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Health care and the church

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Throughout much of the oft-times misleading and incendiary campaign against health care reform, voices of authority within the church seemed fairly silent. But here in California, there are signs of a shift.

According to the *Los Angeles Times*, several Southern California religious leaders have begun to speak out in favor of health care reform -- and the need to include illegal immigrants in any plan.

Last week, more than a hundred parishioners from Our Lady of Angels Church launched a phone bank to tell officials of their support for an all-inclusive health reform plan. The parish -- also known as "La Placita" -- has been a center of immigrant activity in Los Angeles for decades. Parish pastor Fr. Roland Lozano, says he began the phone bank because "it's what God wants us to do."

The *Times* points to a 1963 encyclical by Pope John XXIII, calling health care a basic human right. Kathy Saile, director of social development with the U.S. Conference of Bishops, says that, as a result of that encyclical, the church believes illegal immigrants should be included in any reform plans.

The article also notes that Episcopal churches in the region have joined the call for health care reform, and for the inclusion of illegal immigrants in that reform. But not every denomination is on board. The *Times* reports the Southern Baptist Convention asserts that the Bible calls for the poor to be helped by people of faith, not the government. "It's noble and commendable to be charitable with your own money," said Richard Land of the Convention. "But it's something different to be charitable with other people's money."

The good news -- at least people of faith are joining the debate, and not leaving it to the shrill voices of this summer.

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