



Office of the Bishop

DIOCESE OF LITTLE ROCK

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January 25, 2012

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

I write to you concerning an alarming matter that strikes at the fundamental right to religious liberty for all citizens of any faith. The federal government, 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.

Last year the US Department of Health and Human Services issued rules requiring all health care plans to cover sterilization and contraception, including abortifacients. The only Catholics who would qualify for the so-called "*religious exemption*" allowed under these rules would be only those Catholic employers who hire mainly Catholics, serve mainly Catholics and exist mainly to inculcate religious values. All these conditions would have to be met in order to qualify for the exemption. Catholic hospitals would not qualify, not to mention ordinary businesses owned by Catholics. Moreover, there was no conscience protection whatsoever for insurers or individuals with religious or moral objections to being forced to help pay the cost of these abortions and sterilizations. This is a direct attack on religion and our First Amendment rights.

In so ruling, our government 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--what Archbishop Dolan of New York correctly describes as "*a year to figure out how to violate our consciences.*"

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. 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.

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

Sincerely in Christ,

+Anthony B. Taylor
Bishop of Little Rock