



## **Health Care is a Human Right. Privatizing, Profiteering, and Withholding It is a Violent Evil**

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My father is an infectious disease physician. Since the dawn of the AIDS epidemic, he's spent his career leading front-line responses and spearheading decades-long investment and care for people living with HIV/AIDS. As he puts it, when the new health crisis arose during medical school, "this path chose him." As he moved into residency, where he would help guide the first AZT trials, my dad says that faced with something seemingly incurable, "AIDS jolted me awake to what it might mean to be called to 'heal the sick.'" Raised in church, the call to loving, clinical care where it was both most needed and "impossible" was a spiritual vocation, rooted in the science of medicine.

Unfortunately, the church overwhelmingly did not love the work back. It is well-documented that in the 1980s and beyond, the communities most ravaged by HIV/AIDS were also those most likely to be personally and systemically marginalized, demonized, and left to die without any fight from society at large. Self-proclaimed Christians often led the hateful charge.

This was profoundly painful for my father, who experienced rejection and judgment for those he served in a place that had molded him, and was supposed to be sanctuary from the torrent of death and damnation he was fighting to quell.

My family had to deconstruct and reconnect the dots of a faith that proclaimed a savior for all humanity yet too often withheld that unconditional liberation from those most in need of it here on earth. I eventually found my way to the United Church of Christ, but it wasn't easy, just as it is painful for many in our pews: religious refugees from spiritually violent church traditions that codify exclusion while upholding the already-powerful.

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As the AIDS epidemic showed us, spiritual violence often leads to physical suffering. It leads to crushing isolation, self harm, and widespread illness and death thanks to the profiteering machinations of our health “care” insurance system, its avaricious executives, and their paid puppets on Capitol Hill.

These actors are perpetrating an evil, actively suppressing and depriving us of what so many understand to be not just human need, but human right. This violence costs thousands of lives and prevents millions from a thriving life. [Deadly decisions made with a keystone](#) on a spreadsheet are at least if not more objectionable as other forms of violence. In fact, in the case of insurance giant United Healthcare, they [relied on an AI program that erroneously rejected 90% of elderly patient Medicare claims](#). Their leadership knew this, and kept it going. Evil. Violent. Deadly.

The stories of how UHC and others cause excruciating pain and death for so many and their loved ones are multitude, exposed in new ways in the past month. Who will bravely come together to work to end these abominations?

The official position of the United Church of Christ [is that health care is a human right, and, since at least 1991](#), the entire denomination has commissioned itself to fight for its universal, abundant access.

The year 1991 was also when Earvin “Magic” Johnson announced he was HIV+. Johnson’s reveal was a game-changer for national conversations, but in truth it was the long, lonely, brazen bravery of the likes of ACT UP, Rev. William Sloane Coffin, my dad, and many on society’s margins that led the way there and forced action on AIDS research and patient care.

No more deny, delay, depose: let us walk as the heroes of the 1980’s showed us. The only impossibility is maintaining our current system. Let us be jolted awake and fight for our right to health care. So many lives, including our own, are on the line.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The Rev. Seth Wispelwey serves as the Minister for Economic Justice in the National Setting of the United Church of Christ.

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