

# Oakley parishioners join CCISCO in call for affordable health care

By Voice staff

Nearly 400 people from Contra Costa County crowded into St. Anthony Church in Oakley last month to tell government officials what their community needs in the way of improved health care.

Organized by representatives of St. Anthony's chapter of Contra Costa Interfaith Supporting Community Organization (CCISCO), the meeting agenda laid out three objectives:

- That Congress provide full funding for the State Children Health Insurance Program (S-CHIP) so that all children can have affordable health insurance by 2012;
- That the state of California enacts health care reform this year, with coverage of all children as a cornerstone of the plan;
- That Contra Costa County implement reforms to make it easier to access the Basic Health Care program by extending the enrollment period to 12 months, by integrating federally qualified health centers into the plan and by opening clinics in geographically isolated areas such as Oakley.

"We are here tonight to take action to relieve the suffering in our community," said CCISO leader Julio Suarez. "We know that by taking action, we can turn our suffering into joy."

CCISO leaders presented research findings and recommendations based on over 100 one-on-one sessions, 500 surveys and 25 research meetings with key public officials and health care experts.

In surveying local residents, St. Anthony's leaders learned that nearly 40 percent of them had no health insurance and 24 percent had been diagnosed with an illness they couldn't afford to seek treatments for.

Leaders also found that the cost of prevention is far cheaper than utilizing the emergency room, which has become the only option for the uninsured. They pointed out that the average emergency room visit for an uninsured child costs \$435 as compared to \$100 for a family with health care coverage.

Leaders also cited a recent report by the New America Foundation estimating that a "hidden tax" on California health premiums has driven prices 10 percent higher to pay for the cost of uninsured individuals.

Community members put faces to these statistics as they told of their struggles in living without health coverage and affordable access to care.



Advocates for affordable health care coverage hold post cards showing their support for health care reform that benefits all children.

Public officials responded positively to what they had heard.

Congresswoman Ellen Tauscher pledged to continue working with CCISO leaders to ensure that Congress finds the funding to re-authorize S-CHIP to ensure that all kids are covered.

Barbara Kauffman, director of Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's San Francisco office, pledged the governor's commitment to work for health coverage for all Californians, especially children; Erin Gable, district representative for California State Senator Tom Torlakson, promised his support as well.

State Assembly member Guy Houston, Oakley representative, did not attend the meeting and declined to send a representative. Members of the audience responded by writing postcards urging him to make health care reform a priority. Deacon Joe Tovar blessed the postcards with holy water.

"We know that this is an important issue," said Contra Costa County Supervisor Federal Glover, "but your stories and research make it more real and urgent." He thanked CCISCO leaders for building partnerships with public and private stakeholders and pledged to help bring a health clinic to Oakley and to improve access to the Basic Health Care program.

"Your stories and research really capture what it is like to live in East Contra Costa County," said Dr. William Walker, director of the Contra Costa Health Services Department. Walker announced that he plans to convene a task force of local hospitals and health care providers to bring a new clinic to Oakley.

Oakley Vice Mayor Bruce Connelley predicted that based on "the turnout we have here tonight, I am certain that we will get a new health clinic and health coverage for everyone."

THE Catholic VOICE