

Talking points regarding the HHS Mandate and our response

These talking points have been prepared by Priests for Life for your use in conversations, blogs, letters, and sermons. It will be updated regularly. Contact us for more information: www.PriestsForLife.org, PO Box 141172, Staten Island, NY 10314. Phone 1-888-735-3448 mail@priestsforlife.org. Fr. Frank Pavone, National Director

- This issue is not primarily about the Catholic Church; it is primarily about America, and whether or not freedom of conscience will be respected and protected by the law of the land. The HHS mandate affects virtually every employer across the nation. Only a fraction of them are religious employers, and an even smaller fraction of those are Catholic.
- Freedom of conscience and religion are not just for religious groups. They are a right of every American, indeed, every human being. Every employer, every insurer, every person has a conscience, and has to be free to live in a way consistent with it.
- There are many non-religious reasons for opposing the HHS mandate.
- What is happening here is a clash of worldviews. The Obama administration and other powerful forces on the other side of this battle see contraception, abortion, and sterilization as goods to which all should -- indeed must -- have access. Some of these forces strive to have abortion declared as an international human right. For them, it is the most natural conclusion in the world that these "services" should be mandated.
- The argument of the other side used to be freedom of choice and freedom of conscience. Things have changed.
- It seems the Obama administration wants to mire down the debate by heaping upon us detail after detail, nuance after nuance, and difficult-to-understand accommodation after accommodation. This we do not need. We want the mandate removed, period.
- The religious exemption in the HHS mandate is so narrow that countless religious organizations - including Priests for Life -- do not qualify for it. The exemption requires that the entity to be employing members of its own faith serving members of its own faith. But we do not serve others because of **their** beliefs; we serve them because of **our** beliefs. Living the faith means spreading the faith and having a mission to all the world. But the administration does not make room for that fact in this mandate.
- Moreover, the government should not be defining who is religious enough to qualify as a religious entity.

- The "accommodation" announced on February 10 was just a Presidential speech. It did not actually implement new policy. The policy that has been officially put in place is the same as it was before.
- The "accommodation" announced on February 10, even if implemented, does not change the moral or legal problems involved in the mandate. Whoever pays for the objectionable services, and whoever speaks to the employees about them, coerced cooperation is still in place, namely, that the employer still has to provide an insurance plan that covers these immoral activities. We want the freedom to provide insurance to our employees ***that does not cover immoral activities.***
- The mandate speaks of a year's extension given to certain objecting groups to "adapt" to the rule, without any provision for changing the rule. We do not need a year or a moment to consider what we will do. The rule is unjust. You don't adapt to injustice, you ***oppose it.***
- Because the FDA defines most abortion-inducing drugs as "contraceptives," this mandate bypasses the federal restrictions on abortion funding or coercion in matters of abortion. If this mandate is allowed to stand, it will pave the way for coercion of abortion on demand.
- The remedies to this unjust mandate come in various forms. First, it has been challenged in federal court by various groups, including Priests for Life. The Priests for Life lawsuit seeks to have the mandate enjoined, and declared unconstitutional.
- There is also a legislative remedy being formed in Congress. Americans should express to their Senators and Representatives their support for laws that protect the rights of conscience.
- Rallies and demonstrations at federal buildings across the nation are also being prepared. A national rally day has been declared for Friday, March 23. (See www.standupforreligiousfreedom.com).
- This is and must be presented also as an election issue. Elections have consequences. This whole problem is an example of trying to put the toothpaste back into the tube. Many of those fighting this mandate also worked hard to inform voters of the positions of the candidates in the 2008 election cycle, and warned that we could end up in a mess like we have today. At the same time, many others fighting this mandate now were nowhere to be found during that election cycle. This is an excellent lesson to bring to this year's elections. Let's be active in distributing voter education material that will help voters elect people who respect life and conscience. (See www.PoliticalResponsibility.com.)