

Trinity United Church of Christ

400 West 95th Street • Chicago, Illinois 60628-1120 • Telephone 773-962-5650
Executive Office Fax 773-238-2547 • Church Office Fax 773-962-0164

ASSOCIATE PASTORS

Rev. Pamela L. Fox
Rev. Barbara A. Heard
Rev. John E. Jackson, Sr.
Rev. Michael D. Jacobs

Rev. Dr. Jeremiah A. Wright, Jr., Senior Pastor
Rev. Melbalenia D. Evans, Executive Minister

March 3, 2004

ASSOCIATE PASTOR

Rev. Ann Patt
Dr. Julia Spell
Rev. Michael G. Syk
Rev. Wanda J. Washington

Dear Brothers & Sisters in Christ,

Greetings in the name of Him who lived a vision for justice, hope, and righteousness in this world. During this Lenten Season, I hope we all can bask in the glow of God's grace while continuing to serve God's people.

I know that many of you are familiar with our concerns regarding Advocate Health Care's unjust business practices: the discriminatory pricing of health care for the uninsured, aggressive debt collection practices, and anti-union conduct.

During the past few months, Trinity UCC has listened to both sides of these pressing issues (Advocate and the Hospital Accountability Project of SEIU). My concern regarding Advocate's billing, collections and anti-union activity was expressed in a letter to Rev. Jerry Wagenknecht, Senior Vice President of Mission & Spiritual Care, dated November 21, 2003. To date, I have not received a response from Rev. Wagenknecht.

In our meetings with Advocate, they stated that federal regulations forced them to charge the uninsured exorbitant prices and pursue aggressive collections practices. Two weeks ago, however, the U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services said that federal regulations do not prohibit granting discounts to the uninsured nor do they mandate filing lawsuits against low-income patients.

Now, more than ever, the faith community must speak with one voice and call upon Advocate to stop its price gouging and predatory collections practices that impact the "least of these."

The United Church of Christ (UCC) has long acted on its Gospel mandate to live out social justice and these issues are no exception. I am encouraged that the Chicago Metropolitan Association (CMA) Council passed the *Statement of Concern: Allegations of Different Pricing for Those Who are Uninsured by Advocate Health Care*. The CMA Council process, while good, is slow and has only considered *one* of the issues being raised.

More congregations need to follow the example of Epiphany UCC. Upon receiving the CMA Council statement and also hearing from both sides, it is my understanding that Epiphany UCC recently unanimously passed its own resolution calling on Advocate to "...proclaim a Hospital Jubilee in which they agree to:...end discriminatory pricing,...end predatory debt collections,...forgive unjust medical debt,...implement automatic charity care,...provide community benefits equal to their tax exemption,...respect their worker's right to a free and fair union election process."

While I recognize these statements may create tension, they are acts of love, justice and courage. During this Lenten season, I invite all of you to prayerfully consider living out our commitment to God's justice by adopting the enclosed statement, which calls upon Advocate to mend its relationships with patients, workers and the community.

I also urge you to participate in a Hospital Jubilee Sunday, where your members begin to learn more about these issues and hear from the former patients and workers themselves.

After signing the enclosed statement, I would encourage you to return a copy to by fax to my office at (773) 238-2574 Attn: Mary Crayton. At a date to be decided, we should come together with one voice to call on Advocate to treat all its patients with justice and fairness.

As we prepare ourselves for the celebration of the Risen Christ, we can act to restore healing and reconciliation to a health care system broken by the sins of selfishness and greed. May this be an opportunity to "make the pathway straight."

Sincerely and respectfully yours,

Rev. Jeremiah A. Wright, Jr.

Rev. Dr. Jeremiah A. Wright, Jr.
Senior Pastor
Trinity United Church of Christ