

Capitol Comments: Laboring for a Harvest of Health

By: Maria Frederick, Public Relations and Outreach Coordinator, Texas Catholic Conference

“The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest (Matthew 9:37).” Does this statement of Jesus still apply to us today?

Let’s begin by investigating why Jesus makes this statement. In Matthew 9:35-36, we are told that Jesus has gone to cities and villages, teaching in synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, curing every disease and every sickness. When He sees the crowds, Jesus has compassion for them, because “they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”

When we go into our own cities and communities, our parishes and gyms, schools and workplaces, are we preaching the good news of the kingdom, either in word or in our charitable actions toward others? Do we pray for the curing of those who are ill from various diseases and sicknesses? More importantly, as we are living our lives as Christians in the world, how do we feel toward the “crowds”—those who are harassed and helpless. Do we try to help these lost sheep find a shepherd?

I’d like to invite you to take a closer look at one of the weakest and most vulnerable group in our population, a group that Jesus Himself tells us to care for—children.

Texas has the highest rate of uninsured children in the nation, with a total of 1.4 million children lacking health insurance. Of these children, 700,000 are eligible for but not enrolled in health coverage. These children are like sheep, in need of direction from a shepherd, to help enroll in programs that will provide them with health care coverage.

Currently Texas has 3 health children’s insurance programs: Children’s Medicaid, Traditional CHIP, and the CHIP Perinatal Program. Children’s Medicaid covers children in families whose income is at or below the federal poverty level. Traditional CHIP is available for families that earn too much to qualify for Medicaid, but too little to afford private insurance. Qualifying families may earn up to 200% of the federal poverty level. The CHIP Perinatal Program provides health care coverage to women who are pregnant, and covers pre-natal care services for the unborn child, two postpartum visits for the mother, and regular check-ups, prescriptions, and immunizations for the child.

Clearly there is a need for laborers to help enroll uninsured children in health insurance programs. April 27-May 3 is national Cover the Uninsured Week. Cover the Uninsured, a project of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, is a national effort to highlight the fact that too many Americans are living without health insurance. During this week, Enrollment events will be held throughout the nation to enroll eligible uninsured families in public health coverage programs. Enrollment events will be held throughout Texas. You can find an event near you by visiting www.CoverTheUninsured.org.

Imagining those children who do not have access to immunizations, prescriptions, dentists, eye exams, or regular check-ups and office visits, can we see a harvest that is in dire need of laborers? Can we, like Jesus, look at the crowds of children in Texas and feel compassion for these children and their families? Can we take time to ask the Master of Harvests to send laborers who can help to enroll our children for our state’s healthcare programs? Can we take the time to be laborers for the abundant need for health care that our state’s children face? Can we make a promise to use our voices to advocate to our legislators on behalf of the uninsured children in our state? Our “yes” to these questions, a yes given through the Holy

Spirit who dwells in us, allows us to mold our will to that of the Master of Harvests, Our God and Father in Heaven.

To sign up to receive email updates on CHIP and other Texas Catholic Conference legislative priorities, visit the Conference web site at TXcatholic.org, and click on “Get Involved.” For more information on Children’s Health Insurance in Texas, visit ChipMedicaid.org or contact your local Catholic Charities office. Statistics for this article are provided by the Children’s Defense Fund of Texas (cdf texas.org).

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