

Health Care Reform and a Dispute About Dying



By Richard M. Doerflinger

Congress's effort to enact health care reform legislation has sparked a vigorous debate. From a Catholic viewpoint the underlying issue is clear: Tens of millions of Americans lack basic health coverage; many more risk losing what they have as costs rise. And this is a matter of justice. As Pope John XXIII said almost half a century ago: "Man has

the right to live. He has the right to bodily integrity and to the means necessary for the proper development of life, particularly food, clothing, shelter, medical care..." (*Pacem in Terris*, no. 11). A society that does not ensure basic life-affirming health care for those in need is failing in a basic responsibility.

Since the right to health care is based on the right to live, it is also clear that what attacks life is not health care at all, and not a legitimate goal of health care reform. The Church insists that reform is too important and legitimate a goal to be hijacked by destructive agendas such as government-mandated abortion coverage.

But concerns have also been raised about the way health care reform may treat people at the other end of life, specifically through Section 1233 of the current House bill on "advance care planning consultations." Supporters say it is a harmless provision to ensure that elderly patients will have their wishes respected when they can no longer speak for themselves; some opponents see the ominous hand of government nudging grandma over the cliff.

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Richard Doerflinger is Associate Director of the Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. This article first appeared in the *Life Issue Forum*, August 21, 2009.

Priorities and Principles For Health Care Reform

The message of the U.S. Conference of Bishops is clear and principled. The Conference:

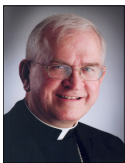
- **Supports universal health coverage which protects the life and dignity of all, especially those who are poor and vulnerable.** Because Catholic teaching insists that basic health care is a right and is essential to protect human life and dignity, genuine health care reform which protects human life and advances universal coverage is a moral imperative and urgent national priority. For us, universal coverage should be truly universal, assuring decent health care for all from conception to natural death.
- **Opposes any efforts to expand abortion funding, mandate abortion coverage, or endanger the conscience rights of health care providers and religious institutions.** Longstanding and widely supported current policies on these issues must be preserved. We urge members of the House and Senate to take all steps necessary to oppose abortion funding, mandated abortion coverage or weakening of conscience rights.
- **Supports effective measures to safeguard the health of immigrants, their children and all of society** by expanding eligibility for public programs, such as Medicaid, to all low-income families and vulnerable people and by offering adequate subsidies for cost-sharing of insurance premiums and out of pocket expenses.

For decades, the Catholic Bishops of the United States have supported and continue to support genuine national health care reform that meets criteria set forth in letters to the House and Senate:

- a truly universal health policy with respect for human life and dignity;
- access for all with a special concern for the poor and inclusion of legal immigrants;
- pursuing the common good and preserving pluralism, including freedom of conscience and variety of options; and
- controlling costs and applying them equitably across the spectrum of payers.

**SAVE THE DATE: Catholics @ the Capitol
Monday, February 22—Tuesday, February 23, 2010**

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Conference Joins Coalition to Move Kentucky Forward

By Robert J. Castagna
Executive Director



Facing total projected budget deficits over the next two fiscal years of upwards of \$1 billion if not more, the Commonwealth of Kentucky finds itself in serious need of revenue restructuring and stabilization. Considering that the top 20% of taxpayers pay a lower percentage of income in taxes than the bottom 80% of taxpayers, tax equity and fairness issues present themselves for review as well.

With the goal of achieving a more progressive tax system producing sufficient revenue to preserve the safety net of services for the vulnerable and to provide a strong education system, the Catholic Conference of Kentucky has joined a number of church-based and community organizations to form the Kentucky Forward Coalition.

Among the coalition partners, to name a few, are the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth, the Kentucky Council of Churches, the Kentucky Society of Friends, Kentuckians for the Commonwealth, Advocacy Action, Kentucky Equal Justice Center, the Kentucky Education Association, the Kentucky AFL-CIO and health care related advocacy organizations. These partners have their sights focused on the needs of those dependent on state programs for services: the poor, elderly, students and those who are physically and mentally ill. Relying on federal and state dollars to fund the Commonwealth's budget, these state programs are under budgetary stress.

The biennial budget for fiscal years 2010-2012 is described by the state Budget Director, Mary Lassiter, as a "significant challenge." Part of a three-year problem confronting state decision-makers, the state's budget has been reduced almost \$600 million over the last year and a half; and the economic recovery is forecasted to be insufficient to support existing spending levels during the next biennium.

In the June 2009 Special Session of the Kentucky General Assembly, the state budget for fiscal year 2009-10 was balanced largely as a result of the infusion of some \$740 million of federal stimulus funding. While an

additional \$293 million of federal stimulus funds plus savings in Medicaid are available to balance the 2010-2011 budget, the budget remains severely out of balance for the next biennium. The challenge to balance the 2010-12 biennial budget will fall to the Governor and the 2010 General Assembly as they examine the revenue forecasts and the state tax system.

Focusing on the state tax system and comprehensive revenue reform, the Legislature's Joint Appropriations and Revenue Committee held a rather abbreviated hearing on June 4 in which two legislators presented their proposals for revenue restructuring. Rep. Bill Farmer's proposal would repeal the state personal and corporate income taxes, reduce the sales tax rate to 5.5 percent and expand the sales tax to include services currently exempt from taxation. Rep. Jim Wayne presented his bill to increase individual income tax rates for higher incomes, allow a refundable earned income tax credit in an amount equal to 15% of the federal earned income tax credit, reinstate the Kentucky estate tax and impose the sales tax on a number of services.

In analyzing the tax proposals offered by Rep. Farmer and Rep. Wayne, the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy (ITEP), a Washington, D. C. non-partisan research organization, indicated that the two tax measures would have "vastly different impacts on Kentucky taxpayers and on the Commonwealth's long-term fiscal outlook." In its report, *Tax Reform in Kentucky*, ITEP indicated that Rep. Wayne's proposal "would make it easier both to shrink Kentucky's projected fiscal gap and for working Kentuckians to make ends meet." On the other hand, ITEP concluded Rep. Farmer's bill "could end up doing the opposite—on both counts."

In their 1986 pastoral letter on the economy, *Economic Justice for All*, the U.S. Catholic bishops taught: *The tax system should be continually evaluated in terms of its impact on the poor.* #202 The evaluation should be based on three principles: adequacy to pay for the public needs of society, especially the

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Conference Joins with Others to Seek Fair, Progressive Tax Structure

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poor; a progressive tax structure so that those with relatively greater resources pay a higher rate; and those below poverty should not be required to pay income taxes.

When examining Kentucky's current tax structure and evaluating it against the principles contained in the pastoral letter on the economy, the Catholic Conference of Kentucky advocates for a fairer and progressive tax structure to produce sufficient revenue to sustain the necessary public programs to educate the state's children and to protect the weak and vulnerable in our state. The Catholic Conference invites all individuals of good will to join in the effort to reform and restructure the Commonwealth's tax system to protect our children, the poor and elderly through fairer and sufficient revenues to sustain and move forward the programs which serve their needs.

For Discussion and Reflection

1. List the basic human rights you think society should guarantee. How should society guarantee these rights?
2. What are the major economic issues facing Kentucky?
3. What is the difference between charity and justice? Cite a few examples detailing when each is appropriate to a situation.
4. List 3 examples of social sin in Kentucky or the United States.
5. What specific changes would you recommend to reform the tax code and balance the budget either in Kentucky or the United States?
6. Are there businesses you purposely patronize, or avoid, because of social justice principles? Are there investment decisions you make based on justice rather than market principles?
7. How would you approach voting if you felt neither major candidate represented a consistent life ethic, or a commitment to the common good?

Scripture Meditations

Psalm 146:6-9
Isaiah 10:1 & 2
Luke 19:1-10
Matthew 20:25-28



*In 2005, Kentucky's Catholic Bishop published a pastoral letter in the form of eight pamphlets, **Economic Justice in 21st Century Kentucky: Holding Ourselves Accountable**. In the column below and to the left is material from **4-Protecting the Common Good**. Although some of the data has changed—there are now more children with health insurance, though not yet all poor children are signed up—the situation has not changed, as clearly demonstrated in the accompanying article. Color copies of this significant pastoral letter are available from the Conference. Contact us to let us know how many you need.*

Focus on Kentucky: Tax Reform

Because Kentucky operates a yearly budget deficit, social services have been cut. Unless the Kentucky tax code is reformed, the quality of life in the Commonwealth will diminish for those who are not wealthy.

Kentucky Tax and Budget Facts

- In 2005, 118,000 children in our state have no health insurance.
- Future revenue shortfalls risk benefit and eligibility reductions in Medicaid.
- The richest 1% pays the least percentage of their income in Kentucky taxes.
- Since 1995, 26 different state tax cuts have cumulatively cost Kentucky \$2.24 billion.

Moral Principles for Tax Reform

Catholic social teachings offer two moral principles that apply directly to taxation: the common good and preferential option for the poor.

- The Kentucky code should first assure that the basic needs of all are addressed before other appropriations are made. The budget should not be balanced on the backs of poor people.
- All citizens and corporations have the right and responsibility to pay taxes because that represents one way citizens and corporations give something back to society.
- Tax cuts should result from a reduction in revenue needs, not as a political decision to satisfy special interests.
- Taxation in any form should be based on one's ability to pay. Catholic social teaching favors a more progressive form of taxation.
- The poor should not pay a disproportionate amount of income in the sum total of taxes paid.

For More Information:

Visit the website of the Kentucky Council of Churches:
www.kycouncilofchurches.org

'Charity in Truth' and the Authentic Development of Peoples

By Rev. Ronald Ketteler

Pope Benedict XVI issued his third encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* (Charity in Truth) on June 29th, the Solemnity of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul.

The title of the encyclical inversely orders the sequence of a phrasing found in a passage taken from a verse in St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians — "*Veritas in Caritate.*" The Pope singles out the expression "truth in charity" in Ephesians 4: 15 to spell out the essential and complementary interrelationship of charity to truth.

In the opening line of the encyclical, the Holy Father sums up its leitmotif: "Charity in truth, to which Jesus Christ bore witness by his earthly life and especially by his death and resurrection, is the principal force behind the authentic development of every person and of all humanity." (CV n.1)

On July 8th at a General Audience in the Vatican, the day after his social encyclical was released, Pope Benedict XVI presented a reflection on the document. The Pope stated that in continuity with other documents of the Church's teaching office *Caritas in Veritate* undertakes "a deeper analysis and reflection of the Church on the social issues of vital interests to humanity in our times."

The drafting of this encyclical began in 2007, a period following the 40th anniversary of Pope Paul VI's 1967 encyclical *Populorum Progressio* (On the Development of Peoples). Today forty years after its publication in 1967, the present Holy Father explicitly links *Caritas in Veritate* to the thought of Pope Paul VI in *Populorum Progressio*.

More than twenty years earlier in 1987, Pope John Paul II had commemorated the significance of *Populorum Progressio* with the encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (On Social Concern). At that moment two decades later, Pope John Paul II engaged the issue of international solidarity anew with the same sense of urgency as his predecessor, Pope Paul VI.

Pope Benedict XVI calls *Populorum Progressio* "the cornerstone of the Church's social teaching in which the Great Pontiff outlined certain decisive and relevant ideas for the integral development of man and of the modern world."

As the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church (2004) notes, despite the general optimism about economic development in the wake of the post war era "[i]nequalities that in the past were experienced within nations are now becoming international and make the dramatic situation of the Third World ever more evident." (CSDC n. 94)

By mid-20th century, the conditions in the developing nations of the world, the implications for global economic cooperation and the responsibilities of the developed regions towards the international common good were rapidly emerging as major concerns for justice.

Within that socio-economic context, *Populorum Progressio* championed the cause of the poor nations of the world in relation to the developed nations of the North. Pope Paul VI



Rev. Ronald Ketteler

expounded on a central theme — that of integral human development along with a critique of the conventional developmental theories espoused in the 1960s. Integral human development cannot be equated with economic progress alone.

In "The Catholic Thing," an online forum, Jesuit Father James V. Schall of Georgetown University participated in a Symposium on *Caritas in Veritate*. Father Schall distills the heart of the Holy Father's new encyclical: "It is a concise representation of what a human person is in his relation to God, the earth, to another person, to the family, to what it is we are meant for, both in this world and in our eternal destiny."

Again, in a Zenit News interview, the noted professor of political science observes that Pope Benedict XVI's third encyclical "takes place in the Church's on-going effort accurately to state the fundamentals of human living." *Caritas in Veritate* teaches "not what our eternal life is about, but what our temporal life is about, seen in the light of our eternal life."

Father Schall notes that the thought of *Caritas in Veritate* becomes more intelligible if read within the context of the Holy Father's prior encyclicals *Deus Caritas Est* (2005) and *Spe Salvi* (2007).

In his initial outline of *Caritas in Veritate*, John Carr, executive director of the Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development at the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, describes the core of the encyclical in terms of "the essential connection between the duty to live out an expansive and demanding definition of charity and anchor this love in truth about the human person and the ethical requirements of economic life."

In an expression of welcome for the message of *Caritas in Veritate*, Cardinal Francis George, president of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, commented that "the encyclical offers sound reflections on the vocation of human development as well as the moral principles on which a global economy must be based."

Cardinal George highlighted a range of moral issues on which the encyclical brings the consciousness of Catholics into focus, such as "a call to see the relationship between human and environmental ecologies, and to link charity and truth in the pursuit of the common good and authentic human development."

A document, which consists of six chapters in addition to an introduction and conclusion, is too comprehensive in scope to summarize its depth adequately in an introductory essay. This initial commentary, then, will limit its review to the overarching theme embodied in the title — "*Charity in Truth.*"

At the opening of the press conference to introduce the encyclical, Cardinal Paul Josef Cordes, the President of the Pontifical Council Cor Unum, summed up the central concept of the encyclical in these words quoted from the text: "What strikes me from the outset is that the central concept remains *caritas* understood as divine love manifested in Christ." In Christ, that light of truth enlightens the Christian in the world as "gift ..., not produced by us, but rather always

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'Charity in Truth' and the Authentic Development of Peoples

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found or, better received' (CV n. 24)."

Caritas in Veritate proclaims: "The search for love and truth is purified and liberated by Jesus Christ from the impoverishment that our humanity brings to it, and reveals to us in all its fullness the initiative of love and the plan for true life that God has prepared for us. In Christ, *charity in truth* becomes the Face of his Person, a vocation for us to love our brothers and sisters in the truth of his plan. Indeed, he himself is the Truth (cf. Jn 14:6)." (CV n. 1)

Pope Benedict XVI synthesized the substance of *Caritas in Veritate* at that General Audience on July 8th. References to the introductory section of the encyclical prefaced his commentary: "Charity in truth is, therefore, the principal propelling force for the true development of each person and all of humanity" and is the integrating concept suffusing "the whole of the Church's social doctrine." He continues: "Only with charity, enlightened by reason and faith, is it possible to achieve objectives of development with a human and humanizing value."

In a word, "charity in truth" is the core principle "around which the Church's social doctrine turns, a principle that takes on practical form in the criteria that govern moral action." (CV n. 6)

The Holy Father explains: "Truth needs to be sought, found and expressed within the 'economy' of charity, but charity in its turn needs to be understood, confirmed and practiced in the light of truth." (CV n. 2)

Otherwise, in the various spheres of societal life (i.e., law, culture, economics, and politics) a danger can arise for misinterpreting the meaning of the concept of charity and separating charity from ethical demands.

Thus, Pope Benedict XVI asserts: "Without truth, charity degenerates into sentimentality. Love becomes an empty shell, to be filled in an arbitrary way. In a culture without truth, this is a fatal risk facing love. It falls prey to contingent subjected emotions and opinions, the word 'love' is abused and distorted, to the point where it becomes the opposite." (CV n. 3)

Charity illumined by reason and faith mirrors "the personal yet public dimension of faith in the God of the Bible, who is both *Agape* and *Logos*: Charity and Truth, Love and Word." (CV n. 3)

Truth is a necessary presupposition for engaging in dialogue about charity, a love ordered to values. In order to create effective dialogue, the Holy Father views charity in truth as the foundation for communicating Christian values: "Truth, in fact, *logos* which creates *dia-logos* and hence communication and communion." The objectivity of truth and human reality empowers "men and women to let go of their subjective opinions" and "to move beyond cultural and historical limitations and to come together in the assessment of the value and substance of things." (CV n. 4)

Since ethical relativism is widespread on the postmodern

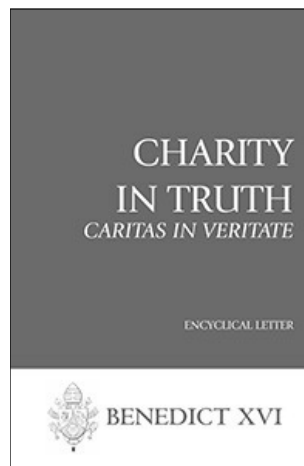
Rev. Ronald M. Ketteler, associate professor and chairperson of Theology, teaches at Thomas More College, Crestview Hills, Kentucky

world scene, *Caritas in Veritate* calls for the practice of charity in truth to witness to Christian values "essential for building a good society and for true integral human development." (CV n. 4)

In the Introduction to the encyclical, Pope Benedict XVI points out that "the dynamic of charity received and given is what gives rise to the Church's social teaching which is *caritas in veritate in re sociali*: the proclamation of the truth of Christ's love in society." Moreover, Church social doctrine, rooted in truth, has emerged and developed in order to serve the demands of charity: "Truth preserves and expresses charity's power to liberate in the ever-changing events of history." (CV n.5)

Pope Benedict XVI affirms the primacy of *caritas* (love) in the pursuit of justice and peace, "a force that has its origin in God, Eternal Love and Absolute Truth." (CV n. 1)

More on Caritas in Veritate



The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has a new section of its website focusing on *Caritas in Veritate*: <http://www.usccb.org/jphd/caritasinveritate/>. Pastors, RCIA directors, educators and other Catholics can all benefit from the wealth of information provided here. Below, a few samples of quotes from the encyclical for your reflection.

Due attention must be given to responsible procreation, which among other things has a positive contribution to make to integral human development. The

church in her concern for man's authentic development, urges him to have full respect for human values in the exercise of his sexuality. (44)

"...se ha de seguir prestando la debida atención a una procreación responsable que, por lo demás, es una contribución efectiva al desarrollo humano integral. La Iglesia, que se interesa por el verdadero desarrollo del hombre, exhorta a éste a que respete los valores humanos también en el ejercicio de la sexualidad..." (44)

The environment is God's gift to everyone, and in our use of it we have a responsibility towards the poor, towards future generations and towards humanity as a whole. (48)

"...la relación del hombre con el ambiente natural... es un don de Dios para todos, y su uso representa para nosotros una responsabilidad para con los pobres, las generaciones futuras y toda la humanidad." (48)

Now is Time to Cap the Payday Loan Industry

By David Dutschke
 Director, Parish Social Ministry Department
 Coordinator of Housing Development
 Catholic Charities of Louisville

Usury, offering money at interest, specifically a high rate, is an ancient practice; its condemnation has a long history.

For example, Ezekiel the prophet wrote, "There are those in you who take bribes to shed blood. You exact interest and usury; you despoil your neighbors violently; and me you have forgotten, says the Lord GOD." — Ez. 22:12, *New American Bible*

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2nd edition, 1997) says that the tenth commandment forbids greed (#2536). And interestingly goes on to say in #2269: "The fifth commandment forbids doing anything with the intention of indirectly bringing about a person's death. The moral law prohibits exposing someone to moral danger without grave reason, as well as refusing assistance to a person in danger. The acceptance by human society of murderous famines, without efforts to remedy them, is a scandalous injustice and a grave offense. Those whose usurious and avaricious dealings lead to the hunger and death of their brethren in the human family indirectly commit homicide which is imputable to them."

We find this in the Koran: "Those who charge usury are in the same position as those controlled by the devil's influence. This is because they claim that usury is the same as commerce. However, God permits commerce, and prohibits usury. Thus, whoever heeds this commandment from his Lord, and refrains from usury, he may keep his past earnings, and his judgment rests with God. As for those who persist in usury, they incur Hell, wherein they abide forever." — *Al-Baqarah* 2:275

Speaking of Hell, in *The Divine Comedy* Dante Alighieri places usurers in the inner ring of the seventh circle of hell, below even suicides.

Common sense says that interest rates of \$400% are usurious. Catholic Charities of Louisville has been working with a variety of other organizations to rein in the modern day usury practitioners, commonly known as payday lenders.

In March of this year when Citizens of Louisville Organized and United Together (CLOUT) challenged the Governor and our local legislators to address this, there was a unanimous commitment on their part to work for a rate cap of 36% in the upcoming 2010 legislative session. This same number rate cap already applies to payday loans made to the military personnel.

Payday lending is very lucrative, albeit risky. Let us look at the business model. You need some cash now. I will lend that to you for a fee. I tell you that you must pay me back in 2 weeks—next pay check. In 2 weeks, you can only pay part of it back. Sorry, I say, but you must pay in full. But don't worry. We can just roll it over for another 2 weeks — all you do is pay that interest. And before you know it, I have made \$100's of dollars in interest on the original \$300 that you borrowed.

The business plan of payday lenders emphasizes the im-

portance of encouraging clients to continue their cycle of debt through rollover extensions or back-to-back transactions loans. This allows the client to continue to pay fees without ever paying the principal owed.

The industry argues that they provide a legitimate service to persons who have immediate needs. Our conventional banking system is not as flexible. (There is at least one answer to this issue of flexibility — BANK ON — but that is for another article.)

CLOUT studied this industry and here is what its research discovered:

- That 33,000 households in Louisville alone get caught in the payday trap;
- That 29,000 households in Louisville alone are unbanked;
- That families in Jefferson County, KY paid over \$28 million in fees, and \$131 million for entire state. (Fees is the name payday lender give to what amounts to interest on the loan);
- That the average borrower takes out over 9 loans;
- That there are more payday and check cashing stores in Jefferson County KY than there are McDonalds, Burger Kings, Kentucky Fried Chickens, White Castles, and Kroger Stores combined;
- That in the past 8 years the number of outlets nearly doubled: from 69 to 132;
- That half of the States do NOT allow payday lending;
- That in KY a new payday loan operation opens every 4 days; and
- That Ohio and West Virginia have caps, and in Arkansas the practice was found unconstitutional because it violated their 17% usury law.

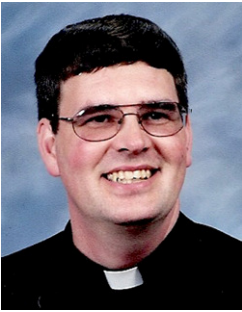
It would be instructive to count the number of lobbyists employed by the industry for the upcoming 2010 session. In the late '90s the payday industry — which often characterizes itself as a simple "mom and pop" operation struggling to make a profit — employed ten lobbyists working to protect it from additional regulation for protection in Tennessee.

Payday lending is predatory and unjust and very profitable. For people of faith, it is one more blight we need to limit or end.

Catholic Charities of Louisville will be working with the Catholic Conference and nearly 50 other members of the Kentucky Coalition for Responsible Lending to pass legislation in 2010 that sets a cap of 36% or less on the amount of interest/fees that payday lenders can charge those to whom they loan money.

If you or anyone you know has suffered at the hands of these lenders, please contact the Catholic Conference of Kentucky and tell us your story. In addition, please contact your State representatives and senators and press for his or her support of the cap on interest/fees at or below 36%.

For further information please visit the website of the Kentucky Coalition for Responsible Lending: <http://kyresponsiblenlending.wordpress.com/>.

*Spiritual Ecumenism***“...the Soul of the Ecumenical Movement”**

By Rev. Tony Bickett
Ecumenical Officer
Diocese of Owensboro

The Decree on Ecumenism of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) states that spiritual ecumenism “should be regarded as the soul of the whole ecumenical movement”. The Council defined spiritual ecumenism as a “change of heart and holiness of

life.” In other words if Christians truly seek unity in Christ there needs to be a conversion of minds and hearts. The Council also says that spiritual ecumenism must include both “public and private prayer for the unity of Christians” (*Decree on Ecumenism*, 8).

Cardinal Walter Kasper, the Vatican’s chief ecumenist, recently told members of the study group working on the relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches, “The first place in spiritual ecumenism belongs to prayer, which joins Jesus’ own prayer on the eve of his death “that all may be one” (John 17:21). Christian unity cannot be the fruit of human effort; we cannot as humans make or organize it. We can only receive it as a gift of the Spirit.”

Our journey toward unity depends on the generosity of the Holy Spirit. Only God has the gift of unity which Jesus prayed for on the eve of his death on the cross. Our work is first of all spiritual work, participating in this fervent prayer of Jesus. Spiritual ecumenism is the center of the hope and work of all Christians if we are to fulfill Jesus’ prayer “that all may be one” (John 17:21).

All our prayer, private and communal, must be for conversion, for a sincere repentance, and for growth in holiness. Our prayer is never secondary to the real work of ecumenism. What a remarkable difference every member in all the

churches can make when they pray with Christ for Christian unity.

In *A Handbook of Spiritual Ecumenism*, Cardinal Kasper explains: “The quest for Christian unity is, above all, a desire that must be kept alive and a prayer that must be nourished.” Prayer makes a difference first of all in the one who prays. Prayer must always precede all our efforts to realize visible unity.

This conversion begins with us, our ways of stereotyping others, our sense of superiority, our lack of interest in the changing understandings taking place between our church and others through dialogue.

In the service of unity, every Christian is called to discern his or her conscience through examination, self-criticism, and repentance. The Second Vatican Council refocused our journey from an “ecumenism of return” to the Catholic Church for an “ecumenism of common return” or conversion to Jesus Christ. There can be no ecumenism without conversion and church renewal.

Spiritual ecumenism is also a mutual sharing of spiritual gifts. The Holy Spirit has given us many different gifts for the building up of the Body of Christ. These spiritual gifts are meant to be shared with others.

The ecumenical movement is not only an exchange of ideas and documents, nor only a matter of working side by side to overcome poverty and racism; it is also an exchange of spiritual gifts and spiritual experiences.

Cardinal Kasper in speaking of spiritual ecumenism says, “It no longer starts with what divides us but with what we have in common. It starts with common Christian experiences and with common Christian challenges.”

Spiritual ecumenism is also incarnational, addressing questions of justice and peace and the responsible stewardship of all creation. May our prayer and sincere sharing turn us more fully toward Christ so that in drawing closer to Christ, we may at the same time come closer to one another.

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lington Lane, Frankfort, KY,
40601, we will sign you up
so you can help us make a
difference in Frankfort and
Washington.

SAVE THE DATE: Catholics @ the Capitol Monday, February 22—Tuesday, February 23, 2010

LIFE ISSUES FORUM:

Health Care Reform and a Dispute About Dying

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The truth, I think, lies somewhere between. This section says that if doctors talk with Medicare patients about “end-of-life services and supports,” the benefits of advance directives such as “living wills,” etc., Medicare will reimburse them for their time.

One worry here is that government or doctors may have agendas in tension with patients’ goals and interests. When a federal official first proposed that the government encourage seniors to sign living wills, in 1977, this was part of a memo on how to cut the government’s health costs – earning a rebuke from Catholic bishops and others.

Another problem is the assumption that documents like the living will are a positive good no matter what they say. The evidence suggests they are imperfect instruments that do not always serve patients’ interests (see the report *Taking Care* by the President’s Council on Bioethics, www.bioethics.gov/reports/taking_care/chapter2.html). The consultations will

also promote whatever advance directive serves as a model in the patient’s home state – and some states’ documents do not make careful distinctions between ordinary and extraordinary means. Patients may not realize that signing some forms could prompt the denial of even ordinary care like nutrition and hydration during a chronic, non-terminal illness. (Section 1233 lists “artificially administered nutrition and hydration” among the topics for discussion).

Such concerns have persuaded key drafters of the Senate health care reform bill to drop this provision – prompting a reaction from the nation’s leading proponent of physician-assisted suicide, the Hemlock Society (now renamed “Compassion and Choices” to mask its zeal for poisoning the elderly). The group said it had “worked tirelessly with supportive members of Congress” to insert the provision, and lamented that it might be dropped due to “misinformation” that it would “promote euthanasia.”

A hint to supporters: If you want to calm concerns that the provision could promote euthanasia, don’t boast that it is backed by groups promoting euthanasia. It now seems Section 1233 will have a quiet and dignified death, and we can continue trying to agree on how to cover people who lack any health care at all.

USCCB POSITION ON HEALTH CARE REFORM



For complete, up-to-date information regarding the U. S. Bishops’ position and statements regarding health care reform, visit this special website frequently: <http://usccb.org/healthcare/>. The Catholic Conference of Kentucky urges you to sign up to receive our legislative alerts on this and other important issues. Visit <http://www.ccky.org>. Invite your family and fellow parishioners also.



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