

LET OUR LIGHT SHINE!



Health Care for All

Tool Kit of Interfaith Resources for:
Candlelight Vigils... Prayer Breakfasts
Prayer Services... and more!

Faithful Reform in Health Care
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This Tool Kit was produced by Faithful Reform in Health Care, an interfaith coalition of national, state, and local groups and individuals who understand the faith community's important role in working for a health care future that includes everyone and works well for all of us.

People of faith are encouraged to use the resources as part of an effort to raise the visibility and voices of people of faith who care about health care reform in the United States.

All of these resources are currently available online as Word documents to enable users to easily adapt pieces for their needs. In addition, new resources will be added to the website as faith communities develop their own activities throughout the country.

All resources may be used and/or reprinted with the appropriate citations as noted on specific pages.

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Let Our Light Shine for Health Care

AUGUST – SEPTEMBER 2009

INVITATION

NOW is the time to act! The largest faith-inspired mobilization EVER for health care reform continues – from events in early Spring 2009, in the nationwide events surrounding June’s Interfaith Week of Prayer for Health Care, and now through the new **Let Our Light Shine for Health Care** effort. Planned to coincide with the **August Congressional recess**, when members are in their home states and districts, events all across the country will elevate the moral imperative for compassionate and comprehensive reform. In small and large congregations, hospital chapels, college campuses, and public squares, people of faith are called to pray for those who are left out of our health care system – and for those with the power to enact change. Further, we are urged to show our support for reform by reaching out to our Members of Congress with as many voices as possible – and as often as possible – urging them to transcend partisan politics and engage in dialogue that makes change happen.

Why Host an Event? Hosting prayer events around the country will give people of faith an opportunity to reflect on the deep scriptural, spiritual roots of our work to support health care reform, highlighting the moral aspects of the issue and remembering the real-life consequences of our broken health care system. It will show our representatives in Congress that we seek health care reform that is grounded in the sacred bonds of our common humanity and reflects faithful stewardship of our abundant health care resources. It will demonstrate the depth and breadth of public support for a health care future that includes everyone and works well for all of us.

EVERYONE can be a part of this nation-wide effort—from the smallest community of faith to large suburban congregations or city-wide coalitions! This tool kit is provided by the Faithful Reform in Health Care coalition to help connect your efforts to others all over the country – and to make your planning as easy as possible!

Thanks for your commitment to this work! We’re excited to know all of our voices will be raised up during the coming weeks in a vibrant call for comprehensive, compassionate and sustainable health care reform in the United States.

Tool Kit Contents

- ◆ Suggestions for Events
- ◆ Getting Organized: A quick how-to on planning your prayer event
- ◆ Prayer Event Planning Checklist
- ◆ Sample outlines for events
- ◆ Interfaith Reflections for a Prayer Vigil or Prayer Breakfast
- ◆ Prayer Litany for the Uninsured and Under-insured
- ◆ Sample media advisory, Op-Ed, Letter to the Editor
- ◆ List of additional resources

Many thanks to the Interfaith Immigration Coalition for their inspiration and guidelines upon which many of the planning resources in this Tool Kit were based.



Getting Started: Selecting your event

EVENT SUGGESTIONS

1. **Plan a public prayer vigil or prayer breakfast** coordinated with multiple communities of faith. Set a goal for attendance that would attract your local media, and even your member of Congress. You may also choose to invite members of your broader community and publicize the event through the bulletins, newsletters, or websites of the participating congregations.
2. **Plan a prayer vigil, prayer service, or Health Care Sabbath for your own local community of faith or congregation.** If your congregation is already engaged in direct health care services, consider inviting someone to share his or her story as part of the event. Even these single-congregation events can be a great opportunity to engage your local media.

If you have a member of Congress in your congregation, invite that person to participate in a time of prayer and candlelighting during one of your services of worship during August/early September.

3. **Add a focus on health care reform** to an existing/on-going community event or activity, such as a voter registration drive, community, health center activities, and/or discussion for your worshipping community. Contact local media to let them know you're doing it!
4. **Encourage your clergy** or lay leaders to offer a sermon, include a prayer litany and candlelighting, or other major focus on health care during one of your regular services of worship from now through early September. Contact local media to let them know you're doing it!
5. **Hold an event** at a health care facility connected to your community of faith – a hospital, extended care facility, community clinic, etc. Contact local media to let them know you're doing it!

Register Your Event Now

PLEASE go to <http://www.faithfulreform.org/> to **register your event**. You can also use the calendar to find out who else is planning events in your area. Registering your event is IMPORTANT—it helps us track and connect people to you and provides information so that other advocates in your town know how to get involved.

Please report EVERY activity, small or large, to add your voice to the many voices of faith that will be raised in the coming weeks! Even a small event, multiplied around the country, will send a powerful message to our representatives in Congress that health care reform is a moral issue that is important to people of faith and conscience.



Getting Organized: A quick how-to on planning your event

Define your goals:

- ◆ **Purpose:** What is the purpose of this event? How does this particular event move you towards your larger community, grassroots, or legislative goals for health care for all?
- ◆ **Audience:** Who do you want to participate? Your community? Your local, state, or federal officials? What age group? What demographic?
- ◆ **Desired Outcome:** What do you want to happen because of this event? BE SPECIFIC. While an event may fall into a larger goal of passing comprehensive health care reform, being specific will help you focus your planning. The more specific you can be, the more effective you can be in your organizing.

For example: “We want the town mayor to issue a positive statement on health care reform” or “We want 30 people to sign a postcard to their Congressperson.”

Keeping in mind these three goals, consider the elements below when planning your event.

Plan your event!

1. Type of event, length and location

- a. Keep both the length of the vigil and the expected attendance realistic, an hour can be a large time commitment for people especially members of Congress. Know your audience, and plan accordingly. Short – but meaningful – is OK!
- b. Consider what time of day will best serve your purpose.
- c. Location
 - Does it fit the tone and purpose of your event?
 - Is it realistic for your expected attendance? (You don’t want to be in a location for 80 if your attendance is 1!
 - Is it easily accessible?
 - What permits are needed for public sites?
 - Is there sufficient parking?
 - Are there any traffic considerations?
- d. Is sound equipment needed? If so, is there electrical outlet access?
- e. If you have equipment like microphones, is there access to electrical outlets? Is there an echo?

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2. Leadership / Speakers

- a. Are there prominent faith leaders in your community who could attend and offer comments, reflections, or a prayer?
- b. Which leaders best represent the faith communities you are aiming to engage?
- c. Will there be a leader/emcee to get the vigil/event started? Who?

3. Materials/equipment

- a. What type of equipment do you need? Cameras, banners, candles, microphone, projectors?
- b. Will you be outside long enough that people might need water?
- c. Do you need chairs for speakers, musicians, persons with special needs, etc?
- d. Depending on the size crowd you expect, do you need a megaphone? Microphone?
- e. Will you have a sign-in or an information booth? Who will work it?

4. Recruitment—a successful event needs people!

- a. Who do you want to attend this event and how can you make sure they do?
 1. What could prevent them from coming (think weather, time of day etc.) and can any of those obstacles be avoided?
 2. What natural networks in your community or place of worship can you tap into? Who leads those networks? Invite them join you in planning your event to more easily recruit members of their networks to your event.
- b. Do you want people in policy-making positions to come?
 1. **To invite your member of Congress to attend the prayer vigil, contact the scheduler immediately to determine their process for honoring speaking requests.**
 2. If your member of Congress cannot/does not come, ask if a spokesperson from the office can participate and make a statement on behalf of the Senator or Representative, or at the very least provide a written statement that can be read.
 3. Make sure the Congressional office receives any press releases and/or press coverage from the event as a follow-up.

5. Publicity

- a. Distribute event information to other organizations and have their leaders contact their members
- b. Fliers/Newspapers/Radio announcements—What best reaches your audience? Consider placing an op-ed or writing a letter to the editor of your local paper to promote your vigil.
- c. Send a Media Advisory to the local media at least a week before the event, and follow-up with personal phone calls.
- d. Send a press release after the event with quotes, numbers in attendance, etc.

6. Follow-up

- a. Send pictures/video/audio recordings of your event to local/national offices of your members of Congress.
- b. Get blog posts, pictures, articles about the event everywhere you can.



Candlelight Vigil / Prayer Breakfast: Planning Check List

Two to Three Weeks before your event

- Assemble a core planning team—invite leaders of other groups whose members share your concerns.
- If you plan to invite your member(s) of Congress, contact the local office ASAP to get instructions about extending an official invitation. Follow-up immediately.
- Select and invite speakers and those offering prayers.
- Select an appropriate location.
- Find out if you will need permissions to use your location and begin the process of applying for permits.
- Find a photographer if you want photos or video of your event.
- Begin adapting promotional or media materials for the event.
- Begin inviting people to your event through word of mouth, newsletters, bulletins, website, and/or listserv of your community of faith and any other group that is involved in planning your event.
- Register your event at <http://www.faithfulreform.org>.

If you are serving food, make your initial meal arrangements. Make sure the food served provides healthy choices. In addition, if this is an interfaith event, work with your interfaith leadership to respect the dietary practices of those who will be in attendance!

One Week before your event

- Begin gathering all equipment you will need—sound equipment, extension cords, chairs, projectors, coffee dispensers, etc.
- Adapt media advisory and press release with quotes from speakers and send to your local media.

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- Go over program and identify the appropriate prayers and speakers. Generally, it's good to have just one or two speakers to lead, but it may be nice to open up to the broader group to offer short prayers and reflections.
- If food or refreshments are served, confirm expected attendance with food provider.

The day before your event

- Make sure you have all equipment ready for the next day, your speakers and the emcee for your event are prepared, and any other people who are staffing the event know their role (in charge of the sign-in table, taking pictures, handing out programs, welcoming press & handing out news release, etc.)
- Prepare a sign-in sheet for participants, so you can continue to communicate with them after the event is over.

The day of your event

- Arrive early to set up—give yourself and your team plenty of time to set-up sound equipment, tables, literature tables, etc.
- Greet participants, give them a copy of the event program and ask them to sign up on the sign-up sheet for future updates.
- Greet reporters, give them a copy of your press release, and ask them to sign in on a sheet of paper – ask for their name, media outlet, email address and phone number (you may need their contact information for the next event or to follow up).
- At the conclusion of the event, make sure to thank everyone for their attendance and let them know how to stay involved.

Follow-up

- Follow up to thank your speakers and those who attended your event.
- Send pictures/video/audio recordings of your event to Faithful Reform in Health Care at action@faithfulreform.org.



Candlelight Vigil / Prayer Breakfast Outline

Sample #1 (with one primary speaker)

“Let Our Light Shine for Health Care”

An Interfaith Candlelight Prayer Vigil (or Prayer Breakfast) for Health Care for All

Gathering Music

5 min Welcome and Call to Prayer

Unison Prayer: In the sacred bonds of our common humanity, we give thanks for the life that we share and for our calling to care for each other. We acknowledge that we have failed to care for every member of our human family, and have not ensured that all may receive the health care they need for the life that you intend. We pray for forgiveness for hearts that have been slow to feel another’s pain, for hands that have been still when caring touch was needed, and for voices that have remained silent while millions suffer for lack of health care. Amen.

5 min Remarks and Introductions

5 min Reflection from the Qu’ran and Prayer

5 min Reflection from Hebrew Scriptures and Prayer

5 min Reflection from Christian Scriptures and Prayer

5 min Personal testimony about lack of health care

3 min Music, dance, etc.

2 min Introduction of Speaker

15 min Proclamation

5 min Music, dance, etc. (including the lighting of candles)

5 min Call to Action and Benediction

Departing Music

Nearly all faith traditions include teachings about the provision of health care. Simply select those most relevant to your community. See the Interfaith Reflections in this Tool Kit as a guide for what you could develop in the absence of persons to represent the various faith perspectives.



Candlelight Vigil / Prayer Breakfast Outline

Sample #2 (with no primary speaker)

“Let Our Light Shine for Health Care”

An Interfaith Candlelight Prayer Vigil (or Prayer Breakfast) for Health Care for All

	Gathering Music	
5 min	Welcome and Call to Prayer	
	<i>Unison Prayer: In the sacred bonds of our common humanity, we give thanks for the life that we share and for our calling to care for each other. We acknowledge that we have failed to care for every member of our human family, and have not ensured that all may receive the health care they need for the life that you intend. We pray for forgiveness for hearts that have been slow to feel another’s pain, for hands that have been still when caring touch was needed, and for voices that have remained silent while millions suffer for lack of health care. Amen.</i>	
5 min	Remarks and Introductions	
5 min	Reflection from the Qu’ran and Prayer	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px;"><p>Nearly all faith traditions include teachings about the provision of health care. Simply select those most relevant to your community. See the Interfaith Reflections in this Tool Kit as a guide for what you could develop in the absence of persons to represent the various faith perspectives.</p></div>
5 min	Reflection from Hebrew Scriptures and Prayer	
5 min	Reflection from Christian Scriptures and Prayer	
5 min	Personal testimony about lack of health care	
3 min	Music, dance, etc.	
10 min	Litany of Prayer for the Uninsured and Uninsured, including the lighting of candles (found in this Tool Kit)	
5 min	Music, dance, etc.	
5 min	Call to Action and Benediction	
	Departing Music	



Interfaith Reflections for a Prayer Service or Candlelight Vigil

Reflection on Jewish Perspectives on Health Care

Teachings from Jewish scripture – Leviticus 19: "Do not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor." Judaism advances two core values underlying an abiding commitment to provide health care to all of God's children. The first is that an individual human life is of infinite value; the second is that we are endowed with wisdom and strength to be God's partners in repairing the world. Just as the Talmud teaches that a physician is obligated to heal and that a patient is obligated to obtain health care, so too are we taught that the whole of society is responsible for ensuring that every individual has access to health care.

Prayer from the Jewish Tradition (to be offered by a Jewish participant or leader)

Unison Participant Response: Strengthen us to use our hearts, hands, and voices to raise our vision for a health care future that includes everyone and works well for all of us.

Reflection on Christian Perspectives on Health Care

Teachings from Christian Scripture – Mark 2:3: "Then some people came, bringing to [Jesus] a paralytic, carried by four of them... He said to the paralytic, 'I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home.'" Christian scripture is filled with Jesus' acts of healing, but this particular scripture also lifts up our responsibility in helping others access the care they need. We are reminded that all of the stories about Jesus' healing ministry were found in larger narratives about our common humanity, compassion, human dignity, shared responsibility, and God's intention for our health and wholeness.

Prayer from the Christian Tradition (to be offered by a Christian participant or leader)

Unison Participant Response: Strengthen us to use our hearts, hands, and voices to raise our vision for a health care future that includes everyone and works well for all of us.

Reflection on Islamic Perspectives on Health Care

Ayahs from the Holy Qur'an. "A person whose passions respond only to his or her personal needs, and who is only concerned with his or her own personal and familial life, has long abandoned the true purpose of life..." (15:3). True Muslims are compassionate human beings, whose passions are aligned with a divine purpose of life. It is a pleasure for Muslims to help address health care needs, for piety is achieved in giving what you love most to those who need you.

Prayer from the Islamic Tradition (to be offered by a Muslim participant or leader)

Unison Participant Response: Strengthen us to use our hearts, hands, and voices to raise our vision for a health care future that includes everyone and works well for all of us.

Silent Meditation

Unison Participant Response: For the blessing of life, we give you thanks. For the comfort you provide for all who experience illness and loss, we give you thanks. And for the call to care and the will to do it, we give you thanks. Amen.



A Litany of Prayer and Candlelighting for the Uninsured and Underinsured

[This Litany of Prayer can be used as a focal point of prayer time in a service of worship, as the central prayer time for a short vigil, or as a part of a longer event. It has reportedly been used effectively in each of these kinds of settings.]

Reader #1: We are the millions of men and women in our national community who—for a variety of reasons: downsizing, outsourcing, restructuring—will wake up one day this year to learn that we no longer have a job. Added to the stress of finding a new job, we'll also have to figure out how to continue to provide health care for our families. If we are fortunate to have health insurance, we will be faced with paying more at a time when we are trying to make do with less.

Response: "You are or have been one of us. We know or have known others. We care for you and we pray for you, remembering that we are all brothers and sisters."

(Light a candle; moment of silence)

Reader #2: We are the 4 million people in our national community who will celebrate a 19th birthday this next year. As we blow out the candles on the cake, we may be marking the loss of our health insurance. Our society will ensure that if we call the fire department, someone will respond. It will not offer us the same guarantee for our health.

Response: "You are or have been one of us. We know or have known others. We care for you and we pray for you, remembering that we are all brothers and sisters."

(Light a candle; moment of silence)

Reader #3: We are the 5 million children in our national community whose lack of health insurance sets up a barrier to good health. We are children in a nation that works to make sure we each have a basic education. We are children in a nation which ignores that we need a similar guarantee for health care.

Response: "You are or have been one of us. We know or have known others. We care for you and we pray for you, remembering that we are all brothers and sisters."

(Light a candle; moment of silence)

Reader #4: We are the 30 million workers between the ages of 18 and 64 who earn less than \$9 an hour. Those of us who work full-time earn \$18,800 a year. Many of us are the store clerks, mechanics, dry cleaners, and restaurant workers you meet. Our nation relies on our work to keep American humming along. We typically have no health insurance. We make too much to get health care from public health programs. We often end up in emergency rooms for care because we have no other place to go.

Response: "You are or have been one of us. We know or have known others. We care for you and we pray for you, remembering that we are all brothers and sisters."

(Light a candle; moment of silence)

(more)

Reader #5: We are the owners of small businesses, those businesses with less than 100 workers. We employ 38 million people in communities across the country. We support the local little league team and sponsor civic events. Because of the high cost, we often are unable to provide the protection of health insurance for our employees.

Response: "You are or have been one of us. We know or have known others. We care for you and we pray for you, remembering that we are all brothers and sisters."

(Light a candle; moment of silence)

Reader #6: We are the six of every 10 people in the United States who are lucky enough to have jobs that offer health insurance for our families. And yet, each year, we find that we are paying more. Deductibles and co-payments keep going up. More and more things are not covered by our insurance, which means we have to pay for them. As a result, many of us—people who own homes, who had full-time employment and insurance before getting ill—will declare bankruptcy because of our medical bills.

Response: "You are or have been one of us. We know or have known others. We care for you and we pray for you, remembering that we are all brothers and sisters."

(Light a candle; moment of silence)

Reader #7: We are the 20,000+ people who will die this year because we do not have the security of health care that comes with having insurance. Out of pride, out of shame, out of fear – or because we simply don't have the money to go to the doctor – we will ignore signs that our health may be in jeopardy. If we do get medical attention it will be too late.

Response: "You are or have been one of us. We know or have known others. We care for you and we pray for you, remembering that we are all brothers and sisters."

(Light a candle; moment of silence)

Reader #8: We are the uncouneted millions for whom preventive health care and a healthy lifestyle are a struggle. We live in the inner city where fresh fruit and vegetables are not available in our markets. We live in rural communities with no doctors. The color of our skin or our gender disproportionately impacts the diagnosis and treatment of a medical condition.

Response: "You are or have been one of us. We know or have known others. We care for you and we pray for you, remembering that we are all brothers and sisters."

(Light a candle; moment of silence)

(Adapted from "Readings from the Uninsured" in "Vision and Voice: Faithful Citizens and Health Care," Session 1, accessed at <www.visionandvoice.org> Permission granted for copying with this citation.)

SAMPLE COLOR FLIER

A Word version that can be adapted for your event is available online at www.faithfulreform.org.

LET OUR LIGHT SHINE!

HEALTH CARE FOR ALL

Interfaith Candlelight Prayer Vigil & Rally

Saturday ~ August 1

9:30 PM

(MUSIC BEGINS @ 9:15)

Indiana Statehouse

DOWNTOWN INDIANAPOLIS

SOUTH LAWN
AT CAPITOL & W. WASHINGTON

SPONSORS (list in formation):

Disciples Justice Action Network

Indianapolis Peace and Justice Center

Light of the World Christian Church

Faithful Reform in Health Care

SPEAKERS:



Bishop T. Garrett Benjamin
Senior Pastor

Light of the World Christian Church, Indianapolis



Rev. Dr. John Thomas
General Minister & President
United Church of Christ



Rev. Dr. Sharon Watkins
General Minister & President
Christian Church
(Disciples of Christ)

**Plus numerous community
faith leaders**

To help with planning, RSVPs are appreciated but not required @ www.faithfulreform.org.

PLEASE BRING EXTRA CANDLES TO SHARE!

CAN'T ATTEND? CALL YOUR MEMBERS OF CONGRESS @ TOLL-FREE # 1-888-797-8717

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SAMPLE MEDIA ADVISORY (to be sent before the event & adapted for press release after the event)
A Word version that can be adapted for your event is available online at www.faithfulreform.org.

July 16, 2009



Media Advisory:

Interfaith Candlelight Prayer Vigil and Rally for Health Care for All

Saturday, August 1 ~ 9:30 pm
Indiana Statehouse Lawn

Indianapolis media contact:

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Thousands who attend the Indianapolis Candlelight Prayer Vigil and Rally will launch nationwide August faith activities for Health Care for All.

As health care reform legislation continues to move quickly through Congress, people of faith are uniting in unprecedented numbers nationwide in support of a health care future that includes everyone and works well for all of us. Candlelight Vigils, Prayer Breakfasts and Health Care Sabbaths are being held as part of a national *Let Our Light Shine* initiative in August and early September. Timed to coincide with the August Congressional recess, these events will focus on urging elected leaders to transcend partisan politics to make comprehensive and compassionate health care reform happen this year.

The **Interfaith Candlelight Prayer Vigil and Rally in Indianapolis on August 1st** will launch this nationwide initiative. To be held following the final evening session of the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the event is expected to attract several thousand assembly participants and concerned individuals from the greater Indianapolis area.

Speakers will include: **Bishop T. Garrett Benjamin**, Senior Pastor of Light of the World Christian Church in Indianapolis, the congregation which proposed the original resolution on which the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) took its position in support of health care for all; **Rev. Dr. Sharon Watkins**, General Minister and President of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and member of President Obama's Advisory Council of Faith Leaders; and **Rev. Dr. John Thomas**, General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ, a leader in faith-inspired health care reform advocacy; and numerous Indianapolis faith leaders.

"It's not that we don't have enough experts or enough money to make health care reform happen," says the Rev. Dr. Ken Brooker Executive Director of the Disciples Justice Action Network. "It's that we lack a moral vision for health care for all, and the political will to use our abundant resources efficiently and equitably in support of the common good."

Rev. Linda Hanna Walling, Executive Director of Faithful Reform in Health Care further states, "By launching this *Let Our Light Shine* initiative, people of faith are calling upon our elected leaders to rise above partisan politics to create a health care future that is grounded in the sacred bonds of our common humanity and reflects faithful stewardship of our abundant health care resources."

Organizational co-sponsors to date: Indianapolis Peace and Justice Center; Light of the World Christian Church, Indianapolis; Disciples Justice Action Network (Disciples of Christ); and Faithful Reform in Health Care.

Sample Op-Ed using Faith Values in Health Care

Writing Tips

Introduction: Begin with a values statement that highlights the core values of your message: community, common good, shared responsibility, compassion, etc. Share your vision of what can be, moving beyond the scope of the problem in your city, state, or in the U.S.

Human interest: Offer a human interest edge, **but be careful.** Do not further victimize the victim by creating a scenario in which opponents could say, “Just get a job with insurance.” Place the event in the context of the system, ie don’t talk about Joe being sick with no insurance. Do talk about the local factory that closed leaving hundreds without insurance, one of which was Joe.

Content: Offer your thoughts, assessment of the problem, solution, etc. from the macro view. Remember...It’s not about “Joe” but about the system that is not working for him. It’s about all of us together.

Offer a vision and hope: Lots of folks are offering (fighting over) solutions. A unique role of the faith community is that of offering a vision and hope for a better health care future.

We are living through an unprecedented opportunity to create a health care future that includes everyone and works well for all of us. Those of us in faith communities believe that such a future must be grounded in the sacred bonds of our common humanity and reflect faithful stewardship of our abundant health care resources. When that future moves from vision to reality, 1 in 6 children and non-elderly adults in Ohio will no longer have to live sicker and risk dying younger because they cannot get needed health care. Medical care will no longer be the cause of financial ruin for families, institutions, businesses, and governments. All people will have the health care they need regardless of their age, income, race, gender, pre-existing conditions, or place of residence.

While I’ve worked on health system reform for nearly a decade, like many people, I hadn’t really experienced how our health system does or does not work for everyone. And then last fall, my 15-year-old son became ill. It was mono at first, but two weeks later he was in a Cleveland hospital having surgery to remove an abscess that was displacing his trachea and pressing on an artery to his brain. With good insurance and access to excellent and timely medical care, we knew we were among the lucky ones. Yet, as I held my son’s hand all through that first night after surgery, with deep gratitude I couldn’t help but think about those who aren’t so lucky, those who hold loved ones who are ill, knowing that needed health care is out of reach. And there are so many! In our current way of doing health care, life situations simply put access to health care at risk for some and out of reach for others – job loss, divorce, pre-existing health conditions that aren’t covered, aging out of parents’ insurance to name a few.

Truth is witness to the whole, and my family’s experience simply isn’t the whole truth. What IS true is that many people who live in the shadows of world-class hospitals cannot walk through the doors with the assurance that our health care system will work for them. But it doesn’t have to be that way.

In the United States, we are blessed with the talents, wisdom and abundant resources necessary to meet the needs of one another, including the health care needs of all. It’s not that we don’t have enough experts or enough money to make reform happen. It’s that we lack the moral vision and commitment to do the right thing for everyone who lives here, and the political will to insist that we use our resources effectively, efficiently and equitably.

Many of us in faith communities are working to change that. We know that social change happens over time as our hearts and minds are transformed and our sensitivities are moved from self-interest to the common good. When the religious community is at its best, it is

at the heart of such transformation.

Compliment lawmakers, if applicable:

Another possibility here is to say thank you to your elected officials who are demonstrating a moral vision!

Make a commitment:

If transformation is going to happen, we have to commit to being a part of it. We cannot expect others to do all the work. Tell the readers what you will do. Make it clear that you are working not just for a particular policy, but for a system that reflects values that are important to you.

Reference an event if applicable:

Make reference to your event, and place it in the context of the larger national observance. Be sure to include:

- What
- Where
- When
- Who will be presenting
- Who/how many will be attending
- Why this is important
- Contact info

Toward that end, we have committed ourselves to promoting values that are important to us and to our health care reform discussions – values like community, compassion, shared responsibility, concern for those who are most vulnerable, and faithful stewardship of our abundant resources. Inspired by these shared values from our sacred texts, we will keep alive a vision where health, wholeness and human dignity are our priority. And we will measure legislative proposals by their capacity to move us toward a health care future that is:

- Inclusive, offering everyone, regardless of circumstance, access to a solid system of health care.
- Accessible, eliminating all barriers to that system, thereby enabling all of us to participate in and contribute to the life we share together.
- Affordable, ensuring that we create a modern system that uses our abundant health care resources effectively, efficiently, and equitably.
- Accountable, calling for shared responsibility across all sectors of our society, working in partnership on behalf of the common good.

As we journey into this future, we will do our part to urge our elected leaders to move beyond partisan debate toward dialogue that is inspired by a shared public conscience. When that happens, comprehensive, compassionate and sustainable health care reform will be possible.

Our members of Congress will soon return to the district offices for their August recess. Those of us who believe that reform cannot wait, that comprehensive, compassionate and sustainable reform must be passed this year, need to be at their doorsteps with a vision that affirms our commitment to one another, with a vision that will shape us as individuals and as a nation, both for now and for future generations.

[Tentatively scheduled for publication in the Cleveland, OH Plain Dealer online edition, 7/18/09]

Getting your Op-Ed published

Newspapers welcome well-written, thoughtful and timely articles. However, there are lots of issues at any given time, along with gifted writers who can wax eloquently on those issues. To help get your Op-Ed published:

- ◆ Make your Op-Ed timely, connecting it to a current event in your community/state, to a recent story in your paper, to a legislative timetable, etc.
- ◆ Make a personal contact with the editor who oversees your local Op-Ed submissions. Learn their timelines and deadlines.
- ◆ Consider co-authoring the Op-Ed with other faith leaders, showing solidarity around shared values.

Sample Letters to the Editor using Faith Values in Health Care

Keep it short!

Sample #1

Begin with a brief reference to a current event, previous article, etc.

The [Qur'an/Torah/Christian scripture/etc] calls us to be concerned about the health and well-being for all, and teaches us that such concern is grounded in the sacred bonds of our common humanity. In addition, we are taught to use our abundant resources in ways that protect and benefit those most vulnerable around us. Keeping these values alive in our public discourse about health care reform is essential in moving us beyond partisan politics toward dialogue that embraces the common good. Then we will be able to envision a health care future that is:

- Inclusive, offering everyone access to a solid system of health care.
- Accessible, eliminating all barrier to that system
- Affordable, ensuring that we use our abundant health care resources effectively, efficiently, and equitably.
- Accountable, calling for shared responsibility and partnership on behalf of the common good.

Sample #2

Begin with a brief reference to a current event, previous article, etc.

We must begin now to build a health care future that includes everyone and works well for all of us! As a person of faith, I believe I am called to treat everyone with dignity and compassion, to promote and enable healing, and to act with justice and generosity. That means I am very concerned about our country's broken system of health care – a system which excludes too many, distributes services unjustly, rations care inequitably, and offers compassion only to those who can afford it. Working together we — the public and members of Congress — have an opportunity to affirm our sacred bond, to live with one another in an inclusive community; use our wisdom, talents and resources for the common good; and work toward health and wholeness for everyone.



Additional Resources

Worship and prayer resources

- Vision and Voice: Faithful Citizens and Health Care: <http://www.visionandvoice.org>
This website includes a video of faith leaders speaking about health care reform from a moral perspective. The video could be used in place of a speaker!
- Faithful Reform in Health Care website: <http://www.faithfulreform.org>
- Be sure to check the national website of your own community of faith!

Advocacy resources: In addition to your own community of faith, numerous groups and coalitions will be launching advocacy opportunities in the days ahead. You are urged to include actions and next steps beyond your prayer and candle lighting witness – including phone calls, letters, postcards and visits to your members of Congress.

- Sign up for the health care or social justice email list in your community of faith to stay current with the action opportunities based on the legislative priorities of your own faith group.
- Sign up for the email list at Faithful Reform in Health Care to get timely information about legislative progress, timely actions, and faith-inspired messaging for health care for all. <http://www.faithfulreform.org>

Understanding the issue: While there are numerous organizations providing information on health care reform, two are particularly helpful to grassroots advocates who want to understand the issue without getting into the complex details.

Families USA <http://www.familiesusa.org>

Kaiser Family Foundation: <http://www.kff.org>

Seeking Justice in Health Care: A Guide for Advocates in Faith Communities

An 80-page resource that provides an overview of U.S. health care and the options for reform through the lens of justice. Copies may be ordered in print and online versions at <http://www.faithfulreform.org>.