

# SICKO

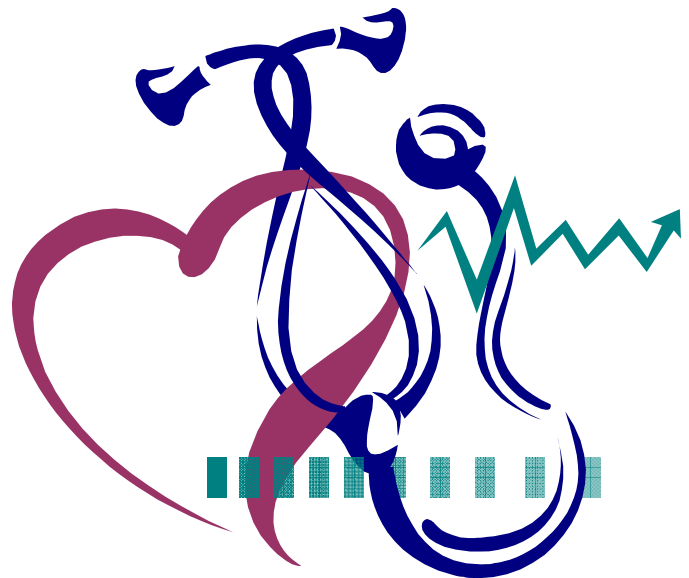
A FILM BY MICHAEL MOORE

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## A GUIDE FOR DISCUSSION, REFLECTION & ACTION

for people of faith who care about being a part of the  
solution in addressing the crisis in U.S. health care

Produced by  
Faithful Reform in Health Care  
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# Faithful Reform in Health Care

WORKING TO ELEVATE THE FAITH COMMUNITY'S MORAL AND PROPHETIC VOICE  
IN SUPPORT OF AFFORDABLE QUALITY HEALTH CARE FOR ALL

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July 2007

Dear Friends,

For those of us who are committed to making health care reform happen in the United States, Michael Moore's new film *SICKO* offers a wonderful opportunity for reflection and dialogue about the moral case for health care reform. Through laughter and tears, we are drawn into the absurdities of the U.S. health care system. But even more important, with its powerful stories about people who have suffered because they were denied needed health care, the film reminds us that as people of faith we have not yet been the change agents we are meant to be.

As our nation once again puts health care reform on its legislative agenda, voices of faith will be called upon to elevate the moral message in support of affordable health care for all. Viewing and talking about this film within our congregations will give us the opportunity to expand the circle of those willing to raise their voices in support of health care for all. In addition, considering where our faith values connect with the stories of those who are suffering will give us opportunities to address this as a moral crisis which calls for our prophetic leadership.

So... I invite you to get a group together within your congregation or neighborhood. View the film, talk about it, and commit to becoming part of the solution. Voices of faith have been integral to successful social reform movements in the United States, and health care reform will be no exception. Our work can begin with reflection and action today. This guide is offered to help make that possible. Won't you join me?

Health and peace,

Rev. Linda Hanna Walling  
Executive Director

## Using this Guide

This Guide is offered as a resource to help people of faith engage in conversation about the moral case for health care reform in the United States. It is designed to be a user-directed resource with no experts needed.

In the **REFLECTION** section, participants will be led to consider their reactions to the film and to reflect upon the moral imperative for making health care available to everyone. It is NOT intended to stimulate discussion about or promote “the best plan.”

The section which offers **MORE INFORMATION** is included to document and clarify some of the facts in the film. This information does not provide a comprehensive overview of the issue, but points to additional resources for participants who want to dig deeper.

The **ACTION** section addresses the film’s assertion that for health care reform to happen in this country, we all need to accept responsibility for getting more involved in our democracy.

## Participating in Dialogue

The conversations about SICKO are not designed to be formal dialogues. But because the health care issue can be so very personal and discussion about reform can be divisive, it is suggested that groups consider the principles of good dialogue when beginning their discussion. The principles outlined below come from Our Health Care Future, a dialogue project of Georgetown University, the Center for Healthcare Reform of the St. Joseph Health System and NETWORK: A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby.

In dialogue, we pay attention to the wisdom of the group. We listen for new thinking and ideas that help us address complex and challenging issues. A conversation is a dialogue when people in a group agree to:

- Listen deeply to one another, giving full attention to each other, looking for common ground.
- Respect the ideas and viewpoints of each person, trusting that others have part of the answer.
- Give voice to their own ideas and thinking.

In dialogue, each person also monitors her/his participation, taking responsibility for getting her/his ideas out there, while making sure that others in the group have both the clock time and a respectful environment in which to share their ideas. In dialogue, we see changes in thinking and often see new ideas emerge.

Dialogue is usually in danger when people defend their point of view, assume there is one right answer, criticize others’ thinking, ask questions that are really opinions or judgments, and look only for conclusions that agree their thinking.

[Quoted from <[www.ourhealthcarefuture.org](http://www.ourhealthcarefuture.org)>.]

The logo for 'the dialogue' features the text 'the dialogue' in a lowercase, sans-serif font. To the right of the text is a small, dark square icon containing a white speech bubble with a tail pointing towards the text.

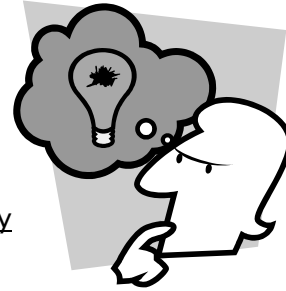
## Reflection

### Getting started:

Ask the group to:

- Think about a recent health care experience and briefly share what made it satisfactory or unsatisfactory.
- Briefly talk about what story in the movie was most moving and why.

(If the group has more than 5 or 6 participants, break into smaller groups to discuss these two questions.)



### The moral question:

SICKO contains lots of facts about the problems in U.S. health care. We've know these facts for years, but they have not moved us closer toward reform. Why not?



**We have not been able to enact comprehensive health care reform because as a nation we have not yet agreed that we should guarantee health care for everyone. We have not yet answered the moral question "Am I my brother's/sister's keeper?" with a resounding YES!**

Until we agree that our goal is health care for all, we will continue to divide ourselves over the questions about whether the government or business should be in charge, and whether our priority should be to reduce costs or make health care available for everyone. And we will continue to allow wealthy special interests to influence the votes or our lawmakers.

Here are few of the comments for those being interviewed from other countries:

- **From Canada:** The least of us and the best of us are taken care of equally.
- **From France:** You pay according to your means and receive according to your needs.
- **From Great Britain:** If you can find money to kill people, you can find money to heal people.

And from Michael Moore:

- (In Cuba) If one enemy can offer a hand to another with the offer to heal, what else is possible?
- We live in a world of me, not we...

### For discussion:

- What other statements do you remember about moral or shared responsibility in the film?
- What did you see in the film that connects with the teachings of your faith tradition in regards to caring for one another?
- Was there anything in the film that differs with your religious beliefs?
- The power of this film was in the telling of stories. Our faith traditions are filled with stories. Our lives are filled with stories, as well. In which of the stories do you see a connection between the crisis in U.S. health care, your faith experience, and your own story?

## More information



One purpose of the film SICKO is to get some of the facts out to the American people about the things that are wrong with U.S. health care. Michael Moore points out that wealthy stakeholders make huge investments to maintain a status quo which supports excessive industry profits instead of meeting our health care needs. Because of those special interests, sometimes we are left with information that simply is not true. The information here documents some of the facts in SICKO – facts that are intended to help correct the misunderstandings about U.S. health care and what it will mean to reform it.

### Understanding the words

Affordable health care for everyone is referenced in a variety of ways in the film, depending on the country being highlighted, or the perspective of the person speaking. In the U.S. the terms often are used interchangeably and incorrectly. Here are the different kinds of insurance referenced in the film.

- **Universal Health Care** – very simply... a health system designed to guarantee that everyone has access to quality health care which is comprehensive and affordable (all industrialized democracies except the U.S.)
- **National Health Insurance** – insurance coverage provided by a nation that guarantees health care for all of its citizens, regardless of whether the health care is provided by government-employed health professionals (England) or private practitioners (France, Canada)
- **Socialized Medicine (National Health Service)** – a health system in which health care providers are government employees, health care facilities are run by the government and the government pays for health care services (England)

Note: A Single Payer health system is not an insurance system. It is a financing mechanism for health care delivery in which a single fund reimburses the providers of health services. (Canada)

### For discussion:

1. What information about health care in other countries surprised you in the film?
2. The film shows that different countries have found a variety of ways to make health care available to everyone. How can that inform our opportunities to improve the U.S. health system?
3. What further information would you and your group like to have about how other countries figured out how to do this?

## Facts in the Film:

- ❑ In spite of per capita costs that far exceed those of any other industrialized democracy, the U.S. is ranked 37<sup>th</sup> in the world in overall health outcomes. [Sources: World Health Organization and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development]
- ❑ Prescription drug prices are higher in the U.S. than in other countries. In addition to the examples cited in the film, research shows that for some drugs we pay more than twice as our friends in 7 other wealthy nations (England, Switzerland, Germany, Canada, Sweden, France, Italy). [Source: Boston University School of Public Health, Oct. 2004]
- ❑ In 2004 medical bills contributed to 54% of bankruptcies in the U.S. Most of these people were insured when illness struck. The rest of the bankruptcies were caused by job loss, divorce, death, gambling, and addictions. [Source: Journal of Health Affairs, February 2005]
- ❑ In 2001, the pharmaceutical industry had a return on revenue of 18.5%, nine times higher than all Fortune 500 industries. [Source: Public Citizen Congress Watch, *America's Other Drug Problem*]
- ❑ In the Medicare prescription drug legislation that was passed in 2003, one-third of the \$400+ billion that was approved included new profits for the insurance and pharmaceutical industries. When that legislation was being considered, there were 637 pharmaceutical industry lobbyists influencing the content of the bill. [Source: Center for Responsive Politics]
- ❑ Health insurers consider any paid claim to be a "medical loss" [Linda Peeno] and the list of reasons for rejecting coverage is growing. Health insurers say they can justify this. However, health insurers' annual profits and margins doubled over a four year period, giving them earnings that have outpaced the rest of corporate America. [Investors' Business Daily, Oct. 18, 2004]

## For discussion:

1. Which facts contradict what you have heard and/or believed about U.S. health care and the potential to reform it?
2. Upon hearing these facts, what new insights do you have about health reform?
3. What still confuses you about U.S. health care? What additional information do you need?

## Learn more:

- Commonwealth Fund <[www.cmwf.org](http://www.cmwf.org)>
- Faithful Reform in Health Care <[www.faithfulreform.org](http://www.faithfulreform.org)>
- Families USA <[www.familiesusa.org](http://www.familiesusa.org)>
- Kaiser Family Foundation <[www.kff.org](http://www.kff.org)>
- National Coalition on Health Care <[www.nchc.org](http://www.nchc.org)>
- New America Foundation Health Program <[www.newamerica.net](http://www.newamerica.net)>
- Our Health Care Future <[www.ourhealthcarefuture.org](http://www.ourhealthcarefuture.org)>
- Universal Health Care Action Network <[www.uhcan.org](http://www.uhcan.org)>

## Action!

SICKO emphasizes that change is possible when the people fully participate in the democratic process. Michael Moore challenges viewers to use their power to meet the needs of the community.

The faith community has been integral to major social justice movements in this country – abolition of slavery, women’s rights, civil rights, environmental protections.



Many believe that the faith community will be important in the movement to make health care reform a reality for two reasons:

- To elevate the moral and prophetic witness in support of reform.
- To help create a common table where different perspectives can engage in dialogue.

### For discussion:

1. What did you hear or see in the film that makes you think about the way citizens in the U.S. get involved in their democracy?
2. What do you think will help get people of faith more involved in working for affordable health care for all?
3. What do you see as the barriers to getting people of faith more involved?
4. Share what you know about your faith group’s efforts to work for health care for all.
5. What would it take to get you personally active in working for health care reform?

### Ways to get involved:

- **PRAY** for those who suffer because they cannot get needed health care.
- **CONNECT** with the local, state or national offices of your own faith group and find out what they are doing to advocate for affordable health care for all.
- **JOIN** or connect with local, state or national organizations that are working for reform.
- **SIGN UP** for email listservs to stay up-to-date on legislative activities that relate to health care reform. (See list in the More Information section.)
- **STUDY** the issue in your own congregation.
- **DIALOGUE** about the issue with others who do not share your views.
- **VOLUNTEER** at a health care facility that provides services for the under-served in your community.
- **WRITE** letters to your local paper about your concern.
- **URGE** your elected officials and candidates to rise above the influence of special interests and promote a system that is moral, just and compassionate.

**Visit <[www.faithfulreform.org](http://www.faithfulreform.org)> for resources and to write your members of the U.S. Senate and U.S. House of Representatives to express your opinion about health care for all in this country.**

## What people of faith are saying:

"Our commitment to health care stems from two central ideas. The first is Judaism's teaching that an individual human life is of infinite value and that the preservation of life supersedes almost all other considerations... The second is the belief that God has endowed us with the understanding and ability to become partners with God in making a better world. The use of that wisdom to cure illnesses has been a central theme in Jewish thought and history."

RELIGIOUS ACTION CENTER OF REFORM JUDAISM

"We also bring to the question of health care reform a special concern for the poor and vulnerable, rooted in the proclamations of the Hebrew prophets, in the gospel of Jesus of Nazareth, and in the teaching of our Church. It is God's own poor who suffer most acutely from the faults and failings of the health care system. It is their pain and suffering, their poor health and sickness, that sharpens our resolve to participate in the call for genuine reform."

U.S. CATHOLIC BISHOPS

The health of a society is truly measured by the quality of its concern and care for the health of its members... The right of every individual to adequate health care flows from the sanctity of human life and that dignity belongs to all human beings...

IMAM SA'DULLAH KHAN  
THE ISLAMIC CENTER OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

From the earliest passages of the Bible (Genesis 15:26) Christians recognize that it is ultimately God who heals, and in the New Testament Jesus' healing ministry is intended to demonstrate the presence of God. Claiming the promise of God, the United Methodist Social Principles (§162, T) therefore recognize that "health care is a basic right" rather than a commodity available only to those with means, and recognizes "the role of governments in ensuring that each individual has access to those elements necessary to good health."

GENERAL BOARD OF CHURCH AND SOCIETY, UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

"The Buddha taught there are four requisites for harmonious life: food, shelter, clothing, and medicine or health care. The state of the health care system in the United States is an affront to Buddhist principles of compassion and loving kindness."

BUDDHIST PEACE FELLOWSHIP

"We believe that health care is a basic right and not a privilege... the gospels convey a message from God — a very powerful message that is the Church's marching order to meet the issue of affordable, accessible health care for all... be it resolved that ... local churches, conferences, associations, instrumentalities, organizations, and health and welfare institutions associated with the UCC join in education and advocacy activities to advance legislation that support universal health care"

BOARD OF HOMELAND MINISTRIES, UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

"One of the central public policy questions for U.S. citizens today is whether the richest nation on earth will continue to allow millions of poor people to exist without health insurance. To do so violates biblical justice... How can any Christian read what the Bible says about the poor and what Jesus says about the sick without hearing a divine call to demand that every person in this nation, starting with the poor, have access to health insurance?"

FROM JUST GENEROSITY BY RONALD SIDER  
FOUNDER OF EVANGELICALS FOR SOCIAL ACTION

**For more statements, visit "Perspectives" at <[www.faithfulreform.org](http://www.faithfulreform.org)>.**