

WITNESS IN WASHINGTON WEEKLY

The Washington Office of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

August 14, 2009

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 - President Obama to join conference call with people of faith
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 - Save the Date: Ecumenical Advocacy Days 2010
 - Mark 10:46-52 - The Healing of Blind Bartimaeus
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Stated Clerk issues statement on current health care debate *"Reforming our health care system cannot wait"*

LOUISVILLE - The Reverend Gradye Parsons, Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, has issued the following statement in light of the national attention on health care reform:

The current public debate about health care has led several people to ask what the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has said about this issue.

The 218th General Assembly (2008) directed the Stated Clerk to send the following resolution (<http://www.pc-biz.org/Explorer.aspx?id=1833>) to appropriate committee chairs in the United States Congress:

Jesus Christ, who has reconciled us to God, healed all kinds of sickness (Mt. 4:23, par) as a sign of God's rule. Isaiah speaks God's word to say "No more shall there be ... an infant that lives but a few days, or an old person who does not live out a lifetime" (Isa. 65:20a). We, as Reformed Christians, bear witness to Jesus Christ in word, but also in deed. As followers of our Great Physician Jesus, we have a moral imperative to work to assure that everyone has full access to health care.

Our nation is in a crisis in health care, which presents an unprecedented opportunity for our nation to provide health care affordable for all. In this country there is a baby born every fifty-one seconds to a family with no health insurance. In this, the wealthiest nation in the world, our infant mortality rate is second highest in the industrialized world. Forty-seven million Americans are uninsured (50 percent employed; 25 percent children; 20 percent out of labor force as students, disabled, et al.; 5 percent unemployed). The U.S. spends nearly twice as much per capita than any other country on health care, but we rank poorly in the thirty-seven categories of health status measured by the World Health

Organization. The rise in childhood obesity, asthma, diabetes, and other chronic diseases indicates that the overall health status of people of this country is declining.

We are warned by the prophets not to heal the wounds of God's people lightly; yet in 2006 the aggregate profits of the health insurance companies in the United States were \$68 billion. During that same year more than 15,000 families were forced into bankruptcy because of medical expenses. Our business employers operate at a competitive disadvantage internationally because health care costs are assumed by the governments of other industrialized nations. The General Assemblies of the PC(USA) and its predecessors since 1971 have called for reform of health delivery systems in the United States to make them accessible to the entire population. Our federal government already operates efficiently and with low overhead the health delivery programs of Medicare and Medicaid; and yet at the same time insurance companies spend nearly one-third of every premium dollar on marketing and other administrative costs and in fact, several such companies spend less than 60 percent of premium dollars they receive on health care services.

The American College of Physicians, the nation's second largest physician group, has endorsed a single-payer healthcare system. Only a single-payer system of national health care coverage (privately provided; publicly financed; not socialized medicine) can save what is estimated to be \$350 billion wasted annually on medical bureaucracy and redirect those funds to expanded coverage.

Since the publication of this resolution, the nation has been engaged in an escalating polarization on the issue. Consensus seems far off and the details of how to reach the goal of comprehensive health care continue to confound our country. Yet, consensus as a nation is imperative because reforming our health care system cannot wait. The General Assembly has been clear that Congress must enact comprehensive health care reform that will provide all persons with access to health care services.

I am mindful of a portion of a prayer Peter Marshall prayed in 1947 when he was chaplain of the Senate. "We know deep down in our hearts that without Thy guidance we can do nothing, but with Thee we can do all things. Let us not be frightened by the problems that confront us, but rather give Thee thanks that Thou hast matched us with this hour. May we resolve, God helping us, to be part of the answer, and not part of the problem; for Jesus' sake. Amen."

President Obama to join conference call with people of faith

President Barack Obama has accepted an invitation to join the faith community on a conference call on Wednesday, August 19, at 5:00 p.m. Eastern / 4:00 p.m. Central / 3:00 p.m. Mountain / 2:00 p.m. Pacific. The goal of the call is to connect and energize the millions of people of faith across the country who are concerned about health care and who want to be part of the solution.

Because thousands of participants are expected, you are urged to RSVP to help facilitate planning and to guarantee your place on the call. You may also submit a question for the President when you register. In addition, you are invited to tell your family, friends, and colleagues; spread the word through your email networks; and invite others to listen to the call with you.

RSVP at <http://faithforhealth.org/join-the-call> to receive your call-in information and to submit a question.

General Assembly Guidance:

In 2002, the General Assembly approved "Advocacy on Behalf of the Uninsured," in which it:

- Reaffirm[ed] the church's commitment to advocacy for a national medical plan.
- Encourage[d] presbyteries, sessions, and the members of congregations to be advocates for universal health care and to support advocacy efforts in their local communities to bring public and private entities together in this effort.
- Urge[d] presbyteries and sessions to provide educational programs and advocacy efforts on behalf of persons, especially those with low incomes and fixed incomes, without medical insurance.

Mark Your Calendar: Grassroots call on Climate Change

Did you miss the first NCC Grassroots call on the climate bill last month? Well, you have a second opportunity to hear a climate update and ask your questions about the process moving forward.

As you know, the House has passed ACES, the American Clean Energy and Security Act of 2009. Now the climate debate moves to the Senate.

Call in to get an update on where legislation is and what you can do to improve the process in the Senate.

The NCC Eco-Justice Program will host the next conference call:

When: Thursday August 27th at 12pm (Eastern)

Phone number: (866) 939-8416

Passcode: 7420302

Please RSVP to Tyler Edgar at tedgar@nccecojustice.org so that she can make sure that there are enough phone lines for all the callers.

General Assembly Guidance:

The 218th General Assembly (2008) approved "The Power to Change: U.S. Energy and" in which it "urge[d] individuals and families in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) to do the following... Advocate for change and leadership within the church and in all forms of government regarding energy policy and global climate change."

Save the Date: Ecumenical Advocacy Days 2010

March 19-22, 2010

Theme: *A Place to Call Home: Immigrants, Refugees, and Displaced Peoples*

Jesus had no place to lay his head. Neither do tens of millions of migrants, refugees and displaced persons. Be a part of an action weekend addressing this global injustice. Join hundreds of faith-based advocates in taking action on legislation that will welcome immigrants, protect refugees, and prevent displacement for millions.

Worship, study and dialogue with hundreds of people of faith at the annual Ecumenical Advocacy Days. Then join us as we go to Capitol Hill to advocate for our members of Congress to remedy this global injustice. The 2010 conference will be held March 19 - 22 at the DoubleTree Hotel in Crystal City, Va.

Mark 10:46-52 - The Healing of Blind Bartimaeus

They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!' Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!' Jesus stood still and said, 'Call him here.' And they called the blind man, saying to him, 'Take heart; get up, he is calling you.' So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. Then Jesus said to him, 'What do you want me to do for you?' The blind man said to him, 'My teacher, let me see again.' Jesus said to him, 'Go; your faith has made you well.' Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

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Or click here to give online: <http://www.pcusa.org/washington/support.htm>

Thank You.

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