

Health Care Reform Now: Why We Can't Wait!

By Rev. Charles Mock

Executive Secretary, Home Mission Board

In one of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s letters from the Birmingham jail he informed a number of his clergy colleagues, hesitant and disturbed about the speed in which he was calling for racial reform in America, that there was no time to waste. He indicated that "time" is neutral and could therefore be used for better or for worst. Dr. King made a case for why we can't wait any longer: what needed to be done to end race-centered discrimination and segregation needed to be done now. The same case is being made by millions of people with regards to Health Care Reform. There are good reasons why we can't wait. What needs to be done needs to be done now!

Why can't we wait? We cannot afford to wait any longer because of the escalating cost to millions of financially challenged individuals and families across America. The longer we wait the higher the cost will be in the long run. According to one credible government report the present cost for a family of four is over 13 thousand dollars a year. Without any real change in the present system that same cost 10 years from today would be over 35,000.00 dollars. We have been on a track equivalent to being penny wise and pound foolish. We continue to act as if out of sight out of mind, or, delay to another day would be more favorable climate than now.

Why can't we wait? We can't afford to wait any longer because while our political leaders politicize the health care crisis, subjecting it to short and long range political considerations, innocent, hard working poor and middle class persons under the weigh of economic pressures are losing their jobs and therefore health care benefits; losing their minds under stress and resorting to harmful escape hatches that only make matters worst; filing for bankruptcy after exhausting their life's earnings to pay egregious hospital bills; and worst yet, committing suicide because they can no longer take the stress, pressure and pain.

Why can't we wait? We can't wait because continuing to do what we have always done while expecting different results is a classic case of insanity. We must face the fact this broken system has not worked in the past and there are no sound reasons to believe that tweaking it will make it work in the future.

Why can't we wait? We can't wait because 75% of Americans believed that the Health Care system is morally and financially bankrupt. Americans therefore voted overwhelmingly for a radical change through the person of President Barack Obama who campaigned on reforming the Health Care system now.

Why can't we wait? We can't afford to wait because this is the closest our nationally elected leaders have ever come to taking our national health care crisis serious enough to finally do what needs to be done. There are leaders who do not see this as a Democratic or Republican, blue-dog or progressive, liberal or conservative issue, rather a human rights issue rooted in the American constitution which states that one of our inalienable rights is life. The right to "life" is severely compromised when one does not have proper health care insurance.

There are decent statespersons whose religious or human rights values and conscience will not permit them to politicize this issue that affects so millions of decent hardworking Americans. We applaud such leaders who are willing to sacrifice political career for principled leadership and statesmanship.

What appalls so many of us is when our tax dollars are used by elected officials who make decisions that are more for the good of their political party or self-serving career, at the expense of the people they have been elected to serve. The collective deception, distortion and lies owing to political partisanship disgrace our national character as leaders of the democratic free world. In the words of William Shakespeare in *Romeo and Juliet* there seems to be "a curse on both our houses."

Why can't we wait? If we do not pass Health Care Reform now, we may not get another chance in the next ten years at a minimum. It is safe to guess that when we have a Republican President of Republican majority in Congress, there's an old proverbial saying that states, "What goes around comes around." In other words, there's a very good chance that what the Republicans are doing to the Democrats to sabotage this needful legislation, the Democrats will likewise do to them. You also know the old saying, "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth."

We can't wait any longer for real and permanent health care reform. We can't wait any longer to engage in some of the following actions.

We can no longer wait to pick up the telephone and call our elected officials office to tell them how we feel and how we hope and pray they will vote.

We can no longer wait to sign a postcard that states our position and send it to our elected officials.

We can no longer wait to email our elected officials and urge them to vote the way of our heart.

We can no longer wait to attend town meetings and church-sponsored meetings where we can hear facts versus fiction around this important decision.

We can no longer wait to campaign with our feet by showing up in our city, State Capitol, or Washington D. C. at rallies for health care reform.

We can no longer wait to ask our religious leader why he or she is not challenging your congregation around this issue that affects many members of his or her flock.

We may feel powerless in the face of this health care giant but as you can see, there's always something we can do individually and collectively to make our values known and our voice heard. To be silent at a time such as this, especially as people of faith who follow the commandments of God, is no less than an embarrassment to the God who has been to us a great physician that continuously heals our souls. It is no less than a disservice to the Christ who took upon Himself our infirmities in order to make us well. Have we not learned anything from the health care crisis experienced by a man in [John 5:1-9](#)?

*After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ²Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew, Bethesda, having five porches. ³In these lay a great multitude of sick people, blind, lame, paralyzed, waiting for the moving of the water. ⁴For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water; then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had. ⁵Now a certain man was there who had an infirmity thirty-eight years. ⁶When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he already had been in that condition a long time, He said to him, "**Do you want to be made well?**" ⁷The sick man answered Him, "Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; but while I am coming, another steps down before me." ⁸Jesus said to him, "**Rise, take up your bed and walk.**" ⁹And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked. And that day was the Sabbath.*

Jesus came across a man at the Bethesda Pool who had a pre-existing physical condition for 38 years. Jesus heard from this sick man a story behind why he had not been healed after all these years. He told Jesus that he “had no man to help him in the pool.”

Is not this the condition of 45 million of Americans? They have no man, no woman, no husband, no wife, no family, and no system of support to help him get to the pool of healing waters. He was not only physically infirmed he was also familiarly infirmed. He was a man in waiting. Jesus felt that he had waited long enough and should not have to wait any longer. Some religious leaders felt differently: that the timing was not right, that he could wait until a more convenient day to be healed. Any day other than on the Sabbath! Historically, the Sabbath is a day in which we worship and celebrate our release from bondage, infirmity and enslaving work to freedom and rest!

We are challenged to follow in the footsteps of Jesus and be like Jesus, whom one theologian called “The Man for others.” We are charged to be the man, the woman, the neighbor, the advocate others need to become released from bondage and on route to wellness. Jesus did not have to touch this man, give him money, pray for him, or take him to a hospital. Jesus simply gave this infirmed man what we also have been blessed to give: our time, our hope and our empowering, healing word. The church is supposed to be the embodiment and body of Jesus on earth on behalf of those without family and friends.

We can no longer afford to wait. It is in our power to go and give likewise. The time is now! If not now when? If not us who? Let us not keep others waiting any longer!