



Office of the Archbishop

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

It is important for you to know that the federal government has just dealt a heavy blow to 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.

By this 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. Unless the rule is overturned, we Catholics will be compelled to violate our consciences or 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 and 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.

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.

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 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.

Thank you for all you do to build the Church and society.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend John G. Vlazny
Archbishop of Portland in Oregon