Respect for Rights of Conscience Act
The Iowa Catholic Conference is encouraging citizens to contact their members of Congress in support of the Respect for Rights of Conscience Act. Go to www.capwiz.com/catholicbishops for a sample message on this issue and others. Your response to these alerts would be most appreciated.

Via The Iowa Catholic Conference August 2011
WASHINGTON (USCCB) - The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) sharply criticized a new HHS “preventive services” mandate requiring private health plans to cover female surgical sterilization and all drugs and devices approved by the FDA as contraceptives, including drugs which can attack a developing unborn child before and after implantation in the mother’s womb.

“Although this new rule gives the agency the discretion to authorize a ‘religious’ exemption, it is so narrow as to exclude most Catholic social service agencies and healthcare providers,” said Cardinal Daniel N. DiNardo, Archbishop of Galveston-Houston and chairman of the USCCB Committee on Pro-Life Activities.

“For example, under the new rule our institutions would be free to act in accord with Catholic teaching on life and procreation only if they were to stop hiring and serving non-Catholics,” Cardinal DiNardo continued. “Could the federal government possibly intend to pressure Catholic institutions to cease providing health care, education and charitable services to the general public? Health care reform should expand access to basic health care for all, not undermine that goal.”

“The Administration’s failure to create a meaningful conscience exemption to the preventive services mandate underscores the need for Congress to approve the Respect for Rights of Conscience Act,” the Cardinal said. That bill (H.R. 1179), introduced by Reps. Jeff Fortenberry (R-NE) and Dan Boren (D-OK), would prevent mandates under the new health reform law from undermining rights of conscience. A companion bill, S. 1467, was introduced in the Senate by Sen. Roy Blunt (R-MO).

Cardinal DiNardo added: “Catholics are not alone in conscientiously objecting to this mandate. The drugs that Americans would be forced to subsidize under the new rule include Ella, which was approved by the FDA as an ‘emergency contraceptive’ but can act like the abortion drug RU-486. It can abort an established pregnancy weeks after conception. The pro-life majority of Americans – Catholics and others – would be outraged to learn that their premiums must be used for this purpose.”

Background and notes from Respect Life Initiative & Iowa Catholic Conference

For the Church, there is no distinction between defending human life and promoting the dignity of the human person.

Pope Benedict XVI writes in Caritas in Veritate. . . that “The Church forcefully maintains this link between life ethics and social ethics, fully aware that ‘a society lacks solid foundations when, on the one hand, it asserts values such as the dignity of the person, justice and peace, but then, on the other hand, radically acts to the contrary by allowing or tolerating a variety of ways in which human life is devalued and violated, especially where it is weak or marginalized.’” (no. 15).

As a gift from God, every human life is sacred from conception to natural death. The life and dignity of every person must be respected and protected at every stage and in every condition. The right to life is the first and most fundamental principle of human rights that leads Catholics to actively work for a world of greater respect for human life and greater commitment to justice and peace.

The bishops pledged to affirm the intrinsic value of human life and the dignity of every human being in a way that transforms the culture by implementing “The Life and Dignity of the Human Person”
priority plan for 2010-2012.

To achieve this goal, the priority plan includes ongoing education, prayer, policy, and advocacy efforts to mobilize the Catholic community on issues of life, justice, and peace. In this way, the Catholic community celebrates the gift of human life and witnesses to the Good News of Jesus Christ.