



Diocese
of
Cleveland

Cathedral Square

908/2009
18 August 2009

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

My dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Over the past several weeks the various news media sources, print and electronic, have been covering the national debates about proposed health care legislation. It is hard to believe that anyone can claim to be unaware of such conversations and disagreements.

Cleveland, in fact our own diocese specifically our Diocesan Social Action Office, has been noted in some of the literature. Some organizations have gone so far as to state that our Social Action Office is in favor of proposed legislation as it stands in the legislative process. I am told the legislation does not explicitly mention issues of significance for Catholics and other people having similar values.

Imagine such a charge! When one takes a look at statements put forth by the Diocesan Social Action Office since mid-July, they support reform in the area of health care noting that for reform to be truly beneficial it must be for all and must not compromise the lives of the unborn.

It seems to me that some participants in this issue of major importance are more interested in attacking certain people and organizations than clearly stating their own positions and the reasons behind their positions, thereby hopefully entering into a meaningful dialogue in this public forum.

As leader to the faithful of the Cleveland Catholic Diocese, I rely on the teachings of the Catholic Church underscoring all human life as a gift from God to be protected and preserved from conception to natural death; all human beings have a right to health care; any health care policy must respect the sanctity and dignity of all human life.

Recently, two of my brother bishops, Bishop William Murphy, Bishop of Rockville Centre, and Cardinal Justin Rigali, Archbishop of Philadelphia, have written on this issue in their positions as Chairman, Committee Domestic Justice and Human Development (Bishop Murphy) and Chairman, Committee on Pro-Life Activities (Cardinal Rigali). Both of these churchmen have presented clearly Catholic teaching on this matter.

Bishop Murphy wrote that the Bishops **“want to support health care reform”** and do so ever committed **“that health care reform excludes abortion coverage or any other provisions that threaten the sanctity of life.”**

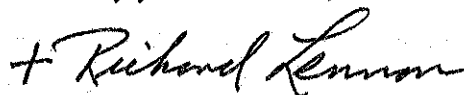
Cardinal Rigali wrote **“that health care legislation (must) respect human life and rights of conscience.”** He went on to state **“we urge you to make this legislation ‘abortion neutral’ by preserving longstanding federal policies that prevent government promotion of abortion and respect conscience rights.”**

These teachings are the teachings of our Catholic Church and they are my teachings as Bishop of Cleveland and the teachings I expect all in leadership in our diocese to embrace and put forth during this time of national dialogue on health care reform.

Health care is a basic right that all people should have access to. However, this right does not override even more basic rights such as life and dignity of the human person. For health care reform to move in a direction that compromises the lives of some for the good of others would be totally unacceptable. A truly great society, a great nation takes care of all of its people, particularly the vulnerable. To this point I suggest that our interventions and conversations regarding health care reform be conducted in a civil manner and characterized by directness and faithfulness to our belief so that we may be heard.

The stakes in this matter are great; we need to be involved for the well-being of all, especially for those most in need.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard Lennon". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Bishop of Cleveland