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## Prominent KC health provider takes issue with Bishop Finn

by Thomas C. Fox

NCR Today

The letter of a prominent Catholic Kansas City health care provider has reached my desk. It is a response to the Kansas City area bishops' pastoral on health care. The layman is Daniel L. Fowler, chairman of the board of Northland Health Care Access, a 501(c)(3) Missouri non-profit corporation that provides access to healthcare for the uninsured. He is also the board chairman of a sister organization, Metrocare, Inc., that operates a network of volunteer specialty care physicians in the Kansas City area in affiliation with the Metropolitan Medical Society. He serves on the board of Northland Neighborhoods, Inc., a community development corporation that is also a Missouri 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation.

Here is what Fowler wrote to his bishop, Finn:

Dear Bishop Finn:

I am a committed Catholic. I am happy to serve our Lord and my parish as a Eucharistic minister, lector and usher. In my professional life I am an attorney. I also serve on the boards of directors of two non-profit corporations, and I am the board chairperson of one. The one of which I am the board chair is Northland Health Care Access. NHCA provides access to primary and specialty health care services to the uninsured in Clay and Platte Counties of Missouri.

Most of the patients NHCA serves are the working poor: those who work two to three part time jobs that do not provide health insurance. These individuals are trying to feed, clothe and house their families. They cannot afford individual health insurance policies.

I read with great interest your "pastoral statement" dated August 22, 2009. To say I am upset, disappointed and dismayed is a gross understatement of my feelings. Your "statement" reveals a complete ignorance of the contents of any health reform measure currently pending before Congress. For example, no proposal authorizes the expenditure of federal funds for abortion services. Your concerns to the contrary are simply wrong. No proposal mandates end of life counseling. Instead, at the request of senior citizens organizations and others, the proposals simply authorize payment for counseling on end of life options.

Again, your concerns are simply wrong. You also express a desire for people to participate financially in their own health care costs. This ignores the plight of the uninsured. If they could afford health insurance, they would have it. This is uniformly the experience of Northland Health Care Access. For the uninsured the concern is often not just being unable to afford health care, it is getting time off work to obtain it when it is free. As a result, the uninsured wait until their health issues reach a critical state, then they go to emergency rooms with multiple and life threatening issues that could have been avoided had they been able to access simple basic primary care. Again, your concerns are simply wrong. I also have to ask a question in that regard. Where in Matthew does our Lord say that when He was ill we cared for Him, but only when He participated financially in His care?

I also listened to your public comments as broadcast on KSHB-TV. While they were brief, I understood you to say that you opposed a public option because it would limit individuals' choice of physicians. First, as has been made clear repeatedly, a public option as currently proposed is just that: it is an option. People are free to select their own private policies if they wish. Second, I suggest you look at the typical private health insurance plan. Most contain approved provider lists. If one chooses to seek treatment for providers who are not approved, the coverage drops dramatically. Furthermore, almost all private insurance plans contain exclusions from coverage. Restrictions on individuals' option to choose providers and treatment are already present.

After reflection on your "pastoral statement" I have reached the almost inevitable conclusion that it is not a pastoral statement at all. Instead, it is a blatant political statement of conservative political dogma that has no basis in reality. Instead of studying the issues, you have quite obviously accepted the inflammatory inaccuracies of politically and financially motivated elements of the political discourse as fact. If you wish to do that as an individual you are so entitled. However, with all due respect, I find that for you to do so as a representative of God's Church is reprehensible. I therefore call upon you to withdraw the statement.

tttttSincerely, Daniel L. Fowler

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