



*The Roman Catholic  
Diocese of Phoenix*

400 EAST MONROE, PHOENIX, ARIZONA 85004-2336 • TELEPHONE (602) 354-2130

COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE

## **St. Joseph's Hospital no longer Catholic**

### **Statement of Bishop Thomas J. Olmsted**

December 21, 2010

Jesus says (Cf. Mt 25:40), “Whatever you did for the least of my brothers and sisters, you did for me.”

Caring for the sick is an essential part of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Throughout our history, the Church has provided great care and love to those in need. With the advent of Catholic hospitals, the faithful could also be confident that they were able to receive quality health care according to the teachings of the Church.

Authentic Catholic care in the institutions of Catholic Healthcare West (CHW) in the Diocese of Phoenix has been a topic of discussion between CHW and me from the time of our initial meeting nearly seven years ago.

At that first meeting, I learned that CHW already did not comply with the ethical teachings of the Church at Chandler Regional Hospital. The moral guide for Hospitals and Healthcare Institutions is spelled out in what are called the Ethical and Religious Directives of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. I objected strongly to CHW's lack of compliance with these directives, and told CHW leaders that this constituted cooperation in evil that must be corrected; because if a healthcare entity wishes to call itself Catholic (as in “Catholic” Healthcare West), it needs to adhere to the teachings of the Church in all of its institutions. In all my seven years as Bishop of Phoenix, I have continued to insist that this scandalous situation needed to change; sadly, over the course of these years, CHW has chosen not to comply.

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Then, earlier this year, it was brought to my attention that an abortion had taken place at St. Joseph's Hospital in Phoenix. When I met with officials of the hospital to learn more of the details of what had occurred, it became clear that, in the decision to abort, the equal dignity of mother and her baby were not both upheld; but that the baby was directly killed, which is a clear violation of ERD #45. It also was clear that the exceptional cases, mentioned in ERD #47, were not met, that is, that there was not a cancerous uterus or other grave malady that might justify an indirect and unintended termination of the life of the baby to treat the grave illness. In this case, the baby was healthy and there were no problems with the pregnancy; rather, the mother had a disease that needed to be treated. But instead of treating the disease, St. Joseph's medical staff and ethics committee decided that the healthy, 11-week-old baby should be directly killed. This is contrary to the teaching of the Church (Cf. *Evangelium Vitae*, #62).

It was thus my duty to declare to the person responsible for this tragic decision that allowed an abortion at St. Joseph's, Sister Margaret McBride, R.S.M., that she had incurred an excommunication by her formal consent to the direct taking of the life of this baby. I did this in a confidential manner, hoping to spare her public embarrassment.

Unfortunately, subsequent communications with leadership at St. Joseph's Hospital and CHW have only eroded my confidence about their commitment to the Church's Ethical and Religious Directives for Healthcare. They have not addressed in an adequate manner the scandal caused by the abortion. Moreover, I have recently learned that many other violations of the ERDs have been taking place at CHW facilities in Arizona throughout my seven years as Bishop of Phoenix and far longer.

Let me explain.

CHW and St. Joseph's Hospital, as part of what is called "Mercy Care Plan", have been formally cooperating with a number of medical procedures that are contrary to the ERDs, for many years. I was never made aware of this fact until the last few weeks. Here are some of the things which CHW has been formally responsible for throughout these years:

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- Contraceptive counseling, medications, supplies and associated medical and laboratory examinations, including, but not limited to, oral and injectable contraceptives, intrauterine devices, diaphragms, condoms, foams and suppositories;
- Voluntary sterilization (male and female); and
- Abortions due to the mental or physical health of the mother or when the pregnancy is the result of rape or incest.

This information was given to me in a meeting which included an administrator of St. Joseph's Hospital who admitted that St. Joseph's and CHW are aware that this plan consists in formal cooperation in evil actions which are contrary to Church teaching. The Mercy Care Plan has been in existence for 26 years, includes some 368,000 members, and its 2010 revenues will reach nearly \$2 billion. CHW and St. Joseph's Hospital have made more than a hundred million dollars every year from this partnership with the government.

In light of all these failures to comply with the Ethical and Religious Directives of the Church, it is my duty to decree that, in the Diocese of Phoenix, at St. Joseph's Hospital, CHW is not committed to following the teaching of the Catholic Church and therefore this hospital cannot be considered Catholic.

The Catholic faithful are free to seek care or to offer care at St. Joseph's Hospital but I cannot guarantee that the care provided will be in full accord with the teachings of the Church. In addition, other measures will be taken to avoid the impression that the hospital is authentically Catholic, such as the prohibition of celebrating Mass at the hospital and the prohibition of reserving the Blessed Sacrament in the Chapel.

For seven years now, I have tried to work with CHW and St. Joseph's, and I have hoped and prayed that this day would not come, that this decree would not be needed; however, the faithful of the Diocese have a right to know whether institutions of this importance are indeed Catholic in identity and practice.

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