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## **Healthcare Prayer Service**

*Below is a suggested prayer service. Feel free to add, cut or adapt as you see fit.*

**Welcome:** We are gathered today to reflect on the importance of healthcare in sustaining and fulfilling life, and to pray for our elected leaders as they make critical decisions about how public resources should be used to support and encourage quality healthcare for all.

**Opening Prayer:** Creator God, we call You by many names and worship You in various ways, but we know You to be a God of healing and love. You care for the rich and the poor, the old and the young, the sick and the well. You desire that our lives be lived abundantly and with wholeness. We ask You to be with us this day. We ask a special blessing upon those in our midst who are struggling with illness. We ask Your guidance with the medical staff who treat us and our families. Today, we ask You to give wisdom and courage to our elected leaders as they prepare to vote on healthcare reform in our nation. May they be guided by principles of love, kindness and justice, and not simple political calculations. We know elected leaders' work is hard and we ask You to be with them in their deliberations and actions. Be with us this day as we seek to stand for justice and righteousness. Amen.

**Song:** "Great is Thy Faithfulness" or "Leaning on the Everlasting Arms" (or another song of your choosing)

### **Responsive Reading:**

***Leader:*** Our religious texts are clear about the big picture priorities for our leaders. In Deuteronomy 16, verses 17-20, Moses tells the people,

***All:*** "Appoint judges and officials for each of your tribes in every town the Lord your God is giving you, and they shall judge the people fairly.

***Leader:*** Do not pervert justice or show partiality. Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous.

***All:*** Follow justice and justice alone, so that you may live and possess the land the Lord your God is giving you."

**Leader:** And it is not just the leaders who must focus on justice, Proverbs 31, verses 8 and 9, says:

**All:** “Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute.

**Leader:** Speak up and judge fairly;

**All:** Defend the rights of the poor and needy.”

**Leader:** First Timothy 2, verses 1-2, reads: “First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people,

**All:** for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.”

**Leader:** It is indeed right that we should pray for our leaders.

**All:** It is also right that we should defend the rights of the poor and needy.

**Leader:** Our leaders are debating how to “repeal and replace” the Affordable Care Act. We want to know:

**All:** How will the replacement improve children’s health?

**Leader:** How will the replacement improve our elders’ health?

**All:** How will the replacement help poor families afford health insurance?

**Leader:** The proposals are not designed to help people with healthcare, but rather are focused on cutting overall expenditures on healthcare. Under the Affordable Care Act in Virginia,

**All:** 327,000 Virginians gained healthcare coverage, even though Virginia did not fully accept the Medicaid expansion that could have helped 400,000 more.

**Leader:** The Affordable Care Act strengthened Medicaid eligibility and funding, while the proposed replacement will shift responsibility and less money to the states, likely resulting in reduced access for Virginia’s 937,000 Medicaid patients and less support for providers.

**All:** The Affordable Care Act reduced out-of-pocket healthcare expenses for 238,000 moderate-income Virginians who will see these supports eliminated by 2020.

**Leader:** By eliminating many of the taxes on rich families that supported the expansion of healthcare for poor families, the proposed replacement essentially shifts resources from the poor to the rich.

**All:** How we spend money reflects our values and priorities.

## **Stories**

**Leader:** Policy decisions are not just about facts and figures, but are about people. Let's hear from people who need the kinds of support offered by the Affordable Care Act:

Ask a few people to share their stories.

## **Faith Body Statements**

**Leader:** Our faith communities are united in their commitment to expanding, not reducing, support for healthcare for low- and moderate-income families. Hear a few of the faith positions:

Select a few of the readings provided at the end of the document.

## **Closing**

**Leader:** Because of our religious teachings about caring for the poor, we urge our elected leaders to:

**All:** Oppose the current healthcare replacement plan.

**Leader:** Because of the stories of our neighbors, we urge our leaders to:

**All:** Oppose the current healthcare replacement plan.

**Leader:** Because of the clear statements from our various national and regional faith bodies, we urge our leaders to:

**All:** Oppose the current healthcare replacement plan.

**Closing prayer:** Oh God of justice and mercy. We are troubled that such an important issue as healthcare for Virginians is being rushed through without adequate thought for protecting the poor and the vulnerable in our families and communities. Please touch the hearts of the legislators. Help them rule with justice and mercy. Be with us in the coming days. Give us the courage to be faithful advocates, importuning at every opportunity. As we go forth today, may we be encouraged by those present, reassured in Your vision for righteousness and committed to doing Your will this day and in the coming months and years. Let all the people say,

**All:** Amen.

*Special thanks to The Commonwealth Institute for the data on who could lose coverage under the proposed changes.*

## **What Faith Groups Say About Expanding Healthcare Coverage**

*The faith community is united for its concern for the health and well-being of all God's people. The following statements are a sampling of the faith community's support for providing healthcare coverage to all.*

### **BAPTISTS**

#### **American Baptists**

"As American Baptists we affirm and support programs, legislation, research and other formulations which help develop a new comprehensive healthcare delivery system which provides quality services for all people. 1. Make healthcare resources, private and public, available in keeping with the total needs of people, rather than on the basis of economic, geographic or racial factors; 3. Provide equitable healthcare for all residents of the U.S.A. by eliminating financial barriers."

#### **Baptist General Convention of Virginia**

"The Baptist General Convention of Virginia and its Social Justice Commission and Health Ministry stand with the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy, Virginia Consumer Voices for Healthcare and all others in this group of supporters to encourage legislators to close the coverage gap....We must provide for those in need of care whenever it is in our power to do so. I say to our legislators, that it is in your power to relieve the distress and suffering of many families by closing the Medicaid coverage gap. Medicaid expansion provides an opportunity for the Commonwealth to bring much needed medical care to thousands of our citizens. To deny expansion reflects a lack of care and concern for the most vulnerable persons in Virginia."

### **CATHOLIC**

"Catholic teaching supports adequate and affordable healthcare for all, because healthcare is a basic human right. Healthcare policy must protect human life and dignity, not threaten them, especially for the most voiceless and vulnerable. Healthcare laws must respect the consciences of providers, taxpayers, and others, not violate them. Coverage should be truly universal and should not be denied to those in need because of their condition, age, where they come from or when they arrive here. Providing affordable and accessible healthcare that clearly reflects these fundamental principles is a public good and moral imperative."

### **CHURCH OF THE BRETHEREN**

"As tangible evidence of the covenantal nature of our Christian faith, all persons should receive adequate healthcare as a basic human right and as a reflection of personal dignity; that - The responsibility for fulfilling the right to adequate healthcare rests not only with the individual and society, but with government as an instrument of society; that - Brethren should support legislation that promotes adequate healthcare for all."

### **DISCIPLES OF CHRIST**

General Minister and President Sharon Watkins has spoken out on the issue of healthcare reform a number of times. She wrote a letter to the Church reminding Disciples that Jesus' ministry was one of healing, of bringing life to the dying, sight to the blind, and wellness to the sick. In the letter, she called on Disciples to contact their Senators and Representatives asking for affordable, accountable, and inclusive healthcare.

## EPISCOPAL

"The Episcopal Church shall work with other people of good will to finally and concretely realize the goal of universal healthcare coverage; and be it further resolved, that church members and the Office of Government Relations communicate the position of The Episcopal Church on this issue to the President and Members of Congress, and advocate passage of legislation consistent with this resolution."

## JEWISH

### The Union for Reform Judaism

"One Biblical word stands for three concepts. Tzedek speaks of social justice, charity and righteousness. Thus the personal, the philanthropic and the social are inextricably linked in the tradition. The ultimate meaning of Tzedek is not to be determined by how those of affluence or influence fare, but by how the least among us, the widow, the orphan, the elderly and the poor manage in our society."

"THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Union of American Hebrew Congregations urge enactment of state and federal legislation in the United States.

A. To insure that all Americans whether or not able to provide for themselves are guaranteed essential healthcare coverage.

B. To guarantee affordable health insurance coverage in the event of catastrophic illness."

### Religious Action Center

"Providing healthcare is not just an obligation for the patient and the doctor, but for society as well. It is for this reason that Maimonides, a revered Jewish scholar, listed healthcare first on his list of the ten most important communal services that a city had to offer to its residents (Mishneh Torah, Hilchot De'ot IV: 23). Almost all self-governing Jewish communities throughout history set up systems to ensure that all their citizens had access to healthcare. Doctors were required to reduce their rates for poor patients, and when that was not sufficient, communal subsidies were established (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 249:16; Responsa Ramat Rahel of Rabbi Eliezer Waldernberg, sections 24-25.)"

### The Rabbinical Assembly

"Whereas Jewish law mandates that the community provide affordable healthcare, as evidenced in a responsum on Medical Issues: ....

Whereas the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards of the Conservative Movement passed a teshuvah (responsum): 'Responsibilities for the Provision of Healthcare' in 1998 that concluded, 'The community bears ultimate responsibility to assure provision of needed healthcare for individuals who cannot afford it, as a matter of justice as well as a specific halakhic obligation.';"

"Whereas the Rabbinical Assembly has consistently resolved to support healthcare reform (2002 and 2008);

Whereas the Rabbinical Assembly is a member of the Faithful Reform in Healthcare Coalition and has endorsed its statement “in support of quality and affordable healthcare for all because we see it as a moral calling”; and ....”

“Therefore be it resolved that the Rabbinical Assembly support the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010;...”

“Be it further resolved that the Rabbinical Assembly encourage the United States Congress to continue to promote a system of healthcare that is inclusive, affordable, accessible and accountable.”

### [Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington](#)

“For more than a decade, JCRC has advocated for healthcare reform that strives for universal coverage and addresses the special needs of low-income populations while implementing consumer protections, consumer education, strategies for cost containment, and adequate financing. We support expanding Medicaid eligibility and closing the coverage gap to provide healthcare for all Virginians in need.” JCRC of Greater Washington Virginia Legislative Agenda 2016

### [LUTHERAN](#)

“Jesus was dedicated to alleviating the suffering of the sick and the poor, the hungry and the homeless. As people of faith we are called to live as Jesus did, accompanying the most vulnerable of our neighbors and serving our communities. As the [Evangelical Lutheran Church of America] social statement on economic life explains, ‘Economic life is intended to be a means through which God’s purposes for human kind and creation are to be served.’ [...] We ask that Congress fully fund the Affordable Care Act, ensure funding for Medicaid expansion, and avoid converting food assistance programs, such as SNAP, into block grants, which would cut the program by billions of dollars over several years.”

### [MENNONITE](#)

“In July of 2005, the Mennonite Church USA delegates approved Healthcare Access Statement: Our Theology, which states that “Because the scriptural test of a just nation is how it treats its weakest members (Micah 6:8, Amos 5:24, Jeremiah 5:26-29) we will be clear and consistent advocates to policymakers on behalf of public health matters and access to healthcare for everyone.”

### [MUSLIM](#)

"What actions are most excellent? To gladden the heart of human beings, to feed the hungry, to help the afflicted, to lighten the sorrow of the sorrowful, and to remove the sufferings of the injured." Prophet Muhammed (Bukhari)

"And if anyone saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of the whole people" Quran 5:32

### [PRESBYTERIAN](#)

“We have personal moral responsibility for our health and concern for the health of others. We are stewards of God’s creation and need to adopt healthier lifestyles. The church needs to continue to raise the issue of comprehensive, systemic health-care reform in support of the key values of access, quality, and affordability set forth in the Resolution on Christian Responsibility and a National Medical Plan (G.A. Minutes 1991).”

### QUAKER

“We affirm healthcare as a right, regardless of employment or ability to pay. We support universal access to timely healthcare. We support preventive, curative, and palliative healthcare, using principles of chronic disease management when appropriate. To maintain and improve the physical and mental health of the entire population, healthcare must cover the entire life span. We recognize that substance abuse and domestic violence should be addressed as healthcare issues that require treatment. We advocate systems that provide for the fair distribution of healthcare resources.”

### UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

“The obligation to care for the health of the poor, universally recognized by religious organizations, is among this country’s fundamental values and is furthered by the Affordable Care Act’s expansion of Medicaid.”

### UNITED METHODIST

“The United Methodist Church is committed to healthcare for all in the United States and therefore advocates for a comprehensive healthcare delivery system that includes access for all, quality care, and effective management of costs.”

### UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISTS

“The Seven Principles of Unitarian Universalism guide our advocacy by supporting bills that ensure the inherent worth and dignity of every person are upheld and that there is justice, equity, and compassion with a goal for peace, liberty, and justice for all. Ensuring Virginians have access to high quality and affordable healthcare is a priority.”