

Maine Council of Churches remarks at the opening of the
Interfaith Week of Prayer for Health Care for All

Thursday, June 18, 2009,
Our Lady of Mercy Chapel, Mercy at the Fore

Good Morning, my name is Eric C. Smith, I am the Associate Director of the Maine Council of Churches, and it is my pleasure to be here this morning on behalf of our 9 member denominations, including Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Unitarian-Universalist churches in Maine to observe the beginning of this Interfaith Week of Prayer for Health Care for All.

Maine Council of Churches had been working on issues of health care for more than 20 years, most recently on issues of access and accountability here in Maine. But this year we see real hope for change on a federal level, and we encourage all people of faith to be attentive to the plans and systems being proposed in Washington, and think critically about how those plans represent our values as a society.

In recent years we have seen more and more clearly that it is not merely our system of health care that is broken, but lives, families, and communities that have been broken because of it. Lives, families, and communities broken not just by illness, but by lack of access to appropriate and timely treatment, and crushing debt when treatment is sought. We have all paid the price for the inequity in our system, not only in increased premiums, decreased coverage, and rising costs; but in the human suffering it has created all around us. We have all been broken by this system of inequality.

But as people of faith, wherever we see brokenness, we see the possibility of healing and wholeness. This year, with the possibility of true reform of our health care system, we offer a vision of health care that is inclusive, affordable, accessible, and accountable; a vision of health care where each and every person in our society is afforded health, wholeness, and human dignity.

We envision health care that is **inclusive**: caring for the health of our community a shared responsibility that is grounded in our common humanity. We recognize that society is whole only when we care for the

most vulnerable among us. Therefore, we are called to act with compassion by sharing our abundant health care resources with everyone.

We envision health care that is **affordable**: health care must contribute to the common good by being affordable for individuals, families and society as a whole. Therefore we understand our responsibility to use our health care resources effectively, to administer them efficiently, and to distribute them with equity.

We envision health care that is **accessible**: all persons should have access to health services that provide necessary care and contribute to wellness. We believe humanity is sacred and that all persons should benefit from those actions that contribute to our health and wholeness. Therefore, we are called to ensure that all of us have access to the health care we need in order to live out the fullness of our potential both as individuals and as contributing members of our society. We must work together to identify and overcome all barriers to and disparities in such care.

We envision health care that is **accountable**: health care must be accountable, offering a quality, equitable and sustainable means of keeping us healthy as individuals and as a community.

This vision is grounded in our commitment to justice for all persons and the belief that each and every member of our society has equal worth and should be afforded equal human dignity. And this vision is attainable in this society.

Summer is a time when many of us in Maine, and especially in churches have the opportunity to slow down, and to enjoy the beauty and rest of this season. But we encourage our member churches, and all people of faith in Maine to be mindful of the conversation in Washington and public dialogue surrounding the issue of healthcare reform in this season, and how they reflect our shared values.

Together we can reach this vision, and set forth a path to a truly healing system of health care system for all of us. To the end we encourage all people of to join together in prayer this coming week.