



The Challenge Of Faithful Citizenship

We continue our dialog from the Catholic Bishops' statement entitled *Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility*, by examining Questions #5 for your thoughtful consideration..

5. How will we address the growing number of people without affordable and accessible healthcare? How can health care better protect human life and respect human dignity?

Truly, one of the great tragedies in our country is the number of individuals without affordable health care. The number of Americans affected by this is in the neighborhood of 45 million, in sheer numbers the largest in our history. Not only is this unconscionable in a nation as wealthy as ours, on some level it is immoral as well.

And yet, as horrified as we may be by U.S. statistics, what of the people in the developing world. Of the 4.4 billion people there, nearly 3/5 lack housing, 1/5 have no access to modern health services, and 1/5 of children do not attend school to grade 5. (UN Development Program, Human Development Report 1999).

Moreover, the same study reports, "in defining research agendas, money talks louder than need—cosmetic drugs and slow-ripening tomatoes come higher on the list than a vaccine against malaria or drought-resistant crops for marginal lands." Once again, our God must weep at the lack of respect we show to the poorest in our midst.

The safeguard of human life is a fundamental human right, and it should be an urgent national priority. **Is it?** Should not reform of the national health care system be paramount on our national agenda, or are these 45 million lives somehow less important? We are called to examine these issues with great care. Is it possible to alter our system in some way, changing our priorities to include these poorest among us? Our nation, our world—indeed our God—awaits our answer!

We might well ponder the words of martyr Bishop Oscar Romero who said, "**A civilization of love that does not demand justice of people will not be a true civilization . . . It is a caricature of love to try to cover over with alms what is lacking in justice.**"

--St. Bede Justice & Peace Ministry

For the complete text of the Bishops' statement, go to www.usccb.org/faithfulcitizenship