



ACCESS TO ADEQUATE AND AFFORDABLE HEALTHCARE

MOST REVEREND PAUL J. SWAIN

BISHOP OF SIOUX FALLS

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In a statement released during the 2013 Legislative session I noted that “access to adequate health care is fundamental to embodying a demonstrated respect for life and human dignity.” It is a basic human right. Accessible, adequate and affordable health care assures that individuals and families can live fulfilling lives with dignity. Tragically many citizens of South Dakota do not have access to health insurance coverage and therefore cannot receive adequate healthcare, disproportionately the poor.

An opportunity exists to address this great need through the acceptance of Medicaid expansion made available through the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA). The ACA is troubling in many ways, not the least of which is its provision which forces religious institutions and people of faith to provide abortifacients, sterilizations and contraceptives, a mandate in conflict with Church teachings and in violation of individual conscience rights. The Bishops of the United States will continue to protest in the courts and in other ways this active redefinition of the First Amendment’s guarantee of freedom of religion and its free exercise.

The issue of Medicaid expansion, however, has been left to individual states as one way health insurance might be made available to those who cannot afford coverage. We recognize that people of good will can differ on whether this approach is sound fiscally and in other ways. We cannot however ignore this grave need and do nothing. Those who oppose Medicaid expansion should offer responsible alternatives yet in this legislative session. However, any proposal whether through Medicaid or as an alternative should provide conscience protection to healthcare providers and facilities so that they might offer care in accord with their mission and moral beliefs.

The health care industry and ministry is increasingly complex and faces many business, regulatory and legal challenges. I encourage all Catholics to pray that prudential judgment guide our governor, legislators and other government officials to enact policies that honor our responsibility to respect the dignity of all persons through the offering of insured access to health care for our brothers and sisters who are without adequate personal resources.