

Doing the Right Thing

Four and one-half years ago the Working Group on Religious Values from the Beth Shalom congregation invited area clergy and religious leaders to attend a breakfast meeting to seek ways to address systemic problems that violate our commonly-shared religious values. Those of us who came – Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and others – voiced our common concerns relating to care for the poor, peace, and justice.

Among all the important issues identified by the 21 people around the table, one stood out as most widely shared: the need for better health care, especially for our most vulnerable and under-served citizens.

There was also consensus that we should continue to meet, to think and work together, and to support one another in our efforts to try to implement the shared values of our respective faith traditions by advocating for socially just policies and practices in our public life. Thus was born the Monroe County Religious Leaders (MCRL), an interfaith gathering of clergy and lay persons who continue to meet monthly to address issues of importance to our common life.

MCRL has focused its attention on a number of issues during these past few years, but none more so than health care. We regard adequate health care as basic to meeting human need. We consider it a mandate within each of our religious traditions that such care be provided to all persons. Thus, we share the conviction that within a democratic society, where all citizens are responsible for the conduct of their common life, health care must be regarded not as a privilege but as a basic human right. For anyone to lack access to adequate health care is both morally and politically unacceptable. Moreover, no stigma should be attached to that access. For example, people should not have to depend on charity to get the health care they need.

In other words, we believe that in our society, and in accordance with the values of each of our various religious faith traditions, universal health care must be provided. Most of us would probably not advocate that the government itself provide such care. But we would say that the government must insure every citizen (e.g., universal health insurance, or Medicare for everyone), or provide some other means by which basic health care can be made accessible and affordable to everyone. It's the Christian, and Jewish, and Muslim, and Buddhist, and morally right thing to do!

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