

Missouri Synod president issues statement on recent HHS decision and religious freedom

ST. LOUIS—February 3, 2012—The [Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison](#), president of the St. Louis-based [Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod](#), issued a statement today about religious freedom in light of the recent decision by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services requiring religious employers to cover contraceptives, even those that can kill unborn children:

“We are deeply distressed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ (HHS) recent decision to require nearly all private health plans, including those offered by religious employers, to cover contraceptives. This will include controversial birth-control products such as ‘Ella’ and the ‘morning after’ pill, even though the Federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA) warns that such drugs can cause the death of a baby developing in the womb. The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) objects to the use of drugs and procedures that are used to take the lives of unborn children, who are persons in the sight of God from the time of conception, and we are opposed to the HHS’ decision mandating the coverage of such contraceptives.

“This HHS action relates to a provision in the ‘health care reform’ legislation (the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act) signed into law in 2010. The church’s benefits partner, Concordia Plan Services, which provides health care coverage to nearly 48,000 people, has been actively monitoring this legislation and, as a result, Concordia Health Plan (CHP)—the LCMS church workers’ health plan—has been maintained as a “grandfathered” plan. As such, employers and workers participating in CHP would not be subjected to the mandate. However, many religious organizations do not have grandfathered plans and cannot avail themselves of the extremely narrow religious-employer exemption, which only is applicable to religious employers that primarily serve and employ members of that faith.

“For centuries, Lutherans have joyfully delivered Christ’s mercy to others and embraced His call to care for the needy within our communities and around the world. In a nation that has allowed more than 54 million legal abortions since 1973, we must consider the marginalization of unborn babies and object to this mandate.

“In addition, I encourage the members of the LCMS to join with me in supporting efforts to preserve our essential right to exercise our religious beliefs. This action by HHS will have the effect of forcing many religious organizations to choose between following the letter of the law and operating within the framework of their religious tenets. We add our voice to the long list of those championing for the continued ability to act according to the dictates of their faith, and provide compassionate care and clear Christian witness to society’s most vulnerable, without being discriminated against by government.

“The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, a church body of sinners redeemed by the blood of Jesus, has affected the lives of millions of people with care, aid, housing, health care, spiritual care and much more. We have been a force for good in this nation, promoting education (the nation’s largest Protestant school system), marriage and giving people the tools and assistance to be good citizens. We live and breathe Romans 13:3–7. The governing authorities are ‘God’s servant for good.’ We pray constantly for our President and those in authority. We have sent our

sons and daughters to fight for this country. We have provided military chaplains, elected officials, officers, including some who have held the highest military offices and other appointed positions in this country. Our people have and are serving as congressmen and women and senators.

“Increasingly we are suffering overzealous government intrusions into what is the realm of traditional and biblical Christian conscience. We believe this is a violation of our First Amendment rights. We will stand, to the best of our ability, with all religious and other concerned citizens, against this erosion of our civil liberty. Come what may, we shall do everything we can, by God’s grace, to ‘obey God rather than men’ (Acts 5:29).”