

January 31, 2012

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

I write to you concerning an alarming and serious matter that negatively impacts people of faith here in the United States and that strikes at the fundamental right to religious liberty for all citizens.

On January 20, 2012, 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 - all of which are in direct violation of our faith. 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 part of their policies. The federal government has dealt a heavy blow to the Catholic population which comprises 25% of the citizenry and to the millions more who are served by the Catholic faithful.

In so ruling, the Administration has cast aside the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, denying to Catholics and other faith-filled people 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.

We cannot - we will not - comply with this unjust law. People of faith cannot be made second class citizens. We are already joined by our brothers and sisters of all faiths and many others of good will in this important effort to regain our religious freedom. Our parents and grandparents did not come to these shores to help build America's cities and towns, its infrastructure and institutions, its enterprise and culture, only to have their posterity stripped of their God-given rights. In generations past, the Church has always been able to count on the faithful to stand up and protect her sacred rights and duties. I hope and trust she can count on this generation of Catholics to do the same. Our children and grandchildren deserve nothing less.

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 Congress in support of legislation that would reverse the Administration's decision.

Devotedly yours in Christ,

+ *George W. Coleman*

Bishop of Fall River