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My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Allow me this opportunity to share with you important information 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 (HHS) 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. The Church has had to struggle against regulations like those now proposed by HHS in several states. This HHS ruling would expand and intensify a situation which is already very harmful.

In its 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 and must be prepared 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 simply accept this unjust law now proposed at the federal level. 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 trust she can count on this generation of Catholics to do the same. Our children and grandchildren deserve nothing less.

In order that we make every effort to respond to this proposed restriction on religious liberty 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 that you visit the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops website, www.usccb.org/conscience, to learn more about this assault on religious liberty, and how to contact Congress in support of legislation that would reverse the Administration’s decision.

With the assurance of my prayers for you and all your loved ones, I am,

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Archbishop of Boston