



LIFE MATTERS

The Newsletter of the Respect Life Office of the Diocese of Rockford
Mitch Striedl, Director ♦ Rev. David A. Peck, Spiritual Director
555 Colman Center Drive ♦ Rockford, Illinois ♦ 61108 ♦ 815.399.4300
mitchstriedl@rockforddiocese.org

March 2012

vol. xi • no. 6

HHS Mandate Not Just About Religious Liberty

By Mitch Striedl

The recent decision by Health and Human Services (HHS) to mandate all employers, including religious institutions, cover the costs of abortion-inducing drugs, sterilizations, and contraceptives, has rightly been discussed by our Bishops as an issue of religious liberty. The so-called accommodation put forth, which is nothing more than a gimmick, has not changed this assault on the long standing protection of religious institutions framed in the Bill of Rights.

While we need to continue to push back against this assault on our freedom, we should also not lose sight that this mandate highlights a need to better understand and evangelize on the Church's teaching regarding contraception. Government officials and their friends in the media are trying to focus the discussion on contraception, avoiding the larger issue of religious liberty.

This misdirection is being done by the Administration because they believe that if it is about contraception rather than religious freedom, they are forming a winning message that can drive a wedge in the Catholic community.

The reason the Administration and their friends in the media believe the focus on contraception is a winning message is because surveys highlight that the vast majority of women, Catholic or otherwise, have used artificial contraception. While it is not 98% of women as the recent media coverage has suggested, it is still a high percentage. The percentages highlight a pressing need for evangelization on the physical, emotional, and spiritual harms of contraception. Too many women have been lied to.

One of the arguments by the Administration is that women are being denied access to a vital health benefit. First, studies by the Guttmacher Institute and others have shown that very few sexually active women forgo contraception due to lack of availability or cost.

Secondly, the Administration should be challenged on the notion that artificial contraception is a health benefit. What other health benefit is designed to take something that is healthy and treat it like a disease to be rendered useless.

While a small percentage of people use contraception for medical purposes, there exists no medical problem that cannot be treated with much healthier alternatives. And considering the laundry list of potential health risks associated with artificial contraception, including infertility, it would be wise to seek and promote these alternatives.

There is a significant body of peer-reviewed research that shows that hormonal contraception increases a woman's risk for breast cancer, cervical cancer, and liver cancer. Studies have also shown that it increases a woman's risks for HIV, blood clots, bone loss, and a host of other physical problems.

While the birth control pill is not the only "medication" that has a laundry list of potential side effects, it is the only "medication" that is not designed to specifically treat a health problem. Fertility and pregnancy are not diseases!

In addition to the physical harms, more studies are indicating that hormonal contraception is harming our environment as well. The Church does not oppose artificial contraception because of the physical or environmental harms it causes, but rather because it goes against the very nature of married love and the sexual act.

The one flesh union is meant to be an intimate expression of the total, mutual, sacrificial, and self-giving love of husband and wife. However, artificial contraception turns the act into a partial, self-serving love between two people. The entire purpose of artificial contraception is to actively intervene to nullify the procreative potential of this most intimate union.

God created married love to be both unitive and procreative, something which is built into and revealed through the natural order of the sexual act.

The couple using artificial contraception is seeking to redefine the true purpose and nature of the sexual act. And if the one flesh union is no longer tied in any way to procreation, the logic follows that it doesn't have to be tied to a married couple or tied to a heterosexual couple.

Artificial contraception also allows a woman to be sexually available all the time for man's selfish desires. Because there is no possibility of new life coming from this union, there is no responsibility or faithfulness required of the man. This can leave many women feeling like objects rather than beloved children of God; being used for sex rather than participating in a mutual gift of self.

Furthermore, since a couple using artificial contraception is trying to actively intervene to prevent the possibility of new life while having sex, rather than practicing periodic abstinence with NFP, if a pregnancy does result they are more likely to view it as "unwanted" rather than a surprising gift from God. This "unwanted" mentality opens the couple up to considering abortion as the option for making the "problem" go away. In fact, several studies have shown that increased use in artificial contraception leads to an increase in abortions as well.

The self-centered love nurtured by artificial contraception, even if the couple is not fully aware, slowly tears apart at their union. A married couple, like all of us, is called to mirror Christ's love, who gave of Himself completely by sacrificing His life for us. Using contraception does not mirror this love, but allows a couple to focus on their own selfish desires and be closed to the possibility that God wants to grow their love with the gift of a child. This selfishness can build distrust and disunity because the couple is no longer focused on being a gift to the other. Rather than being free to love, the couple becomes slaves to their own selfish desires.

This coercive government mandate has provided a unique opportunity to not only discuss religious liberty, but also to discuss the destructive harms of artificial contraception to a society that largely views

contraception as a good thing. I sure hope this conversation and evangelization continues, for it is much needed. Let us resolve to better understand the Church's teaching on contraception and help evangelize others.

If you or someone you know is on the birth control pill for medical reasons and you would like more information about alternatives please call the Respect Life Office at 815-399-4300 or visit our website at www.rockforddiocese.org/nfp

For additional commentary on life issues, check out "Life Lines" on the first Friday of each month in *The Observer*.

How can you help the Respect Life Office?

- 1) The Respect Life Office is supported through the Annual Diocesan Stewardship Appeal. Your generous support of the annual appeal is crucial to helping the Respect Life Office fulfill its mission of building a culture of life.
- 2) Support the Respect Life Office by using GoodSearch, a cost-free internet search engine, at www.goodsearch.com and by selecting "Diocese of Rockford-Respect Life" as your charity to support. Every time you search the internet or shop online at your favorite online retailers through the website's GoodShop section, you will help raise money for the Respect Life Office, and it will cost you nothing extra!
- 3) Please consider making a lasting gift to the Respect Life Office by remembering the office in your will, naming it as a beneficiary of a Charitable Gift Annuity, and/or making a donation to the Respect Life Office Endowment. If you are interested in more information, you can contact Dave Hougan at 815-399-4300 or learn more at www.foundationrockford.org and clicking on the folder titled Planned Gifts.
- 4) Volunteer your time and talent with the Respect Life Office.

If you have any questions concerning all the ways you can support the Respect Life Office please contact us at 815-399-4300 or email us at mitchstriedl@rockforddiocese.org

LIFE MATTERS is published monthly by the Respect Life Office of the Diocese of Rockford. It is sent to all priests, seminarians, religious sisters, prayer team members, and parish respect life coordinators. Individual subscriptions may be obtained for a donation of \$15.00 per year. This publication may be copied so long as it is done in full. It may be quoted so long as proper citation is provided with the quotation.