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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

October 20, 2017

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Catholic Church in Wyoming Welcomes Settlement with Federal Government Over HHS Mandate Litigation

Five-Year Lawsuit Ends with Religious Liberty Protections Intact

(Cheyenne, Wyoming) After five years of litigation in federal court, the Diocese of Cheyenne announced today that its lawsuit against the federal government regarding the controversial Department of Health and Human Services contraceptive mandate has been settled in a favorable manner that protects religious liberty rights. The settlement comes after the administration announced new regulations that provide broad exemptions for religious entities opposed to including or facilitating contraceptive coverage in their employer health plans.

“This final outcome is a victory for religious liberty” said Bishop Steven Biegler. “We are pleased that the case has been resolved and thankful this unnecessary burden of the prior regulation mandating contraceptive coverage has come to its conclusion. We must now remain vigilant in protecting rights essential for the common good.”

The Diocese of Cheyenne, along with St. Joseph’s Children’s Home, Catholic Charities of Wyoming, St. Anthony Tri-Parish Catholic School, and Wyoming Catholic College initially filed its lawsuit against the federal government in January, 2014 in response to regulations issued under the Affordable Care Act that required all employers, religious or otherwise, to include coverage for contraceptives, sterilizations and abortion inducing products in their health benefit plans. Additional lawsuits were filed by other Catholic dioceses and bishops, social service agencies and others opposed to the mandate on religious grounds. Although the federal government offered differing ‘accommodations’ to appease these organizations, none of those efforts satisfied the First Amendment and religious liberty concerns raised by the Diocese of Cheyenne and others challenging the mandate.

The downfall of the federal government’s HHS Mandate began in June 2014, based on the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993, when the Supreme Court of the United States ruled 5-4 that closely-held corporations with religious objections were not required to participate in the government’s contraceptive mandate. Attention turned to non-profit organizations shortly thereafter when the Supreme Court announced it would hear arguments in March 2016 in a series of cases challenging the so-called ‘accommodation’, including a case brought by the Little Sisters of the Poor religious order. On Friday, October 6, 2017, the federal government announced new regulations that provide broad protections to religious organizations opposed to the contraceptive mandate. The Diocese reached a settlement agreement with the Department of Justice shortly thereafter.