



Bishop Olmsted Announcement | Frequently Asked Questions

- 1. What led the bishop to revoke his endorsement of St. Joseph's as a "Catholic" institution?**

St. Joseph's Hospital and Medical Center cannot speak for Bishop Olmsted. This decision comes after several months of discussions between CHW and the Diocese. At issue is whether St. Joseph's acted correctly in terminating a pregnancy to save the mother's life. St. Joseph's and its parent company, Catholic Healthcare West (CHW), continue to stand by the decision, which was made in collaboration with the patient, her family, her caregivers, and the hospital's Ethics Committee.
- 2. Is the action of the bishop related to the controversy around his announcement that Sister Margaret McBride had automatically excommunicated herself? What is her status?**

Yes, this is in relation to a decision last year to save the life of a critically ill woman who was 11-weeks pregnant by terminating her pregnancy. Sister Margaret served on the Ethics Committee in that case. The bishop asked Sr. Margaret to resign her position as Vice President of Mission Services because of her participation in the decision. She did so in May in the hopes of resolving his concerns and now is Vice President of Organizational Outreach at St. Joseph's. Sr. Margaret is part of the hospital's executive leadership team and the hospital strongly supports her.
- 3. What are the facts of the case?**

A woman in her 20's with a history of moderate but well-controlled pulmonary hypertension found out she was pregnant. There was concern for her health, because pregnancy with pulmonary hypertension carries a serious risk of mortality. Because of the severity of her disease, the woman's risk of mortality was close to 50 percent. In November 2009, the woman was admitted to St. Joseph's Hospital and Medical Center with worsening symptoms. Tests revealed that she now had life-threatening pulmonary hypertension. The chart notes that she had been informed that her risk of mortality was close to 100% if she continued the pregnancy. The medical team contacted the Ethics Consult team for review. The consultation team talked to several physicians and nurses as well as reviewed the patient's record. The patient and her family, her doctors, and the Ethics Consult team, agreed that the pregnancy could be terminated, and that it was appropriate since the goal was not to end the pregnancy but save the mother's life.
- 4. How did the bishop find out about the terminated pregnancy? Were any patient privacy laws violated in this matter?**

Patient privacy is of the utmost importance at St. Joseph's, and the hospital has in place comprehensive policies in order to prevent unauthorized disclosure of patient information. If a staff member is suspected of violating such policies, a complete investigation is promptly conducted and disciplinary action is taken if the staff member is found to be in violation. In this case, a complete investigation was conducted. Since no individually identifiable health information was ever given to the Bishop or anyone else, it was determined that the applicable privacy rules under the federal Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) were not violated.

5. The bishop says St. Joseph's is no longer "Catholic." What does that mean?

Although we are deeply disappointed by the bishop's decision to no longer recognize St. Joseph's as a Catholic hospital, we will continue to operate in the Catholic tradition, as we have for the last 115 years. Our operations, policies, and procedures will not change. At the bishop's direction, we will remove the Blessed Sacrament from the hospital's chapel and will no longer celebrate Mass there.

6. The bishop says St. Joseph's did not follow the Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services and that's why he has removed his endorsement. What does that mean?

The Ethical and Religious Directives (ERDs) for Catholic Health Care Services is a document developed by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops to reaffirm the ethical standards of behavior in health care that flow from the Church's teaching about the dignity of the human person. Consistent with the ERDs, if we are presented with a situation in which a pregnancy threatens a woman's life, we will make every effort to save both patients. If that is not possible, we will always save the life we can save. This is what we did in this case and we stand by the decision.

7. Would St. Joseph's do the same thing again? Is there anything you could have done differently?

In this tragic case, the treatment necessary to save the mother's life required the termination of an 11-week pregnancy. Had there been a way to save both the mother and the fetus, we would have done it. We are convinced there was not. We would do the same thing again.

8. Will St. Joseph's now provide elective abortions or sterilizations?

No. Our operations, policies, and procedures will not change.

9. What will happen to the hospital's relationship with the Sisters of Mercy?

The Sisters of Mercy are the founders of St. Joseph's and they will continue their ministry in the hospital.

10. Will the name of the hospital change?

No. St. Joseph's will retain its name and our Catholic heritage will always be at the core of who we are. Our mission and values will not change, nor do we believe this action will have any impact on our operations. We have provided outstanding care since our founding, and we will live up to this legacy of service going forward.

11. Has this ever happened to other hospitals in the United States?

Not to a hospital with so much Catholic history. Earlier this year, St. Charles Medical Center in Bend, Oregon ceased to be recognized by Bishop Vasa as a Catholic hospital due to the bishop's concern that tubal ligations were being performed.

12. Will Catholic patients still be accepted as patients at St. Joseph's?

Of course. People from all religions continue to be welcomed at St. Joseph's.

13. Will Catholic patients still be able to receive the sacraments in their rooms?

Yes, priests will still be able to visit our patients and offer the sacraments.

14. What will happen to the chapel at St. Joseph's?

The chapel is a place for people to find a quiet, prayerful place within the hospital for prayer and reflection. It always has been available to people of all faith-traditions and will continue to be. Mass will no longer be celebrated, however, and the Blessed Sacrament will be removed.

15. Will the statue of St. Joseph outside the front entrance be removed?

No. The statue was a beautiful gift from a donor and is a part of our history. It will remain.

16. Will St. Joseph's still work to help the poor?

Yes. In 2009, St. Joseph's provided \$92 million in healthcare services and programs for the benefit of our community. This amount included charity care, unpaid cost of Medicaid, medical education, community service, other public programs, research and donations. This is part of our mission and our mission will not change.

17. What is Catholic Healthcare West's position on this situation?

Catholic Healthcare West has been fully engaged in the dialogue with the Diocese of Phoenix since the beginning and continues to support St. Joseph's and the decision the care team made to save the life they could.

18. What has been the reaction to this controversy?

We want to thank the thousands of individuals and groups from Phoenix and from around the world who have expressed their support and offered their prayers during this difficult time.

19. What is the situation at Chandler Regional Medical Center? How can Chandler call itself part of CHW?

All Catholic Healthcare West hospitals share a commitment to the sanctity of life. As Chandler Regional Medical Center is not a Catholic hospital, the bishop does not have authority over it. The operations, policies, and procedures at Chandler Regional Medical Center will not change.

20. What is the situation with Mercy Care Plan, which is an AHCCCS health insurance provider that is partly owned by St. Joseph's?

Mercy Care Plan, is sponsored by Catholic Healthcare West and Carondelet Health Network, a member of Ascension Health, and has managed health care for people in Arizona for more than 20 years, including those with special needs.

Within Mercy Care, family planning benefits are administered by a third party administrator through an agreement with the plan. This arrangement has been in place since the creation of Mercy Care Plan. The agreement provides for separate funding from AHCCCS to the third party administrator for this set of benefits. The third party administrator has separate policies, procedures, processes, etc., in order to maintain separation between Mercy Care Plan and the administration of these benefits.