

# **LIVING OUR FAITH ..... at St Philip Neri**

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**Rights and Responsibilities.** Welcome to the latest issue of "Living our Faith," the Peace & Justice Commission newsletter. This issue highlights another core theme of Catholic Social Teaching – our rights and responsibilities as members of the human family. Please be sure to read the back page of this issue to learn more about the Metropolitan Alliance for the Common Good's organizing activity this month and **how your participation is needed** to help ensure all Oregonians access to one of the most vital human rights, **the right to quality medical care.**

**In a world where some speak mostly of "rights" and others mostly of "responsibilities,"** the Catholic tradition teaches that human dignity can be protected and a healthy community can be achieved only if human rights are protected and responsibilities are met. Therefore, every person has a fundamental right to life and to those things required for human decency. Corresponding to these rights are duties and responsibilities – to one another, to our families, and to the larger society. While public debate in our nation is often divided between those who focus on personal responsibility and those who focus on social responsibilities, our tradition insists that both are necessary.

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"Beginning our discussion of the rights of the human person, we see that everyone has the right to life, to bodily integrity, and to the means which are suitable for the proper development of life; these are primarily food, clothing, shelter, rest, medical care, and finally the necessary social services." *Pope John XXIII, Pacem in Terris, #11*

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**We each have a variety of rights** that arise from different sources. Some rights arise from the simple fact that we are human beings. The 1948 "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" issued by the United Nations outlines the "inherent dignity ... of all members of the human family." Pope John XXIII in 1963 offered a similar list of rights in *Pacem in Terris*, as did Pope John Paul II in his address to the UN in

1979. The human rights listed in these various sources include the right to life and bodily integrity; to

food, clothing, shelter, rest and medical care; to freedom in the worship of God and in the pursuit of truth; to private property; work, free assembly, and participation in public affairs; to the resources needed to establish a family; and to education and participation in the benefits of culture. These are our natural human rights.

**Rights are basic to human existence** because they identify and protect that which is necessary for my life as a human participant in creation. If there is no such thing as a right, then each of us is at the mercy of those who are stronger, smarter, richer, or more aggressive than we are. Rights exist not just to protect my own individual humanity but the common good of us all. Consequently, as I defend and exercise my personal rights, I have an obligation to be aware that there is a larger dimension.

**This is where our responsibilities come in to play.** Just as we have rights, we have the responsibility to help protect the rights of our brothers and sisters in the human family. If rights only exist in the abstract, they don't mean very much. If I have a right to be paid for my work, someone has to have the responsibility to pay me. Someone, either an individual or some agency of government, must have the obligation of seeing that I can exercise that right.

**Who bears these responsibilities?** We all do. In the various contexts of justice, we are all, in varying degrees, responsible for the rights of one another because justice is essentially communal. It takes at least two to have justice.

**We have a unique opportunity this month** to apply the abstract concept of rights and responsibilities to a flesh and blood issue in our own community – our right and the right of our fellow Oregonians to **quality health care** and our responsibilities as people of faith and to help ensure those rights. Read more on the next page about **concrete ways you can help.**

The Metropolitan Alliance for the Common Good (MACG) is organizing this month around some concrete ways to ensure access to quality health care for all Oregonians. As a member institution of the MACG, we have the responsibility to educate and mobilize our parishioners on this issue. We have a real opportunity to affect change but need your help and participation for it to be a success.

**Oregon's health care costs are on the rise.** Some might even say we are in a health care crisis. No doubt you or someone you love has been impacted. Perhaps your insurance co-payment has increased or your premium takes a bigger chunk of your paycheck. If so, you are not alone. The facts speak for themselves:

- 511,000 Oregonians do not have health care coverage.
- From 1995-2002, health insurance increased 45% in Oregon; whereas wages only increased between 12-16%.
- Employer-based premiums increased in 2001 and 2002 by 14 % - far outpacing employee earnings and inflation.
- Nearly 1 out of every 5 Oregon residents (780,000) live without prescription drug coverage.
- Since 1991, average retail prices for prescription drugs have grown twice as fast as average monthly Social Security benefits for elderly couples.

**What can we do?** We are very fortunate to have the resources and committed leadership of the MACG on this issue. The MACG is a diverse coalition of civic organizations, including other Catholic parishes, Protestant and Jewish congregations, labor unions and community based non profits totaling over 30 institutions. Over the past year, leaders of the MACG Health Care Working Group have been brainstorming on concrete ways our community can help ensure Oregonians have access to quality medical care.

**On May 27, 2004,** over 600 individuals from all 30 MACG institutions will gather for a **Health Care Assembly** to launch a three-pronged response to the health care crisis:

1. **Citizen-Market Alliance for Health Care Reform in Oregon.** The MACG hopes to hold health care dialogues (based on sound social science research methods) around the state to develop a full picture of the crisis and possible solutions. At the assembly, we will be negotiating with leaders from the health care industry and government to join us in this effort and provide financial support for the dialogues.

2. **Cut Prescription Drug Costs.** The MACG is committed to finding ways to cut the prescription drug costs of our own members (including you). Bulk purchasing pools are one option. To explore this option, the MACG is collecting names of people in our institutions who would like to cut their prescription costs. If this is something you'd like to do, answer the short survey below or the longer survey in the foyer.
3. **Restore Oregon Health Plan.** 45,000 Oregonians have lost or will lose their coverage. Key legislators will be asked at the Assembly to work with the MACG to restore their rights to basic medical care.

**YOUR HELP IS NEEDED!**

- **Come to the Health Care Assembly.** For our negotiations to be effective, we need to have wide representation from the MACG member institutions, including St. Philip Neri. Sign up sheets are in the back of the church, or please call Susan Francois at 503-234-1611 to register. The Health Care Assembly is Thursday, May 27<sup>th</sup>, 7 to 8:30 PM at the Ambridge Events Center (formerly the Portland Conference Center) 300 NE Multnomah.
- **Take the Prescription Drug Survey.** In order to take advantage of existing options to reduce prescription drug costs, we need to gather names of interested people. There is a short survey below or longer ones in the church foyer. Please help us by completing a survey and returning it in the box in the foyer or the parish office.

\_\_\_ I would like to cut my prescription costs.

\_\_\_ I am interested in learning more about bulk purchasing.

\_\_\_ I may be eligible for the new Oregon Prescription Drug Program created by the legislature (see below)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

**Oregon Prescription Drug Program Eligibility Criteria**  
-Public Employee (State, County, City, School, etc...) OR  
-55 years or older & income below 185% of federal poverty level. As of September 1, 2003 this income limit is \$1,385/month for an individual and \$1,868.50 for a couple