



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on June 5, 2012

June 8: Pro-Life, Christian Activists to Rally Against Contraception Mandate

Following the success of a [similar effort last March](#), tens of thousands of pro-life and Christian activists will gather at public venues in cities across the nation June 8 to voice the overwhelming opposition Americans have toward President Obama's contraception mandate, which will require that all employers — including religious institutions — provide free birth control to their employees. Organized by the [Pro-Life Action League](#) and [Citizens for a Pro-Life Society](#), the [Stand Up for Religious Freedom Rally](#) is scheduled for some 160 cities across the nation as an estimated 75,000 individuals, families, churches, and groups gather to hear from religious and pro-life leaders, pray, and express their opposition to the mandate, [announced in late January by Kathleen Sebelius](#), Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).



Rallies around the nation will convene at noon local time at federal buildings, city halls, congressional offices, and other historic sites. The effort, which comes on the 223rd anniversary of the introduction of the Bill of Rights to the U.S. Congress, “is being staged in anticipation of the Supreme Court’s expected ruling in late June on the Affordable Care Act, including the controversial Department of Health and Human Services mandate requiring most private employers to provide co-pay-free contraceptive and sterilization coverage in health-care plans,” reported the [National Catholic Register](#).

“The [first time around in March](#) we got so much publicity that we think we’ll be able to educate an even wider section of the populace about threats to our religious liberties, particularly the threat posed by the HHS mandate,” said Eric Scheidler, director of the Pro-Life Action League and co-organizer of the nationwide rally. “I’m encouraged, because I think what we’re seeing emerge is a sort of wide-reaching pushback against the marginalization of the voice of faith in the public square.”

Matt Yonke, communications coordinator for the event, said that the previous effort provided significant momentum for the June 8 rally. “We’re up to 154 rallies across the country now, which is about 10 more than we had last time on the rally day,” Yonke told the [Catholic News Agency](#). He said that organizers are “expecting a few more cities to trickle in” by rally time June 8. He added that the anticipation over the coming rally, along with publicity and endorsements by a wide variety of organizations, have organizers expecting sizeable crowds across the nation. “We had 64,000 people last time,” he recalled of the March rally. “I definitely think we’re going to top that.”



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The *National Catholic Register* noted that the idea for the religious freedom rally was originally conceived by Monica Miller, director of Citizens for a Pro-Life Society. “I had the idea that we should be doing something more active and make a public show of our opposition to the HHS mandate — instead of just writing letters and doing news interviews,” she recalled. “So Eric [Scheidler] and I teamed up together to do this.”

Noting that the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops took an early lead in opposing the mandate, she told the *Register* that the bishops “need the serious support of laypeople. We’re seeing some of the strongest statements maybe in the history of the Church in this country — like Cardinal [Francis] George [of Chicago] saying, ‘I expect to die in bed, my successor will die in prison, and his successor will die a martyr.’ This is a very serious moment for the Church.”

While the Catholic Church has provided major leadership in the campaign against the mandate, the *Catholic Register* noted that, just as in March, the June 8 rally will cross religious lines. At Federal Plaza in downtown Chicago, which organizers are calling “Ground Zero” for the nationwide effort, “Rabbi Philip Lefkowitz of Agudas Achim North Shore Congregation will share the podium with Catholics and Protestants and a Muslim attorney with the Becket Fund for Religious Freedom, another partner in the umbrella of organizations supporting the rallies,” reported the *Register*.

Lefkowitz said that “religious freedom for Jews is a very sacred thing, and we don’t want to see encroachment by the government upon the religious community. I’m honored to be asked to speak.”

While he said that he wholeheartedly supports the stand the Catholic Church has taken on the issue, he emphasized that effort transcends denominational and religious boundaries. “The idea that the Church, the collective religious community, must constantly be on the defense is quite obvious today,” he said. “There is a war on religion, and if you add to it the fact that America is no longer a Judeo-Christian society, we’ve got a very difficult situation to contend with. But we have to draw the line and make sure everyone understands that the separation of church and state means protecting the church from the state, not the other way around, or else it’ll be an absolute calamity.”

The religious freedom rally comes on the heels of a dozen lawsuits filed in the last few weeks by over 40 Catholic groups against HHS Secretary Sebelius and other federal bureaucrats responsible for enforcing the contraception mandate. As reported by [The New American](#), among those named as plaintiffs in the suit are Notre Dame, Catholic University of America, and the Archdiocese of New York. The suit, according to [Reuters News](#), charges the federal government with forcing religious groups “to support contraception, sterilization, and birth control in violation of their religious beliefs or face steep fines.”

Visit the official [Stand up for Religious Freedom](#) website for more information, and for a [listing of participating communities](#).



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