

Mount president calls for day of fasting

By Jennifer Williams

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Mount St. Mary's University president Thomas H. Powell has called for a day of prayer and fasting in support of religious liberty. Set for Feb. 10 at the Emmitsburg school, the action comes in the wake of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' mandate forcing Catholic employers to offer employees health coverage that includes contraception and abortion-inducing drugs.

In an email to the Mount community, Powell wrote, "Mount St. Mary's University was founded by a political refugee fleeing persecution from an overreaching secular state that was trying to force him to violate his conscience. In the United States, he discovered a new nation dedicated to the principles of freedom, especially the "first freedom" - the right to religious liberty. That liberty is now under threat in the United States. Two weeks ago, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services announced that almost all employers, including Catholic employers, will be forced to offer their employees health coverage that includes sterilization, abortion-inducing drugs, and contraception. Almost all health insurers will be forced to include those "services" in health policies."

Many have denounced the policy as an over-reach, including Cardinal-designate Edwin F. O'Brien, who issued a letter Jan. 25 to all parishioners, which can be read [here](#). In addition, New York's Cardinal-designate Timothy Dolan appeared on CBS Feb. 9 issuing several comments.

Powell referred to the editors of "USA Today" who earlier this week wrote "Few Americans of any political stripe would disagree with the simple proposition that the government should steer away from meddling in church affairs. Certainly, it should never try to force a religiously affiliated institution to violate a central tenet of its faith."

In response, Powell is urging members of the Mount community to designate Feb. 10 as a day of fasting and prayer for religious liberty. A brief program will be held at 12:30 p.m. in Founder's Plaza. Father Brian Nolan, university chaplain and director of campus ministry, will lead the initiative on campus.

Other initiatives taken by the Mount include Powell writing letters to President Barack Obama and colleague presidents of Catholic universities across the country, the Board of Trustees will meet in early March to discuss options, the seminary community gathered for an educational forum earlier this week and additional events will be scheduled throughout the semester.