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Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Calls for Just Health Care Reform - Q & A

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Below is a short sheet prepare the **Presbyterian Washington Office** regarding current public policy of the Presbyterian Church USA regarding Health Care Reform. I do realize that there are folks who will continue to passionately believe that we should not be engaged in this kind of work, but I also know that there are many who believe that engaging in this conversation is exactly where we need to be.

I offer it to you in a spirit of hope to helpful discourse as the Moderator for the entire Presbyterian Church (USA). - Peace

Health Care Reform | Questions and Answers From the Washington Office of the Presbyterian Church (USA)

What does the PC(USA) support?

- For over 60 years, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) General Assemblies have been calling for reform of the U.S. health system, urging the establishment of a national medical plan that will ensure health coverage for all persons residing in the United States.
- The most recent General Assembly (2008) “endorse[d] in principle the provision of single-payer universal health care reform in which health care services are privately provided and publicly financed... as the program that best responds to the moral imperative of the gospel.” [Minutes, 2008, p. 1133]
- Any reform plan should be guided by these values:

1. **Universal Accessibility:** We believe that all people possess inherent worth as children of God, and that God's promise extends to all. Health coverage must be available to all persons living in the United States, regardless of income, race or ethnicity, geography, age, gender, employment status or health status [Minutes, 1994, p. 574; Minutes, 2002, p. 634]
2. **Equity:** Because the right to acquire adequate health care springs out of our worth as living human beings, rather than out of any particular merit or achievement belonging to some but not to others, adequate health care should be defined equally for all people. [Minutes, 1976, pp. 203-207]
3. **Responsible Financing:** Since society has an interest in the health of its people, those individuals and organizations who can pay should help to finance the care for those individuals and families who cannot pay [Minutes, 1991, p. 817]. While concerns for the costs of health care are appropriate, these concerns must continually be balanced against the objectives of access to adequate, quality care for all. The sacrifice of access and quality at the shrine of cost containment is too high a price to pay and should not be tolerated [Minutes, 1988, p. 525].

Does the church support socialized medicine?

No, the church supports health reform that is privately provided and publically funded. Socialized medicine generally refers to health care systems that are run by government, in which medical facilities are owned by government and health care providers are employed by government. PC(USA) General Assemblies have not commented on such a system, nor is the U.S. Congress considering such a proposal.

Why does the church support single-payer?

The single-payer health coverage envisioned by the 218th General Assembly is a system in which health insurance is publicly financed, while medical care is provided by private practitioners. One example of a single-payer health care system would be a "Medicare for all" approach, though single-payer requires only that financing come from a single source, rather than the multiple sources that currently provide U.S. health coverage (employers, government, individuals, etc.). The 218th General Assembly (2008) adopted an overture supporting the principle of single-payer health care. The overture outlined the serious crisis in the U.S. health system, highlighting the rapidly swelling ranks of the uninsured, the increasing occurrence of medically-caused bankruptcies, and efficiency of government-run Medicare and Medicaid programs, when compared to private insurance companies.

On what authority is the church speaking on this issue?

In keeping with our polity, public witness by the National Offices on the topic of health care reform is based entirely on General Assembly policy. The Stated Clerk's recent statement (Aug. 2009), which can be viewed at http://www.pcusa.org/oga/newsstories/clerk-healthcare_augo9.htm, draws almost

exclusively on the Rationale of the 218th General Assembly (2008) overture on single-payer health reform, the entirety of which can be found at <http://www.pc-biz.org/Explorer.aspx?id=1833>.

What is the role of government and why should it be involved?

The 1988 General Assembly summarized John Calvin's explanation: "civil government is ordained by God to order and serve the human community and therefore to be held in respect and honor. Service in the public order is the highest vocation for Christians. The civil state by its own definition and tradition is to serve the causes of justice, the common well being. We believe that the church must not only call upon the political order to serve the causes of justice but actively participate in efforts to shape public policies and institutions so that they serve human needs effectively and equitably." (Minutes, 1988, p. 47)

Why does the church care?

Presbyterians believe that God desires shalom – wholeness and healing –for every person, not just for those who can afford it. Health is much more than the absence of a physical or mental malady or the pursuit of physical or mental perfection. Jesus' command to love our neighbor requires persons with plentiful resources both to comprehend the condition of those persons without basic health care and to share the means to health. [Minutes, 1999, pp. 341-342]

What is the PC(USA) doing now?

The PC(USA), through its Washington Office, is engaged in public witness at the federal level. On health care, the Washington Office is following closely the legislative process and evaluating health reform proposals in light of General Assembly social witness policy statements.

Further, the Washington Office is engaged with ecumenical and interfaith partners to lift up the voices of people of faith. Through Washington Office organizing and publications, Presbyterians are invited to get involved in the public policy process.

The ministry of the Washington Office is to communicate General Assembly policy to decision-makers and to provide resources to Presbyterians, so that they might be engaged in public debate and witness.

How do I get in touch with the Washington Office?

You can reach the Washington Office by [eMail](#) or phone (202) 543-1126.