

Interfaith Prayer Service for Children's Health Care



Prepared by the Interreligious Working Group on Domestic Human
Needs for Cover the Uninsured Week 2007

April 2007

Dear Friends,

As part of Cover the Uninsured Week 2007, which runs from April 22-29, our national offices will be hosting an Interfaith Prayer Vigil in the nation's capital on April 29th to declare that health care is a fundamental right for all, to proclaim our vision for health care for all that begins with covering all of America's children, and to call on our elected officials to take action *this year* to cover all kids. We wanted to provide you with some resources that you may join in our efforts, whether in conjunction with Cover the Uninsured Week or at a later date, to share the message that no one should be without quality, affordable health care coverage, especially not our children!

In this document, you will find a sample prayer service designed for an interfaith gathering. This service will serve as the outline for our gathering in DC on the 29th, but feel free to adapt this for use in your own congregations and communities. In addition, we encourage you to make use of the following faith toolkits provided by the Cover the Uninsured Week campaign to increase awareness in your community, help families access health care, communicate with elected officials, and get the message in the media that people of faith believe our nation has a moral responsibility to that every person has access to the health care they need.

Christian Toolkit:

<http://covertheuninsured.org/materials/files/2007/InterfaithChristianPrayerStudy.pdf>

Jewish Toolkit:

<http://covertheuninsured.org/materials/files/2007/InterfaithJewishPrayerStudy.pdf>

Muslim Toolkit:

<http://covertheuninsured.org/materials/files/2007/InterfaithMuslimPrayerStudy.pdf>

Interfaith Toolkit (from 2005):

<http://covertheuninsured.org/materials/files/2005/2005InterfaithActionSteps.pdf>

With nearly 46 million Americans, including 9 million children, without health insurance, the prophetic voices of people of faith are vital to making health care for all a priority for our national leadership. It is a problem that affects all of us. It's time to take meaningful steps toward solutions. We can help.

We hope you will join us in prayer and action, committing to care for those who are living without health coverage and for the political will to help uninsured Americans get the health care coverage they need and deserve.

Faithfully,

Members of the Interreligious Working Group on Domestic Human Needs

Opening Prayer

Eternal God, we praise you for giving us life and calling us into community to care for each other.

We acknowledge that we have failed to care for every member of our human family, especially our children, and have not ensured that all may receive the health care they need for the life that you intend. Forgive us for hearts that have been slow to feel another's pain, for hands that have been still when a caring touch was needed, and for voices that have remained silent while millions suffer for lack of health care.

Strengthen in us a determination to solve the problem of uninsured Americans, so that all may have the care they need. While we work together, sustain and uphold those who suffer while they await healing and care. Guide doctors, nurses and all other health care providers to serve with skill as agents of your love and healing.

For the blessing of life, we give you thanks. For the comfort you provide for all who experience illness and loss, we give you thanks. And for the call to care and the will to do it, we give you thanks. *Amen.*

(Adapted from materials for Cover the Uninsured Week 2005 by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation with the cooperation of the National Interfaith Advisory Board)

Litany of Lament (based on Jeremiah 8:18-9:1)

Reader: Every day, 1,879 babies are born in the United States without health insurance, and more than nine million children in our country are uninsured. Children without health insurance are less likely to see a doctor when they need one, and more likely to have worse health outcomes than children who have health coverage.

People: **My joy is gone, grief is upon me, my heart is sick.**

Reader: As children headed back to school this year, too many didn't have the eye glasses, hearing aids, and health check ups they needed to learn and grow. Without adequate and appropriate health care, children are less able to achieve and reach their full potential. Uninsured children's reading scores have been shown to more than double after they received health insurance.

People: **The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.**

Reader: The poorest children are more than 5 times as likely to be uninsured as the wealthiest children. Latino children are 3 times as likely to be uninsured as White children. Black children are 1.7 times as likely to be uninsured as White children.

People: **For the hurt of my poor children I am hurt, I mourn, and dismay has taken hold of me.**

Reader: The health care spending in the United States is far more per person than in other industrialized countries, yet we rank 24th out of 30 similar countries in infant mortality rate, and 22nd in low-birth weight babies.

People: Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has the health of my poor people not been restored?

Reader: Too many political leaders say we cannot afford to guarantee health coverage for all children at this time. Yet for what the United States spends on 16 days of general military spending or 5 months on tax cuts for the wealthiest 1 percent in 2007, or 3 ½ months in Iraq, we could provide comprehensive coverage for all children for a year. Why can't a nation with its Gross Domestic Product equal to \$13.3 trillion ensure health coverage to all its children? It's not a money problem; it's a lack of moral commitment in the priorities of our leadership.

People: O that my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears, so that I might weep day and night for the slain of my poor people!

Reader: Let us move from weeping to work to provide the balm of health care, hope, and healing all children need and deserve now.

(From the Children's Defense Fund's *Toolkit for Faith Communities: Covering all Children in 2007*)

Interfaith Litany of Prayer and Reflection

Unison Prayer

Eternal God, we praise you for giving us life and calling us into community to care for each other. We acknowledge that we have failed to care for every member of our human family, and have not ensured that all may receive the health care they need for the life that you intend. Forgive us for hearts that have been slow to feel another's pain, for hands that have been still when caring touch was needed, and for voices that have remained silent while millions suffer for lack of health care.

Reflection: Deamonte, died at the age of 12, Prince Georges County, Maryland

Deamonte, a seventh grader in Prince George's County, Maryland, just outside of Washington, D.C., died because he didn't have health insurance to cover an \$80 tooth extraction. The inexcusable loss of this 12-year-old's life started when he complained of a toothache. His mother, Alyce, who works at low-paying jobs, didn't have employer health insurance, and had been focused on finding a dentist to see Deamonte's brother, who had six rotting teeth. Their Medicaid insurance coverage had been cut off, and Alyce's efforts to renew the coverage were ensnarled in red tape and bureaucratic delays.

After an unsuccessful search for a dentist, Alyce took Deamonte to a hospital emergency room where he was given medicine for a headache, sinusitis and dental abscess and then sent home. But his condition soon took a turn for the worse, and he was back at the hospital being rushed to surgery where it was discovered that the bacteria from his abscessed tooth had spread to his brain. Heroic efforts were made to save him, including two operations and eight weeks of additional care and therapy, totaling about \$250,000. Unfortunately, it was all too late. He died on February 25. The outrage is that Deamonte's life could have been saved by far less costly health insurance to cover routine dental visits and an inexpensive extraction.

Teachings from Jewish scripture – Leviticus 19: "Do not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor." Judaism advances two core values underlying an abiding commitment to provide health care to all of God's children. The first is that an individual human life is of infinite value; the second is that we are endowed with wisdom and strength to be God's partners in repairing the world. Just as the Talmud teaches that a physician is obligated to heal and that a patient is obligated to obtain health care, so too are we taught that the whole of society is responsible for ensuring that every individual has access to health care.

Prayer from the Jewish Tradition: Creator of Life | G'vurot

Great is Your power, O Lord, and endless Your love. The evening stars tell of Your might, and growing things are a song of Your love.

You have taught us to uphold the falling, to heal the sick, to free the captive, to comfort all who suffer pain.

In sickness and in health, in life and in death, You are with us. Blessed is the Lord, Creator of life.

Hear now our prayer for those who cannot see a doctor when they are sick and in need of healing, who suffer pain unrelieved by health care they cannot access. Strengthen us to use our hearts and hands, voices and vision to help see that all people have the health care they need.

(From "Materials for Jewish Prayer, Study and Action", Cover the Uninsured Week 2007)

Unison Response: Strengthen us to use our hearts and hands, voices and vision to help ensure that all persons, especially our children, have the health care they need.

Reflection: Essay by Erika Postma (Age 10, Kevin, Montana)

When I was about seven years old the phone suddenly jingled in its cradle. "Hello," responded my mother. "Mom," questioned my brother on the other end. "Danny, Maggie and I kind of flipped into the ditch." "What?" screeched my mom while she scribbled out a sloppy map.

"If it helps any, we're all alive," humored my brother. My mom hung up and she and dad hurriedly jumped into the car. I plopped in right beside them. We arrived on the scene just in time to see Maggie climbing out the window of the brown beat-up pickup. Slowly, my mom

helped her to the car while my dad and I helped my brothers out. Luckily, we had health and car insurance to cover the accident and were able to take these three teenagers to the doctor. What would have happened if we didn't? Just a couple of cuts and bruises could have been awful damage.

When is an apple a day not enough? Over 4 million kids don't have health insurance, and if these children are being sent to school feeling like a bat in the daytime their grades will decrease. What happens when their grades drop? They'll get held back. Not only is this hard on the kids, but on the teacher and the family.

Why is health insurance important to us? It is important to us because if you put yourself in their shoes, you would understand that trying to make it through the day when you don't feel well is not any fun. Without insurance, contagious viruses can spread. Likewise, not taking care of an illness can escalate and become more serious. In the end, the illness ends up costing the parents even more. If parents are unable to pay for health care, paying Americans end up picking up the tab. This in return makes insurance rates climb. It becomes a vicious cycle for uninsured American children.

An apple a day can keep the doctor away, but a helping of health insurance is needed too.

("When an Apple A Day Isn't Enough" produced by Families USA for the Campaign for Children's Health Care, February 2007)

Teachings from Christian Scripture – Mark 2:3: "Then some people came, bringing to him [Jesus] a paralytic, carried by four of them... He said to the paralytic *I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home.*" Christian scripture frequently lifts up the importance that healing had in the life and ministry of Jesus. Emphasis is placed not only on Jesus as a healer, but also on the role of believers in seeking healing and wholeness of their neighbors.

Prayer from the Christian Tradition

God of Life, we pray this day for those whose dying is hastened by lack of access to health care.
God of Love, we pray this day for the millions of people who do not have health care coverage, that their pain and anxiety will be relieved and that our hearts will be moved to help them.

God of Justice, we pray this day that our nation will work as one to see that all people have the health care they need.

God of the Weak, we pray this day for those who are too young, too sick, too ashamed, too discouraged to speak out for themselves and call for care.

God of Power, we pray that all who are in positions of leadership will work together to solve the problem of people living without health insurance.

God of Mercy, we pray for those whose suffering is unrelieved by care and for ourselves that we will work with others to assure care for all.

God of All, you have made us in your image. Help us to reflect your goodness. Amen.

Unison Response: Strengthen us to use our hearts and hands, voices and vision to help ensure that all persons have the health care they need.

Reflection: SCHIP Helped Kyle Do Better in School—The Importance of Health Coverage

Kyle Harvey is a nine year old boy with vibrant red hair and a wide smile. At first glance, he looks like a typical healthy boy. But Kyle has chronic asthma, migraines and Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder that require ongoing medical attention. His mother, Lorna, is a small business owner who cannot afford private health insurance. She learned about CHIP during an awareness day in Houston and credits the program with improving Kyle's quality of life and helping him perform well in school.

Before Kyle enrolled in CHIP three years ago, he did not have a pediatrician and often went to the emergency room when his asthma and migraines flared up. His ADHD was left untreated and he had significant difficulty in school.

With CHIP, Kyle is able to visit a doctor regularly and obtain the medications he needs. He is finally earning A and B grades and making friends, and was healthy enough to attend summer camp for the first time.

Without CHIP, Lorna never would have been able to afford the \$770 in medications that Kyle takes each month to manage his ADHD and other health conditions.

*(From the Children's Defense Fund Report, *In Harm's Way: True Stories Of Uninsured Texas Children*)*

Ayahs from the Holy Qur'an. "A person whose passions respond only to his or her personal needs, and who is only concerned with his or her own personal and familial life, has long abandoned the true purpose of life..." (15:3). True Muslims are compassionate human beings, whose passions are aligned with divine purpose of life, and whose actions, therefore, are guided by the principles of revelation. To be a true Muslim is to be active not passive, to get involved in society and not to withdraw from it.

Meditation from the Islamic Tradition

O believers, be you securers of justice, witnesses for God, even though it be against yourselves, or your parents and kinsmen, whether the man be rich or poor; God stands closest to either. Then follow not caprice, so as to swerve; for if you twist or turn, God is aware of the things you do. [Qur'an, 4:135]

Unison Response: Strengthen us to use our hearts and hands, voices and vision to help ensure that all persons have the health care they need.

For the blessing of life, we give you thanks. For the comfort you provide for all who experience illness and loss, we give you thanks. And for the call to care and the will to do it, we give you thanks. Amen.

(From the Universal Health Care Action Network, adapted from resources in the 2003 Cover the Uninsured Week Interfaith Kit)

Responding With Faith: A Call to Care

Who Needs Care?

Today, more than 46 million Americans are living without health care coverage, including 9 million children; *America's uninsured need care.*

Most of the uninsured—eight out of 10—are in working families; *America's uninsured workers and their families need care.*

The financial security, health, jobs, families and lives of the uninsured are in constant jeopardy. These children, women and men live sicker and die younger simply because they do not have health insurance; *those at risk, sick and dying need care.*

Individuals and families without health care coverage are forced to gamble every day that they won't get sick or injured. One serious illness or injury could wipe out an uninsured family's bank account; *those with financial problems need care.*

It doesn't have to be this way. So today we proclaim the call to care in the name of our nation's more than 46 million uninsured people.

Why Do Our Faith Communities Proclaim the Call to Care?

Because faith communities have a long tradition of caring for people who suffer in mind, body and spirit, *today we proclaim the call to care for our nation's more than 46 million uninsured people, especially the 9 million uninsured children.*

Because faith communities have prayed for the sick, visited the hospitalized, comforted the dying and their loved ones, and founded hospitals, *today we proclaim the call to care for our nation's more than 46 million uninsured people, especially the 9 million uninsured children.*

Because faith communities have led the way in seeking just and compassionate public policies, *today we proclaim the call to care for our nation's more than 46 million uninsured people, especially the 9 million uninsured children.*

Because Jewish teaching holds that “if you save one life it is as if you have saved the world;” because Muslim teaching instructs us to “help one another in righteousness and piety;” because in Christian teaching we read, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me,” *today we proclaim the call to care for our nation's more than 46 million uninsured people, especially the 9 million uninsured children.*

Because all of our faith traditions, despite encompassing a wide spectrum of beliefs, hold central a conviction that life is a gift from God to be cherished and that God's people are called to care for one another, provide healing and prevent suffering with compassion and a commitment to justice, *today we proclaim the call to care for our nation's more than 46 million uninsured people, especially the 9 million uninsured children.*

Answering the Call

By reflecting on the texts and teachings of our own faiths that guide our understanding of and response to the needs of the uninsured, *we will respond with faith.*

By learning more about the plight of the uninsured and potential solutions through study and discussion, *we will respond with concern.*

By reaching out to help people without health coverage through health fairs and other volunteer opportunities, *we will respond with care.*

By focusing attention on the plight of the uninsured and promoting respectful discussions in which we invite all Americans to participate in seeking and implementing solutions, *we will respond with justice.*

(Adapted from the Cover the Uninsured Week's "Call to Care" signed by national faith leaders)

Closing Prayer

Prayer for All God's Children

Creator God, Source of Life, you have made us in your image. Each child reflects your handiwork, bears the imprint of your hand, the reflection of your face. Open our eyes to see each child as a unique and precious gift from you, beloved and irreplaceable, a sacred trust.

Loving God, Source of all compassion, you have claimed us as your children with the unwavering love of a parent. Open our hearts to care for each child as you care for us, to feel each child's hurt as our own, to respond to each child's trust with our courageous and determined action to nurture and protect them and ensure they receive the care they need.

God of justice, you have set before us your vision of justice in which our first charge is to care for the widow, the orphan, the stranger, the poor—those who are vulnerable, poor, young, excluded, and oppressed.

Open our mouths to speak out for all the children today that don't have health coverage, who suffer and even die needlessly for lack of care that our nation could provide.

Instill in us your passion for justice so that we champion their cause until every person, and especially every child, has health coverage and can live out the lives for which they were created.

Amen.

(Adapted From the Children's Defense Fund's Toolkit for Faith Communities: Covering all Children in 2007)