

Focus on Kentucky: Expanding Health Care

Nationally, one in six people lack health insurance, approximately 45 million Americans, or 15.2%. Of those uninsured 8 out of 10 live in working families.

Comparing Kentucky

In Kentucky over 540,000 adults between the ages of 18 and 64 (21%) lack health insurance. Seventeen percent (17%) of *working* adults are uninsured. Studies show that uninsured people

- are generally in poorer health because they lack access to proper care;
- delay seeking medical care until their illness turns more critical; and
- find free care becoming more difficult to get.

Public Policy

In Kentucky the poorest have access to Medicaid and the wealthiest have private or job-related insurance. Those uninsured comprise the working poor and an increasing number of middle class.

The strategy of the Catholic Health Association works toward universal coverage in deliberate and sequential steps:

- expand Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Fund (K-CHIP);
- initiate a program of premium subsidies;
- expand the Federal Employee Health Benefits Program;
- enroll overlooked children for Medicaid/K-CHIP coverage; and
- strengthen the health safety net.

From Catholic social teaching, health care is a human right, not simply a commodity. (*Pacem in Terris*, n. 11.)

For More Information:

Visit the website of the Catholic Health Association: www.chausa.org.

For Discussion and Reflection

1. In what ways do I respond on a daily basis to the preferential option for the poor?
2. What events in the life of Jesus support the Christian belief that people living in poverty have a special place?
3. How are low income folks regarded on the local level? By peers? By friends?
4. How does a "preferential option" for the poor fit the American ideal of fairness and equal treatment?
5. Identify the structures, patterns, laws or customs that keep people poor.
6. Which public policies, either state or federal, would reduce poverty? What individual or private efforts would help?
7. Which organizations enable low income folks to develop their voice and build self-determination? Which approaches do they use?

Scripture Meditations

Exodus 22:20-26

Isaiah 58:5-11

2 Corinthians 8:1-15

Matthew 25:31-46



OPTION FOR THE POOR



Economic Justice
in 21st Century Kentucky:
Holding Ourselves Accountable
2—The Cost of Discipleship



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OPTION FOR THE POOR

The Key Test of Discipleship

The final judgment scene in Matthew 25 emphasizes our response to others as the criteria for the moral test of society: "I was hungry and you gave me to eat, thirsty and you gave me to drink..." A starving child in the neighborhood should command our response and a homeless woman, our attention. Most Christians help others mainly by supporting community organizations that establish service centers like soup kitchens or homeless shelters.

Self-Determination

The principle, **Option for the Poor**, does not teach class warfare, but recognizes those with the greatest needs require the greatest response. It goes beyond the immediate physical needs of food, clothing and shelter to examine the social situation of the vulnerable.



People with few means cannot participate fully in society. They seldom get their voice heard. They feel powerless in exercising self-determination. Option for the Poor means standing with the vulnerable people of society, seeing through their eyes and enabling them to become active participants in contributing to the common good and sharing in it.

Scripture Speaks

*Open your mouth in behalf of the dumb,
and for the rights of the destitute;
Open your mouth, decree what is just,
defend the needy and the poor!* (Proverbs 31:8–9)



As the day was drawing to a close, the Twelve approached him and said, "Dismiss the crowd so that they can go to the surrounding villages and farms and find lodging and provisions, for we are in a deserted place here." He said to them, "Give them some food yourselves..." (Luke 9:12–13)

He unrolled the scroll and found the passage where it is written:

*"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring glad tidings to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
and proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord."*
(Luke 4:17–19)

People in Kentucky

The economically vulnerable in Kentucky may be children, the unskilled, or mentally challenged. They may have been downsized, injured or are addicted. On the streets and up the hollows Kentucky has brothers and sisters who hurt.

- Approximately 50,000 Kentuckians are homeless each year.
- Kentucky Medicaid covers 1 out of every 4 children; still 118,000 remain uninsured.
- Kentucky's poverty rate hovers at 16%.

Many vulnerable Kentuckians go to work each day, but earn wages that keep them in poverty. Some work 2 jobs and still live without health insurance. Spouses and children frequently suffer abuse from a predator feeling economic frustration.

The Church Teaches

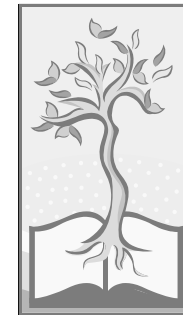


"Hence, those who are oppressed by poverty are the object of a *preferential love* on the part of the Church which...has not ceased to work for their relief, defense, and liberation through numerous works of charity which remain indispensable always and everywhere." Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, instruction, *Liber-tatis conscientia*, 68.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 2448.

The Gospel instructs us in the preferential respect due to the poor and the special situation they have in society: the more fortunate should renounce some of their rights so as to place their goods more generously at the service of others.

Paul VI, *Octogesima Adveniens*, n. 23.



In protecting the rights of private individuals, however, special consideration must be given to the weak and the poor.

Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, n. 54.