

Dear Friends:

Recently I baptized “Gregory Joseph,” named after the outstanding Pope of the early Middle Ages, Gregory the Great. When his mother brought the new baby to the office, I said “Hi, Gregory the Great.” The baby’s face lit up into a beautiful smile. Everyone loves to see a baby smile. The theme of this year’s Respect Life Month captures this sentiment and comes from the first Pope elected in the 21st Century, Benedict XVI: EVERY CHILD BRINGS US GOD’S SMILE. “Every child,” he says, “invites us to recognize that life is God’s gift...to be welcomed with love and preserved with care.”

Numerous forces at the present time are impacting the common good at every level of society and hindering the recognition of God’s smile: Unemployment, homelessness, hunger, lack of healthcare coverage, failure to enact comprehensive immigration reform are some of these forces which demean respect for the human person. As a people we are challenged through government and private participation to build and develop community by bringing about necessary reforms. As Disciples of Christ and members of His Church we are moved by love to contribute to the integral development of the human person and to the transformation of society. Listening to the Word of God and enlightened by reason we are compelled to act on what we have heard from the Gospel.

In particular, this year I raise up the urgent need for healthcare reform.

The Church in the United States has long supported the need for national healthcare reform. Healthcare is a human right and essential in promoting human life and dignity. Universal coverage should provide adequate healthcare for all from conception to natural death.

As Congress develops healthcare legislation it cannot be an opportunity to expand abortion funding nor to mandate abortion coverage. Crucial also is the importance of healthcare legislation protecting the conscience rights of healthcare providers and religious institutions.

Furthermore, the Bishops of the United States strongly support effective measures in healthcare reform to safeguard the health of immigrants, their children and all of society. Love is at the heart of all we do as a Church. The poor and the marginated deserve our special attention.

The Catholic Church operates one out of every six health care institutions in this country. Therefore we have much to offer our legislators from our experience. We speak from a tradition of practical teaching on the ethics of health care which reflect principles drawn from the light of the Gospel and of human reason. As Catholics we are a voice of conviction in our pluralistic society, calling for universal health care to serve the common good of our nation. In promoting universal access to health care we are engaged in the integral development of the human person and of society as described by Pope Benedict XVI in his latest encyclical “Charity in Truth.”

God indeed has smiled on all of us in the gift of life. It is our responsibility as the human family to care for one another. It is our responsibility to ensure that every man, woman and child can enjoy those human rights essential to the development of the dignity of the human person and the well being of society. It is our duty as Catholics to support the right of basic health care for all. We pray for wisdom in discerning how best to accomplish this goal.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Stephen E. Blaire
Roman Catholic Bishop of Stockton

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