Adventist Church Encouraged by Court’s Hobby Lobby Decision

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America is encouraged with today’s ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court in the most anticipated case this term in which religious liberty and the right to healthcare intersected. Today’s decision, in what is referred to as the Hobby Lobby case, reaffirmed the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA), which safeguards the broad religious liberty protections available to all people of faith.

The court’s ruling was the result of appeals by two family owned, for profit companies – Hobby Lobby Stores and Conestoga Woods Specialties – that objected to providing certain forms of birth control as required under the Affordable Care Act (ACA). The question for the Court was whether these companies could claim an exemption from this requirement under the First Amendment and the RFRA.

The Hobby Lobby case presented a unique situation for some faith-based organizations, including family owned companies, as religious freedom and health issues intersected.

The Adventist Church’s commitment to religious freedom is well established and long standing. As one of many religious groups that advocated for the passage of the RFRA in 1993, the Church is concerned with any attempt to weaken or restrict the interpretation of the legislation, which protects religious freedom.

Additionally, the Adventist Church’s commitment to health has been clearly established since the Church’s founding. As the operator of one of the largest hospital systems in the U.S. and of hospitals and clinics around the world, the Church’s involvement in improving the health of all, including women, is similarly well established.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church, in its Fundamental Beliefs and teachings as based on the Bible, does not object to providing the methods of contraception at issue (see Official Seventh-day Adventist Church Statement on Birth Control), and has fully complied with this provision of the AHA for its U.S. based employees. However, the Adventist Church has a long history of defending religious freedom not just for itself but all people of faith. The balancing of interest will always be a
difficult task. Further, the Church is concerned that the weakening of religious liberty rights for any group threatens the rights of all people of faith.

The Adventist Church believes that while the provision of contraception is an important goal of the ACA, it is one the government can reach without forcing family held companies to violate their sincerely held religious beliefs.