

News Release

April 13, 2012

From: Christian Associates of Southwest Pennsylvania
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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.

Christian Associates Statement on Religious Freedom and Healthcare
April 13, 2012

Archbishop Robert Duncan, Council chair,
Bishop, Anglican Diocese of Pittsburgh

The Most Rev. David Zubik, Council vice
chair, Bishop, Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh

Rev. Dr. Wayne Yost, Council secretary,
General Presbyter, Kiskiminetas Presbytery,
PC-USA

Rev. Dr. Eric Brown, Executive Committee
member at Large, Presiding Elder,
Allegheny-Scranton District AME

Rev. Dr. Sheldon Sorge, Executive
Committee, member at large, Pastor to the
Presbytery, Pittsburgh Presbytery, PC-USA

The Most Rev. Lawrence Brandt, Executive
Committee, member at large, Bishop,
Catholic Diocese of Greensburg

Rev. Kurt Kusserow, Executive Committee,
member at large, Bishop, Southwestern
Pennsylvania Synod, ELCA

Rev. Dr. Donald B. Green, Executive
Director, Christian Associates of SW PA

Rev. Char Burch, Interim Conference
Minister, Penn West Conference, UCC

Rev. David Ackerman, Proxy,
Penn West Conference, UCC

The Very Rev. Eugene Yackanich, Interim
Administrator, Byzantine Catholic
Archeprarchy of Pittsburgh

Rev. Alan G. Adams, Executive Presbyter,
Beaver-Butler Presbytery, PC-USA

Rev. Gary Denning, Senior Pastor,
First Baptist Church, Pittsburgh Baptist
Association

Very Rev. Fr. George Johnson, Pastor,
St John the Baptist, Orthodox Church in
America

The Rt. Rev. Kenneth L. Price, Jr., Bishop,
The Episcopal Diocese of Pittsburgh

Rev. Dr. Jack Sullivan, Jr., regional Minister
and President, Pennsylvania Region,
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) US
and Canada

Rev. Robert D. Jackson, Proxy, Christian
Church of Pennsylvania (Disciples of Christ)

Rev. Thomas Federline, Proxy, Catholic
Diocese of Greensburg, Pastor, St. Paul
Parish, Greensburg

Archbishop MELCHISEDEK, Archdiocese of
Pittsburgh & Western PA, Orthodox Church
in America