

News Release

April 13, 2012

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PITTSBURGH -- Christian Associates of Southwest Pennsylvania released its statement on religious freedom and healthcare (attached below) at a 10 AM news conference on Friday, April 13, 2012 at its headquarters and television studio in the Lawrenceville neighborhood, 204 37th Street - Suite 201 Pittsburgh, PA 15201.

The statement is in response to the Preventive Services Mandate issued by the US Department of Health and Human Services. Participating at the conference were Archbishop Robert Duncan, Council chair, Bishop, Anglican Diocese of Pittsburgh; The Most Reverend David Zubik, Council vice chair, Bishop, Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh, and Reverend Dr. Donald B. Green, Executive Director, Christian Associates of SW PA. In addition to releasing the general statement, Reverend Green also read a brief statement from Reverend Dr. Sheldon Sorge, Executive Committee, member at large, Pastor to the Presbytery, Pittsburgh Presbytery, PC-USA.

The news conference was cablecast live on Christian Associates Television, Comcast Channel 95 in the city of Pittsburgh. It also is available throughout the region through Comcast On Demand.

Christian Associates is one of the largest regional ecumenical agencies in the United States. Founded in 1970, the organization includes 26 church bodies (Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant) representing 2,000 local congregations and 1,000,000 Christians in the following counties: Allegheny, Armstrong, Beaver, Butler, Fayette, Greene, Indiana, Lawrence, Washington and Westmoreland.

(statement follows on page 2)

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM & HEALTHCARE

A Statement by

Christian Associates of Southwest Pennsylvania

As members of Christian Associates of Southwest Pennsylvania, we gather regularly to discuss the issues faced by our diverse communities. While we recognize our different perspectives and theological understanding, we look for opportunities to give expression to how much we share in our hopes and aspirations, as well as in our concerns.

Today, we speak together about two shared concerns: (1) the preservation of religious liberty as guaranteed in the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States of America, and (2) the moral imperative of providing healthcare for all, women, men, and children alike.

The “Preventive Services Mandate” issued by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services requires faith-based entities that provide health insurance to facilitate access to specific preventive services, even if they consider some of those services incompatible with the practice of their faith. Our deep concern over this mandate does not arise from the varying convictions we have on the moral content of this mandate, but from our common commitment to the right of religious freedom that all people of faith expect to enjoy in this country. The Constitution of the United States guarantees every religious institution and its affiliated bodies **the inalienable right to define its own identity and ministries and to practice its own beliefs**, not just its freedom of worship.

Many religious institutions are now placed in the untenable position of (a) violating their consciences, (b) ceasing health insurance and paying ruinous fines, or (c) withdrawing entirely from providing the social services to the wider community that have long been a social justice hallmark of their ministry. Creating gaping holes in the public welfare safety net is in and of itself an immense injustice.

Therefore, we call upon the federal government to alter the “Preventive Services Mandate” to broaden the religious exemption within it so that both the constitutional right to the free exercise of religion for all and the moral imperative of healthcare, likewise for all, in this country may not be impaired.