Highlights from PNHP session on Faith, Social Justice and Organizing in the South

Faith:

 Pippa talked about some common “hard questions” that arise in discussions with Christians. Before giving reasons to support single payer, we need to find out a little more about their specific concerns. It helps to find a point of agreement and reframe our proposal in meaningful terms. For instance, some Christians think Jesus was opposed to government. A possible response is that he was certainly opposed to the oppressive power structures in his day. In our time the oppression comes from corporate power and can best be combated with participatory government.

We talked about how many of the poor have experienced frustration and demeaning treatment at the hands of government agencies, and that they are understandably distrustful. It is important to acknowledge the real failings of government systems, which seem to arise more often when designed to serve only a segment of the population, especially the poor and less influential. We can add that the best way to prevent such failures is to have a system that affects all of us directly, with accountability to all citizens. Sharing our resources through taxes can be reframed as a partial version of the economic practices in early Christian communities.

Several session participants said they were atheists and/or humanists. They talked about the importance of understanding that strong ethics don’t require a religious framework. We discussed that there are many, varied approaches to Christianity, including a growing number who take a symbolic, metaphorical approach. There is often common ground between humanists and members of the faith community, and we must be careful not to let language or assumptions be a barrier between us.

Pippa was asked how she dealt with the “lilies of the field” objection to insurance. This comes from a passage in the Bible that says we shouldn’t worry about taking care of ourselves because God will do it. Pippa answers those concerns with the Body of Christ image, which incorporates Christians symbolically as part of the Christ taking care of us. We can contribute to the healthcare of others, without putting our money into private health savings accounts for selfish use, and we in turn will receive care funded by others.

The question of abortion came up—one participant said he had been told if our program funded abortions it was a deal-breaker. We ended the session before we could discuss this further. However, it seems to me that this would be really a tremendous statement, if abortion was a person’s ONLY objection to single payer. Rather than get into a big debate about abortion, I would respond by focusing on that person’s agreement, and say that the abortion debate will happen no matter what form of financing we use.