



THE DIOCESE OF CHARLESTON

January 30, 2012

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

I write to you concerning an alarming and serious matter that negatively impacts the Church in the United States directly, and that strikes at the fundamental right to religious liberty for all citizens of any faith. The federal government, which claims to be “of, by, and for the people,” has just dealt a heavy blow to almost a quarter of those people—the Catholic population—and to the millions more who are served by the Catholic faithful.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services announced last week 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 the health policies they write. And almost all individuals will be *forced* to buy that coverage as a part of their policies.

In so ruling, the Administration has cast aside the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, denying to Catholics our Nation’s first and most fundamental freedom, that of religious liberty. And as a result, unless the rule is overturned, we Catholics will be compelled either to violate our consciences, or to drop health coverage for our employees (and suffer the penalties for doing so). The Administration’s sole concession was to give our institutions one year to comply.

I stand in unity with Catholic bishops throughout the United States and other religious leaders vowing to fight this mandate. I insist that this is a direct attack on our religious freedom and our First Amendment rights. I will work with the bishops, other religious leaders and our fellow Americans to remove this unjust regulation.

If the administration will not rescind this violation of our First Amendment rights, we must call on our elected leaders to do so. And therefore, I would ask of you two things. **First**, as a community of faith we must commit ourselves to prayer and fasting that wisdom and justice may prevail, and religious liberty may be restored. Without God, we can do nothing; with God, nothing is impossible. **Second**, I would also recommend visiting www.usccb.org/conscience, to learn more about this severe assault on religious liberty, and how to contact our elected representatives to seek a just resolution of this issue.

In the Lord’s Peace,

Most Reverend Robert E. Guglielmo
Bishop of Charleston

Office of the Bishop

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