

Health Care and the New Evangelization: Building the Culture of Life in Medicine
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Dear friends in Christ,

I am very grateful that all of you have chosen to attend this panel on Catholic healthcare. My hope is that today is a part of substantial conversation about reforming health care in the United States, as Catholics, bringing to bear the principles of Catholic health care to the public square, and bringing the divine mercy of Christ, the Great Physician, to the sick, the suffering, the marginalized, and the peripheries.

I speak today as the episcopal advisor to the Catholic Medical Association, and as a bishop. And so I'd like to begin by expressing the key priorities of healthcare drawn from Catholic social teaching.

First, healthcare reform should respect the dignity of every person, from conception to natural death. This means that the elderly and persons with disabilities must be treated with special care and sensitivity. It also means that abortion and abortion funding should be excluded from any reform plan, no matter how adroitly the abortion funding is masked. Whatever one thinks about its legality, abortion has nothing to do with advancing human "health," and a large number of Americans regard it as a gravely wrong act of violence, not only against unborn children but also against women.

Second, everyone should have access to basic health care, including immigrants. The Church hopes to see healthcare access broadened as widely as possible. But at a minimum, it should include those immigrants who live and work in the United States legally.

Third, real healthcare reform needs to include explicit, ironclad conscience protections for medical professionals and institutions so that they cannot be forced to violate their moral convictions.

Fourth--and this is so obvious it sometimes goes unstated--any reform must be economically realistic and financially sustainable. We can't help anyone, including ourselves, if we're insolvent. If we commit ourselves to health services, then we need to have the will and the ability to really pay for them. That's a moral issue, not simply a practical one.

We've worked towards these healthcare reforms for decades. We've had very limited, and very tenuous, success. I don't have time to review the state of healthcare in the United States. But we know that abortion is ubiquitous, conscience protection is virtually non-existent, and, despite the promises of both the Affordable Care Act and the American Health Care Act, millions of Americans remain without access to affordable healthcare, and the model we're using may not prove financially sustainable.

For all our efforts towards healthcare reform, we seem to have a very long road to go, and an uphill battle.

That's where the new evangelization comes in. Policy follows culture. And at the heart of culture is faith. When John Paul II began talking about the New Evangelization, he was talking about renewing Catholic identity in the hearts of Catholic people, and Catholic institutions.

John Paul II wanted Catholics to be renewed in faith, energy and enthusiasm. He seemed to say, everywhere he went: "You are beloved sons and daughters of God. You live in the grace of Jesus Christ. You do not need to accept the status quo. You do not need to be afraid."

This kind of evangelization begins with reaching the hearts of ordinary people. It begins with witnessing to life in Jesus Christ, to joyful discipleship of Christ, and the fruit of that discipleship in ordinary life. Just and virtuous health care reform in the United States depends on building Catholic culture, in the context of medicine, by witnessing to life in Jesus Christ, and by inviting others to share that life. The conversations we're having here are an outlet of the new evangelization.

It is hard, in the professional context of healthcare, to build meaningful friendships, to give meaningful witness to life in Christ, and to actively invite colleagues to know, love, and serve God. But that is the place where transformation of culture, and ultimately transformation of policy, really begins.

There is another aspect to the new evangelization that impacts reform of health care in the United States.

In *Christifidelis Laici*, Pope St. John Paul II explains that the mission of the new evangelization includes "remaking the Christian fabric of the **ecclesial community** itself."

To build Catholic culture in healthcare, Catholic healthcare institutions and Catholic healthcare workers need to live, promote, and witness to the faith. They need to see the salvation of souls as a critical part of their mission. They need to be places where medical care and spiritual care are aligned, where truth is the animating principle, and medicine is a ministry.

Today, the pressures of the healthcare industry, the prevailing abortion and contraception mindsets in the medical community, and the commodification and corporatization of ministry has led to weariness among many Catholic medical professionals and institutions. In some this has led to a breakdown of fidelity or a loss of the sense of mission. That is the sense in which Catholic healthcare institutions are in need of the new evangelization.

We're in need of a new dynamic energy, a new source of purpose and commitment to authentically Catholic healthcare. That kind of renewal doesn't come because bishops say it should. It comes because ordinary Catholics commit themselves to being evangelists.

But we are reaching a moment when Catholic healthcare institutions and professionals will have to decide if they want to be Catholic, and pay a heavy price for it. They'll choose truth if it is attractive, meaningful, and compelling. They'll choose to stand for human dignity if the Gospel is a force for renewal, and joy, and meaning. Many Catholic healthcare institutions in America themselves need to be evangelized, with joy and charity. And each one of us bears that responsibility. If we want to see a reform of health care in the United States, we must be genuinely committed to a new evangelization in Catholic healthcare institutions, and for Catholic healthcare institutions.

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis says that the Church must call to conversion "*the baptized whose lives do not reflect the demands of Baptism.*" He's right. He says that we all must help them to "experience a conversion which will restore the joy of faith to their hearts and inspire a commitment to the Gospel." That is precisely the demand of the new evangelization. And a true commitment to the Gospel on the part of physicians, and medical administrators, and institutions, is the key to meaningful Catholic health care reform in our country.

Let us commit ourselves to a new springtime of evangelization. And let us trust that the Lord will grace our work, through the intercession of Pope St. John Paul II.