

Month for Celebrating Freedom

Freedom of Speech, Assembly and Religious Freedom

Issued just days before the nation's annual **Fourth of July** celebration, the Supreme Court decision on Hobby Lobby and Conestoga Wood Specialties cases rests on a fundamental American principle: defense of religious freedom. The Green family owners of Conestoga say their pro-life beliefs permeate their entire lives. They run companies that are generous with life-giving health insurance benefits, but find abhorrent the idea that government would make them finance through life insurance life-destroying activities such as drugs and procedures that end human life.

People can and do exercise religious freedom in their everyday lives. Some companies refuse to open on Sunday, the Lord's day of rest. Some say grace before meals, even when in restaurants. Some run kosher-only kitchens.

The federal government's unrelenting drive to promote birth control and abortion is reflected in the fines on employers who do not comply with Health & Human Services mandates. The fine is \$10 a day per employee, or \$36,500 a year per employee. But an uncaring employer offering no health insurance is fined only \$2,000 a year per employee.

The Court decision reminds us that government must meet a high bar to infringe on religious freedom. But law suits on behalf of religious ministries are moving forward because the HHS mandate still applies to them. These cases will likely be heard by the Supreme Court in its new term.

The government mandate applies to all sorts of religious ministries, many of which help the poor and sick.

The federal government claims it acknowledges religion by exempting houses of worship from its mandate. But the exemption does not extend to a church's services such as to the needy or sick. Helping people in need is the essence of our Catholic tradition. So Catholics are urged to participate in any way they can to communicate their concerns and, above all, to practice their religious freedom, even if it sometimes is unpopular or criticized. [Based on op-ed piece by Sister Mary Ann Walsh, *The Beacon*, 7/10/14]

Check out these Catholic resources:

Our Sunday Visitor - osv.com

National Catholic Register - ncregister.com

Politics over Science

What had been promoted as "choice" for many decades has degenerated into coercion, witness the HHS mandate covering contraception, abortion and sterilization covered by all insurance plans.

By 1965, it had long been accepted in biology that a **woman was pregnant from the time conception had taken place**. But that year, five years after the birth-control pill was approved for use in the USA, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists stated that a woman is not pregnant until after the fertilized egg implants in her uterus. **This was politics not science**, in an attempt to hide the slippery slope of birth control and abortion.

If the pill's effects on hormones doesn't fully stop ovulation, the pill ensures that the lining of the uterus is inhospitable for the fertilized egg, preventing implantation. That's abortion.

Janet Morana explained: "I had taken the pill for the first two years of my marriage. After stopping, I became pregnant with my first daughter. Two years later, twin girls followed. Decades later, at Disney's Epcot Center watching a video *The Making of Me*, it struck me that, during those two years on the pill, I could have and very likely did conceive a child or many children. I was overcome by grief for the life I had, unwittingly, destroyed."

"I did not have a surgical abortion, but I accepted the lie that the pill was harmless and would guarantee a future of my choosing. But it turns out that the **pill itself is bad medicine**—it can cause strokes and blood clots. Since 1999, it has been classified by the World Health Organization as a group-one carcinogen, known to be fatal for some women who take it."

"We have been deceived by a medical profession working in tandem with the pharmaceutical industry, and both have profited handsomely from our ignorance. Complacency is a luxury we can no longer afford – in our lives and at the ballot box. [Based on Janet Morana, "A Bitter Pill to be Avoided," *National Cath. Register*, 6/29/14]

ADDENDUM: The HHS mandate offers full coverage of options preventing or interrupting pregnancy, but not all pregnancy-related costs are covered. Our Church endorses Natural Family Planning (NFP) that does not involve the use of chemicals in a woman's body.

What Ministries Does the Church Offer for Women Who Have Had Abortions?

Remember the great good that Dorothy Day did after her conversion? Remember the great good that St. Augustine did after his conversion? **No matter what evil has been committed**, the Church offers forgiveness, confession of sins, and conversion of one's heart and soul towards doing good. There is a second chance because Jesus who made you loves you and died for you to redeem you from your sins.

There can be life and there can be hope after abortion for all who have been involved in something so sad. The Church wraps her arms around all of her children, offering the grace of **forgiveness and mercy** through the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and sustenance through the Eucharist.

Project Rachel, sponsored by Catholic Charities, and Rachel's Vineyard, sponsored by Priests for Life, offer helpful programs.

Yes, all who have been directly or indirectly involved in an abortion can be forgiven and be reconciled to the Lord again. [*The Catholic Answer*, July 2014, p. 17]

Miss USA Contestants on Firing Line

Valerie Gatto's mother was raped in Pittsburgh, but she decided to have the baby and give it up for adoption. She decided at the last moment to keep her at the urging of her own grandmother. Valerie was told all of this at an early age, and made the story an integral part of her Miss USA campaign. **"Your circumstances do not define your life,"** she says. "My mother made a choice, and she chose life. I'm glad that I'm here."

Speaking on college campuses, she recommends that **women be cautious and prudent**. Yet she is criticized by some for suggesting that some of the burden for preventing crimes should fall on potential victims

And Miss Nevada, Nia Sanchez, winner of this year's pageant and a martial-arts practitioner, has been roundly criticized for suggesting that women should learn to defend themselves.

"That's a lot of content for a beauty pageant, but the deep beauty here is in the extraordinary courage of Miss Gatto's mother, whose act of transcendent generosity deserves a halo more than a tiara." [This Week, *National Review*, July 7, 2014.]

Pope Francis on Twitter:

"Do not be content to live a mediocre Christian life: walk with determination along the path of holiness."

LIFENET Summer Interns

Every summer, the education outreach LIFENET program brings on summer interns who contribute their talents and learn how an organization functions. This summer's interns are Elizabeth Wakuluk, entering senior year at Mount St. Mary's University (Emmitsburg, MD) and Mary Ames, entering junior year at Duquesne University (Pittsburgh, PA).

A note about Mary Ames: she is studying Occupational Therapy with a minor in Special Education. Her sister Gracie has **Down Syndrome** and she loves her dearly. The thought that some people think Gracie's life and the lives of other Down Syndrome children are less valuable is a big part of Mary's motivation to work to protect unborn children. [LIFENET newsletter, June 2014.]

College students from our parish should consider an internship at LIFENETeducation.org for next summer.

Question of the day: Why is a woman's right to abortion more important than a baby's right to live?

Rutgers Cancer Institute Pro-Life?

The Institute ran a full-page ad in the *New York Times* on June 22, 2014, with the following statement in large print: *Aimee Parani was told she would have to lose her unborn baby to win her fight with breast cancer. WE FOUND A WAY TO SAVE THEM BOTH.*

Accompanying these words was a full color photo of mother Aimee and baby Paige.

Guess, deep down, most people know that pregnancy means a real human being is developing in the mom, and not simply "a blob of tissue."

Traditional Marriage Facing Challenges

"We are at a critical point in this country when it comes to the promotion and defense of marriage in the law" were the words of San Francisco Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone who chairs the U.S. bishops marriage committee.

He explained that traditional marriage is facing challenges since the 2013 Supreme Court ruling declared that the federal definition of marriage as existing between a man and a woman is unconstitutional, leaving its definition up to each state. Since then, numerous lower federal courts have declared state definitions of marriage unconstitutional.

To help defend marriage, the U.S. bishops have joined with other religious organizations to write briefs supporting the true definition of marriage, and are supporting legislation such as the Marriage and Religious Freedom Act. [based on editorial, *The Beacon*, June 19, 2014.]