

# SISTERS OF LIFE

February 16, 2012

The Sisters of Life join with the Catholic Bishops of the United States, and leaders of many other religious communities, in strongly objecting to the Department of Health and Human Services rule for "preventative services," and the "compromise" announced by President Obama regarding religious liberty. This mandate will gravely violate the individual and collective religious liberties of the Sisters of Life and millions of others by forcing us to pay for abortion-inducing drugs, sterilization, and artificial contraception against our conscience.

The Sisters of Life is a religious community of consecrated women, founded in 1991 by John Cardinal O'Connor. Ours is a religious community founded in the United States of America by a priest who dearly loved this country, and served as a Rear Admiral and Chief of Chaplains in the United States Navy. We, too, love our country. We are grateful to be a part of its proud history, for the generosity and valor of so many who call this nation home, and for the possibilities that arise from living authentic freedom within a pluralistic society. Yet now we are faced with a government decision that is not only a grave affront to the religious liberty and rights of conscience of every citizen of the United States, but also an offense to each Sister of Life in a particular way. Every professed member of our community takes a special vow "to protect and enhance the sacredness of human life."

In response to a call from God and to the sheer beauty and goodness of the gift of life, each Sister dedicates herself to God that all people might come to know the precious gift of his or her life, and that every human life be protected and received as an unrepeatable icon of the living God. To this end, we defend vulnerable human life in the womb from the moment of conception, supporting and upholding mothers in need through emotional, spiritual and material support during and after their pregnancies. Because the gift of life is intrinsically linked to love, we also affirm and fully support the authentic teaching of the Catholic Church regarding marriage and sexuality. This includes an understanding that sterilization and contraception are gravely against God's plan for human life and love, and we believe, in the end, are false promises that undermine the peace and freedom in commitment that are fruits of authentic human love.

Our special fourth vow, made in a solemn and sacred ceremony and binding on us in conscience and in the laws of the Church, is at the heart of our identity as a religious community, and is a profound expression of the religious and spiritual commitment of each of our Sisters. This new rule pays no heed to our right to live according to our vows. Under the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act each of us will be required by law to obtain health insurance, or face fines. Since this HHS mandate will require every insurer to include abortion-inducing drugs, sterilization, and artificial contraception, we will not be able to obtain any coverage that is free from those "services," and we will be forced to pay for them directly. Since we are neither employers, nor employees, of any religious institution, we cannot even take advantage of the "religious exemption" contained in the new regulations or the "compromise."

As a result, this mandate would coerce each and every individual Sister of Life to betray her religious vows. We will be forced to pay for "services" that attack human life and deny the truth and beauty of human sexuality. This would directly contradict our special religious vow to "to protect and enhance the sacredness of human life," and go against everything we believe in and have devoted our lives to. To us, it would be comparable to a law requiring a spouse to violate their marriage vows -- an unthinkable intrusion upon a sacred promise.

This mandate is an offensive and dangerous infringement upon the natural and Constitutional rights of American citizens. The only just solution to this infringement of rights is to rescind the HHS rule. We call upon members of Congress and the Executive Branch to reverse this decision as soon as possible, and we invite our fellow citizens to join with us in prayer and fasting that our Nation may be protected from this great threat against liberty.

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