



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on December 19, 2012

Will ObamaCare Drive the Little Sisters of the Poor Out of the U.S.?

Will the Little Sisters of the Poor, an order of Catholic nuns that operates homes for the aged, be driven from the United States by ObamaCare? According to the [Daily Caller](#), it is a distinct possibility.

Founded in France in the 19th century by St. Jeanne Jugan, the Little Sisters of the Poor minister to low-income senior citizens in 31 countries. In the United States they operate 30 homes for the aged, accommodating over 2,500 people. They accept the elderly and hire employees without regard to race or religion — and that is where these kind, humble women come into conflict with the healthcare law.



The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has declared that employers must offer health insurance to their employees that includes coverage for sterilization and contraception, including drugs that can induce abortions. The mandate exempts churches and other organizations that hire and serve only members of their own faiths. Since the Little Sisters do not discriminate in hiring and serving, they will be forced to offer insurance covering services they find objectionable.

“The health insurance offered to employees of the Little Sisters of the Poor has always explicitly excluded sterilization, contraception and abortion from its covered services,” the Little Sisters explained in a [statement](#) last March. “This longstanding policy has never been a matter of controversy in our homes.”

Now, however, this policy is effectively being overturned by government fiat, forcing the sisters to choose between violating their consciences and serving America’s aged.

Dropping health insurance altogether is not an option. Doing so would cost the order \$2,000 per employee per year; and besides, “it just does not seem right to us to stop providing health insurance to our employees,” Little Sisters communications director Sister Constance Veit told the [National Catholic Register](#).

The mandate “could be a serious threat to our mission in the U.S.,” Sr. Constance told the *Daily Caller*, “because we would never be able to afford to pay the fines involved. We have difficulty making ends meet just on a regular basis; we have no extra funding that would cover these fines.”

That means the sisters will be forced either to restrict their hiring and serving to Catholics or to leave the United States altogether. The *Daily Caller* reports that “on Dec. 16 a representative [of the Little Sisters] told the congregation of Saint Raymond of Peñafort Church in Springfield, Va., that her order could conceivably be forced to pull out of the United States if paying fines and penalties is the only alternative to compromising on the doctrines of their religion” — remarks that Sr. Constance told the website were “accurate.”



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Indeed, Sr. Constance had previously stated as much herself, writing last June in *The Tablet*, a Catholic newspaper in Brooklyn, N.Y.:

As Little Sisters of the Poor, we are not strangers to religious intolerance. Our foundress was born at the height of the French Revolution and established our congregation in its aftermath. Our sisters have been forced to leave numerous countries, including China, Myanmar and Hungary, because of religious intolerance. We pray that the United States will not be added to this list.

In addition to the immediate problem of the HHS mandate, the Little Sisters have other serious concerns about what ObamaCare portends for the future of both healthcare and religious freedom in America. In their March statement they observed:

Beyond the immediate issues related to sterilization, contraception and abortifacients, we are deeply concerned about the erosion of religious liberty and freedom of conscience which the HHS mandate signals and the impact this could have on our health care ministry. We fear that the successful implementation of this rule could set a precedent for further intrusion of government into health care, with an increasingly broad array of medical treatments and procedures — preventive or otherwise — falling under federal mandates. If the federal government succeeds in enforcing this rule, what is to stop it from rationing health care to seniors or including euthanizing procedures on the list of required “preventive services” as a way of eliminating the costs associated with caring for our aging population? Would health care providers like the Little Sisters of the Poor then be forced to cooperate in such practices?

That the Little Sisters even issued such a statement is extraordinary. “I have been a Little Sister for 25 years, and I have never seen our congregation so active on a public issue,” Sr. Constance told the *National Catholic Register*. “So that is an indication of its importance.... Normally, our lives are very hidden.”

The Obama administration gave religious organizations a one-year reprieve before forcing them to provide health insurance that violates their consciences. According to the *Daily Caller*, “That extension will expire at the end of 2013, but the sisters have only a few weeks left to make their case for an exemption beyond the end of next year.” And what happens then?

“We just cannot say what will happen,” Sr. Constance told the *Daily Caller*. “We are continuing to pray that our backs will not be up against the wall in 2014. If we are forced to make a decision, we will seek concrete direction from the U.S. bishops.”

Americans of all faiths should be able to join the Little Sisters of the Poor in praying for relief from both the contraception mandate and the entire healthcare law. As the sisters put it in their statement, “The HHS mandate is an unjust and dangerous infringement upon the natural and Constitutional rights of Americans and ... the only just solution is to rescind it.” That goes for the rest of ObamaCare, too.

Photo of nuns from the Little Sister of the Poor in 2008: AP Images



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