

Handout 2

Religious Values Supporting Universal Health Care

Shalom: Health and Wholeness

Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. – Matthew 9:35

In the Bible, the Hebrew word *shalom* (often translated “peace”) means the health and wholeness of individuals as well as harmony and right relationships in society and the whole of creation. God’s gracious saving and life-giving activity in the world aims to bring *shalom* – health, peace, well-being, joy, harmony, and wholeness – to all.

Jesus came to a nation that was oppressed by the Roman Empire, and whose people suffered from physical, mental, and spiritual afflictions. As Jesus proclaimed the coming of the Kingdom of God, God’s ultimate *shalom*, he made *shalom* to be present there and then by healing bodies, minds, and spirits.

To be restored to health is to be restored to full participation in community, in loving service to the neighbor and in the enjoyment of life with family and friends. Jesus offered hope and healing to everyone – from outcast lepers to Roman soldiers to religious leaders. The gift of health was part of Jesus’ message of “good news to the poor”

What does it mean for us, as members of Christ’s body in the world, to carry on Jesus’ work of bringing hope and healing to all?

After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. He said to them, “. . . Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, “The kingdom of God has come near to you.” – Luke 10:1-2a, 8-9

Principles for Health Care Reform

Many individuals and groups in the religious community believe that core moral and spiritual values call for a universal health care system. These values include the following:

- **Human dignity:** Each person, created by God, is endowed with a transcendent value. No person can be ranked as more or less important than another: all are precious in the eyes of God. No person’s well-being can be reduced to a price and bought and sold without moral and ethical considerations. Persons are more than “consumers” of the goods and services produced by the health care system: all are entitled to care, respect, and compassion, regardless of their state of health, their medical history, their personal circumstances, or their ability to pay.

“A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. . . . But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them . . .” – Luke 10:30b, 33-34a

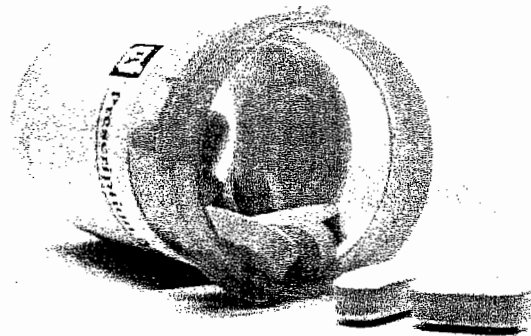
- **The common good:** Each of us depends on the support of the whole community for our health: on medical services provided by the health care system; on public services and regulations that safeguard community health; on health insurance plans that reduce the financial risks of
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illness and injury for individuals and families; on homes and schools that protect and nurture the young while teaching them how to responsibly care for their own health. And because of our interdependence, the health or illness of individuals has a ripple effect on the health and well-being of the other members of the community. Health is a matter of the common good – the good of the whole community – as well as the good of individuals.

But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. -- Jeremiah 29:7

- **Social justice:** The message of the prophets is that a society will be judged by how it cares for the least well-off of its members. Jesus ministered those on the margins of society – the poor, the sick, and the outcast – and tells us that as we have done to “the least of these” we have done it unto him. We are to care for and have compassion on all persons – but we must be especially mindful of the most vulnerable among us. They are in the greatest jeopardy; they are the least able to defend their own interests; and they are the most easily overlooked in a society that gives priority to those with the most power, wealth, and prestige.

*Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of injustice. . . ?
Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover them,
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?
Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,
and your healing shall spring up quickly. . . .
—Isaiah 58:6a, 7-8a*



- **Stewardship:** Natural and social resources are to be used wisely and on behalf of all. Health care providers, both public and private, have a responsibility to use resources prudently. Quality health care goods and services should be delivered efficiently and without waste to everyone that needs them by means of a system that society can afford and sustain. We all have a share in the stewardship of the means of health – whether as patients, parents or guardians, employers, medical professionals, government officials, members of civic organizations, citizens, or church members.

From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded. – Luke 12:48b

Questions for discussion:

- How would you describe the relationships between health, community, and hope?
 - In what ways does our current health care situation satisfy – or fail to satisfy – the values described above?
 - Which of these values are most important to you? Which, if any, do you disagree with? Are there other values you think should be considered?
 - What sort of health care system do you believe would best support these values?
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