

The federal assault on religious freedom

Letter to the faithful by Most Rev. Samuel J. Aquila, Bishop of Fargo

(Read at Masses in the Diocese of Fargo, Jan. 28-29, 2012)

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

I write to you concerning an alarming and serious matter that negatively and directly impacts the Church in the United States, and 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 which includes sterilization, abortion-inducing drugs, and contraception. In addition, almost all health insurers will be *forced* to include those so-called “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).

Catholics 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 grandparents and great-grandparents did not come to these shores – and to the many communities within the Diocese of Fargo – to help build America’s cities and towns, its infrastructure and institutions, its enterprise and culture, only to have their descendants 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. Your children and grandchildren deserve nothing less.

Therefore, I 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. It is critical that we bring this to prayer. Without God, we can do nothing, but with God, *all things are possible*. Second, I would also recommend that you visit www.usccb.org/conscience and www.ndcatholic.org/conscience to learn more about this serious assault on religious liberty, and how to contact Congress in support of legislation that would reverse the Administration’s decision.

I call on every priest and deacon in the Diocese of Fargo to encourage the faithful to join me and the Bishops of the United States in speaking out on this violation of religious freedom and conscience. Every Catholic has the responsibility to promote the dignity of human life and religious freedom. Let us work together to preserve the freedoms our forefathers established in our constitution!

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Samuel J. Aquila
Bishop of Fargo