News

Francis, the comic strip



Pope Francis makes a surprise visit Nov. 16 to the medical tents set up just outside St. Peter’s Square at the Vatican. (CNS /L'Osservatore Romano)

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Justice and compassion compel the Catholic Church to work to ensure equality and fairness in the distribution of health care resources and in people's access to them, Pope Francis said.

A global economic system focused on profit alone has led to a "sickness" infecting society, that of growing inequality in access to basic necessities, including basic health care, the pope said in a written message to a Vatican conference.

The International Confederation of Catholic Health Care Institutions and the Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development held a conference Nov. 16-18 to discuss global inequalities in health care and to find ways to coordinate a response. Anthony R. Tersigni, president of the confederation as well as president and CEO of Ascension, a U.S. Catholic health care group, presented a plan for a new website that would serve as a platform for connecting Catholic hospitals and other health facilities, allowing them to share information and resources. Francis encouraged those involved in the project, especially those "committed to raising awareness among institutions, welfare agencies and the health care industry as a whole for the sake of ensuring that every individual actually benefits from the right to health care."

Equal access to health care will make little progress without addressing "the structural causes of poverty," he said.

"Society needs to be cured of a sickness which is weakening and frustrating it, and which can only lead to new crises," he said. That sickness is poverty and while welfare can help, it really is only a temporary response.

"As long as the problems of the poor are not radically resolved by rejecting the absolute autonomy of markets and financial speculation and by attacking the

structural causes of inequality, no solution will be found for the world's problems or, for that matter, to any problems," the pope said.

Addressing the Catholic health care providers directly, Francis reminded them that for the church, health care is not a business, although efficiency and responsible business practices are important.

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"Listening, accompanying and supporting the persons for whom they care" must be the primary concern, he said.

"Compassion is also a privileged way to promote justice, since empathizing with others allows us not only to understand their struggles, difficulties and fears, but also to discover, in the frailness of every human being, his or her unique worth and dignity," the pope said. "Indeed, human dignity is the basis of justice, while the recognition of every person's inestimable worth is the force that impels us to work, with enthusiasm and self-sacrifice, to overcome all disparities."