

PASTOR'S COLUMN

“Cover The Uninsured Week: A Call to All to Care for All”

Central to religious teaching is the conviction that God is the source of life. The One who created us calls us to seek the health, well-being and wholeness of God's good creation.

The religious community has long been both advocate and provider of care and comfort for people in need. We have been concerned with the wholeness and well-being of people – their minds, bodies, and spirits. Our care and concern has been broad and deep: praying for the sick and dying, visiting those who are hospitalized or home-bound, founding hospitals, and speaking out for health care for all.

Today, the needs of our nations nearly 44 million people without health care coverage require a new and deeper level of concern, care, and commitment to assuring that all have the health care they need to live and grow as God intends.

In 2003, *Cover the Uninsured Week* helped to raise the awareness of leaders and citizens about the struggles of millions of Americans who lack health care coverage through a week-long series of national and local events in communities across the country. This year, with more and more people at risk of becoming uninsured, the call for care is made once again.

Nearly 44 million Americans have no health coverage for a full year or longer. Millions more go without health care coverage of any kind for shorter periods of time. Rising health care costs are making it difficult for individuals, businesses, and state governments to purchase health care coverage, putting even more people at risk of losing their health care coverage.

Being uninsured is not primarily a problem for people who are unemployed. In fact, eight out of ten uninsured Americans are in working families. Either their jobs do not provide health coverage or they cannot afford the premiums. These are people who cannot afford private health insurance on their own and are not eligible for public programs such as Medicaid or Medicare.

More than 8.5 million children are uninsured. That is more than the combined number of children in first and second grades in U.S. public schools. During the most crucial years of brain and body development, uninsured children lack consistent access to health care when they are sick and preventive care to keep them healthy. Undiagnosed and untreated illnesses and conditions, such as ear infections, eyesight problems, and asthma, hinder children's ability to learn in school.

Now is the time for Americans from every walk of life to come together to call for care for everyone. It is time to cover the uninsured.

Cover the Uninsured Week celebrated in this month of May helps to bring to our attention the needs of the uninsured. The Diocese of San Diego, through the Office for Social Ministry, invites and encourages the people of our Diocese to become more familiar with the issues surrounding this need.

We are challenged: 1). Dare To Care; 2). Reach Out With Care; 3). Speak Out For Care. The media and the public too often misunderstand the issue of the uninsured. Log on to www.covertheuninsuredweek.org to download or order a copy of an Issues Guide that explains why this is a problem that affects all of us and summarizes approaches to solutions. Share information about who is uninsured and why, how this problem affects every one of us and urge a community conversation until we find solutions and put them into place. Raise the concern in your place of work, or radio call-in shows, in letters to the editor of the local paper, and by contacting elected officials, business and labor leaders, health care providers and all who have a role to play in finding a solution.

Finally, we need to pray for people who are uninsured. As we pray, let us hold up our nation – its leaders and citizens, business owners and workers, students and teacher, doctors and nurses, and faith communities – that we may continue to work together to solve the problem so that all receive the health care they need.