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## **CA Council of Churches/IMPACT Win Democratic Party's First "Father Robert Drinan Award" for Social Justice**

At its state convention in San Diego, the California Democratic Party honored the nonpartisan California Council of Churches and California Church IMPACT with the first Father Robert Drinan Award for courage in the struggle for social justice. Individual awards honored former Council board member Rev. Phil Lawson and CLUE-CA executive director Alexia Salvatierra.

State Democratic Chair Art Torres presented the award to CCC/CCI Executive Director Rev. Dr. Rick Schlosser and IMPACT President, Rev. John Freeseemann. Torres cited Church IMPACT's successful Capitol and grassroots lobbying for social justice legislation and its campaigns for statewide ballot propositions that reflect moral values.

The Council educates church members on the moral values involved in major public policy issues while Church IMPACT advocates for legislation and budget items on issues ranging from poverty to nonviolence and environmental protection to civil rights.

Church IMPACT won victories helping secure the first part of the path-breaking clean-air act, achieving several key bills on poverty issues, passing the state's path-breaking hate crimes legislation and women's rights bill, and convincing the final two Assembly members to vote for Assemblyman Mark Leno's same-gender marriage equality bill in 2006, giving the bill the majority it needed.

In the 2005 special election, its non-partisan "IMPACT Sundays" campaign helped defeat the closest two initiatives on the ballot, parental notification and the anti-labor so-called "paycheck protection" initiative.

The Democratic Party initiated the Father Drinan award following the January death of Rev. Robert Drinan, a Catholic priest and former Democratic Congressman, who brought his values and dedication to social justice to his political work.

Rev. Schlosser stated, "We are deeply honored to be the first organization to receive this award named for a faith leader who brought his belief in social justice into the public arena. Father Drinan was a model for us all. He led by example showing us that we have a duty to stand for principles that shape our public policy. He also showed us how moral courage and commitment are compatible with respect for people with differing views."



## **Council Receives New Grant to Promote Health Care Reform**

The California Council of Churches is pleased to announce a new two-year project, funded by The California Wellness Foundation, to expand our priority work to move California toward universal health care.

With multiple proposals in California, we have an opportunity to shape a comprehensive, affordable, and equitable health care public policy. We focus on providing affordable health care coverage for all Californians, covering the uninsured, and assuring culturally and linguistically-appropriate access. CCC is uniquely positioned to have a significant role in public education around these issues since we often are speaking for others, not for ourselves. That voice is not often heard within public policy arenas.

Our baseline objective is to have a minimum of two people from each California legislative district engaged with policy education and mobilization in conjunction with our allied organizations. These will be our Health Care Target Activists who will energize and mobilize still others within each district.

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## Is There No Balm in Gilead? Health Care for *ALL* God's Children

California is deliberating what health care plan serves the greatest good for state residents. Two legislative plans propose either to offer private insurance through all employers or to provide universal health insurance through the state as the sole payer. Other proposals, not yet legislative, are to mandate all people carry health insurance or to create health care 'savings accounts.' Each plan challenges us to define our values around key principles: Who is entitled to have access to full medical coverage? Is health care a commodity we should buy like any other? Who should pay for health coverage and how? What role does 'affordability' play in premium costs, deductibles, and co-pays in terms of access? Who decides which of us gets access, which of us gets care?

What is clear is that the current system does not work. California has 7 million residents who have insufficient or no health insurance. Nearly 80 percent of the uninsured are full-time working people. Over half of all personal bankruptcies are due to health care costs, even among those who believed they were insured. Uninsured adults and children tend to wait before seeking medical treatment thereby becoming more ill — and more expensive — when they do. Undocumented immigrants cannot obtain routine health care but are legally entitled to emergency care for life-threatening illness which is too often their fate. The uninsured are less healthy, less productive, and live less long than the rest of us. They also are not stereotypical; they are our neighbors, our divorced or widowed friends, those whose employers have stopped or cut coverage, the children in our schools. They are the young, the old, and the employed. It could be any one of us.

These issues are policy questions. For the faith community, however, they are fundamentally moral issues. At the heart of any policy we choose lie questions about the value of life, the balance between individual and societal responsibility, the issue of whether we rely on a market system and individual chance in that market. Do we look to government as

an instrument of our society to help find the solution? We are all familiar with the story of the Good Samaritan, the foundation of the Golden Rule, and the mandate that we are our brother's/sister's keeper. Can social policy rest on these fundamental principles? Can we shape a policy without them?

### Theological Reflection

Finding scriptural references that guide us in creating a health care system is sometimes difficult. Most healing in the Bible is miraculous which, while inspiring, is not much help in creating a very human health policy. We must, therefore, look more deeply. The directive to heal the sick permeates the biblical record. In *Matthew 10*, Jesus sent his disciples out first to heal the sick — then to spread the Gospel. Taking care of the health needs of all people becomes the predicate to lifting up faith. Throughout the Bible, God directs that the righteous mete out justice and fairness for all people, and assuring health is a core concern. *Jeremiah 8:22* asks, "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has the health of my poor people not been restored?" *Isaiah 65:17-20, 23* says, "I will rejoice in Jerusalem and delight in my people... No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, or an old person who does not live out a lifetime."



Healing the sick is commanded without reservation. All faith traditions share that commitment. The Interfaith Los Angeles Council of Religious Leaders assert in their Theological Statement on Health Care that "our traditions call us to protect the well-being of every human life... health care must

#### California Council of Churches

4044 Pasadena Ave.  
Sacramento, CA  
95821

Phone  
(916)-488-7300

Fax  
(916)-488-7310

#### Email/Website

cccinfo@calchurches.org  
www.calchurches.org

The Rev. Dr.  
Rick Schlosser  
Executive Director

Elizabeth Sholes  
Director of Public Policy

*The mission of the California Council of Churches and California Church IMPACT is to be a prophetic witness to the Gospel by educating faith communities, and advocating in the public policy arena, to pursue justice, equity, and fairness, in the treatment of all people, in particular those most vulnerable in our society.*

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be universal, continuous, affordable, sustainable (and)... ensure health and well-being.” While we tend to think of ‘stewardship’ and ‘care for creation’ as pertaining to our environment, these principles are essential to how we care for one another as well.

We live in a competitive market economy, but that cannot surpass our call to be inclusive and compassionate to all. Healthy people contribute to the wholeness of God’s creation; health is part of the Common Good. Assuring health is a shared responsibility of individuals and of those who provide access to health care. Health is a state of wholeness and completeness for individuals and for society. It cannot exist for just the few. It is part of what assures our humanity and part of our greatest profession of faith.

Jesus sent 70 of his followers into the country and said, “Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you, cure the sick who are there, and say to them, ‘The realm of God has come near to you.’” (Luke 10:1-20)

## Conclusion

During the next two years, we will be offered a number of often-competing policy choices around health care. We will no doubt be bombarded with advertising and debates over each position, hear scare stories and promises galore. We can all have a significant role in shaping the decisions that will be made. We will need to weigh each legislative and policy proposal against the moral values of inclusiveness, full access, sustainability, and affordability. We need to be committed to raising our voice not just for specific policies but for the moral values any given policy assures or betrays. Through our collective advocacy, we speak not just for ourselves but for the well-being of all our state’s people. By standing on our time-honored faith traditions and beliefs, we can raise the level of discourse around our pending health care decisions and help assure that those decisions are made, not for narrow self-interest and gain, but in and for the best interests of all. Our faith principles and values can be the highest test by which we help our legislators and ourselves measure each policy and each outcome.



Visit the California Council of Churches online at [www.calchurches.org](http://www.calchurches.org)

## Questions for Discussion

1. Can we have a truly moral health care system if some people remain uninsured or underinsured?
2. Should everyone contribute a share to the cost of health care coverage? If so, should it be ‘progressive’ based on ability to pay, or a flat fee everyone must pay?
3. Proposals such as health savings accounts let people set aside tax-free money (\$5000 is the usual target) to cover health costs. Is this an answer? Why or why not?
4. Is health care a right or a privilege? How do we reconcile either position with our faith principles?

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## Health Care Grant *(continued from page 1)*

Our second objective is to use the activist base to accomplish at least one educational and informational legislative district visit each year during the grant cycle and while legislative deliberation on health care alternatives are being considered.

Our third objective, in addition to grassroots organizing, is to reach out to the leaders of our 51 denominational partners to bring health care deliberation to the leadership and help them transform it into a priority. Working through their denominational newsletters, magazines, and alert systems, we will be able to raise issues and help publicize events throughout their congregations.

In addition to reprinting our study guide, *Being the Good Samaritan: Health Access for All Californians*, we will be creating additional resources, help congregations and individuals determine the primary moral values by which all health care proposals must be evaluated.

If you are passionate about universal health care and would like to be involved as a Target Activist, or if you would like to arrange for a customized training in your area focusing on issues around health care and how to make your voice heard more effectively, please contact Director of Public Policy, Elizabeth Sholes at (916) 488-7300 ext. 3, or e-mail her at [sholes@calchurches.org](mailto:sholes@calchurches.org).

## Resources for Further Study on Health Care

**Being the Good Samaritan: Health Access for All Californians.** The California Council of Churches congregational study guide. Online at: [http://www.calchurches.org/publication\\_pdfs/HealthAccessGuide.pdf](http://www.calchurches.org/publication_pdfs/HealthAccessGuide.pdf) May be ordered from CCC by writing to us or calling 916.488.7300 ext. 3.

Background readings in health from faith and secular sources.

<http://www.calchurches.org/healthcare/healthcarebackgroundreading.htm>

Sermon on universal health care from Rev. Jim Burklo.

<http://www.calchurches.org/healthcare/burklofaithandhealthcare.htm>

Health and Hope — A Study Guide for Wisconsin Congregations.

Online at: <http://www.wichurches.org/healthcare.html#body2>

University of Southern California Center for Religion and Civic Culture,  
Theological Statements on Health Care:

[http://www.usc.edu/schools/college/crcc/health/theological\\_reflections/](http://www.usc.edu/schools/college/crcc/health/theological_reflections/)

Faithful Reform in Health Care.

A national online movement to have the faith voice present in all health care plans.

<http://www.faithfulreform.org/>

Faith in Public Life: Health care resources.

[http://www.faithinpubliclife.org/content/issues/health\\_care/](http://www.faithinpubliclife.org/content/issues/health_care/)

Families USA-Faith-based Resources. The pre-eminent national health advocacy organization's faith links:

<http://www.familiesusa.org/resource-centers/faith-based-resources/key-contacts.html>

If you do not have access to a computer to download these resources, we can send them to you. Just let us know and, if you can, include a donation to cover the cost of postage.



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California Council of Churches  
4044 Pasadena Avenue  
Sacramento CA 95821



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