

10 August 2009

The Rev. Dr. Michael Kinnamon
General Secretary
National Council of Churches
475 Riverside Drive, 8th floor
New York, NY 10115

Msgr. David Malloy
General Secretary
The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
3211 4th Street, N.E.
Washington DC, 20017-1194

W. Todd Bassett
Executive Director
The National Association of Evangelicals
PO Box 23269
Washington, DC 20026

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

Aware of the current passionate debates concerning health care reform in the U.S.A., I write to you today to share some of our experiences and reflections in similar debates that have taken place, and continue to take place, in Canada.

While we have been following the American health care debate with interest, our hope is that our own work on the topic might be of some service to you. We have no wish to advocate specific positions on the various public policy options being proposed by politicians in your country. Canadians are aware that certain lobby groups and media outlets in the United States regularly use critical references to Canada's health care system and interviews with Canadian citizens to support their arguments. We are also aware that a publicly administered, single-payer system such as we have in Canada has not been proposed by Washington law makers. By means of this letter and its

enclosures, we simply wish to inform you of our Christian reflection on health care in Canada, the implications of this reflection in our ministries, and the action we have taken to discern an appropriate role for Canadian Christians in terms of health care and health care advocacy.

Members of the Canadian Council of Churches have been involved in health care ministry since the earliest times, as you can read in the historical chapter (beginning on page 18) of our August 2007 publication, A Health Care Covenant. Before 1966, Canada had a health care system that failed to provide over 30% of the population with medical insurance. This created enormous human suffering and ethical problems for those who believed with Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:26, "If one member suffers, all suffer together with it..." With varying degrees of fervour, Canadian churches publicly began to advocate for the establishment of Medicare.

Canadian churches wanted health care for all. We rejected a structure that would force thousands into bankruptcy due to unforeseen medical expenses, would promote different levels of service in the many disparate regions of this vast land or would end health insurance for those who found themselves unemployed, for example. Beginning with the enactment of the Medical Care Act in 1968 a publicly-administered system with universal coverage was designed as one of Canada's hallmark policies towards social inclusion and the alleviation of suffering related to poverty.

In recent years the Ecumenical Health Care Network (EHCN) of churches in Canada was established to strengthen Canada's public health care system. We agreed that health care need not be treated as a commodity (page 67) and in a submission to a Royal Commission the EHCN testified that, "The Medicare system is an expression of our belief that medical needs are too fundamental to be responded to solely on the basis of market forces and for reasons of profit" (page 55). The Ecumenical Health Care Network advocated for the expansion of public health services to cover prescription drugs (see pages 97-99) home care (pages 91-93) and to maintain and improve Canadian health care.

Canadian churches working together through the EHCN had an important impact on the *Royal Commission on the Future of Health Care*, which reported in 2002. Our recommendation that Canada develop a "Health Care Covenant" (pages 51-57) and our list of elements to be included in such a proposal (pages 69-73), was designed to allow churches to begin the debate on the future of health care by clarifying our values as a community. It was gratifying to see the first recommendation of the final report of this Commission (entitled, "*Building on Values*," November 2002) adopt this very same call for a Health Care Covenant for Canada.

Throughout our engagement on the provision of health care in Canada, churches have discerned that health care advocacy in our country is directly related to God's call to discipleship. We have seen firsthand that "public health care limits economic hardship"

(page 15.) In the eloquent words of our former General Secretary, “Medicare can be the Good Samaritan parable writ large” (page 48.) We further believe that, “the principles guiding our health care system have an unmistakable affinity with the love of neighbour urged on us by God’s word in Scripture (page 45.)

These are our heartfelt beliefs. We believe, with you, that health care is a moral enterprise, firmly rooted in Matthew 25, “for I was sick and you took care of me.” By sharing these words with you, we also offer our heartfelt prayers for the success of health care reform in your own country, based on your own values and the needs of your communities.

We are sending this to you as an organization representing traditions that correspond to our own membership. May our compassionate Lord and Healer grant you the grace to reflect, discern and act to bring health and peace to your people in the weeks and months ahead!

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Rev. Dr. Karen Hamilton
General Secretary

Enclosure: *A Health Care Covenant*

CC: Bruce Clemenger, Executive Director, The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada
Msgr. Mario Paquette, General Secretary, The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops