



UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

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BISHOPS DECRY HHS RULE, URGE CATHOLICS TO STAND UP FOR RELIGIOUS LIBERTY AND CONSCIENCE RIGHTS IN HOMILIES AT VIGIL FOR LIFE

January 23, 2012

WASHINGTON—Both the president of the U.S. bishops and the bishops' Pro-Life chairman called on the thousands of Catholics gathered for the National Prayer Vigil for Life to speak out for the protection of conscience rights and religious liberty.

"From a human point of view, we may be tempted to surrender, when our government places conception, pregnancy and birth under the 'center for disease control,' when chemically blocking conception or aborting the baby in the womb is considered a 'right' to be subsidized by others who abhor it," said Cardinal-designate Timothy Dolan, archbishop of New York and president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) at the vigil's closing Mass at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception on January 23.

His words referred to the January 20 announcement by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) that nearly all employers will be forced to cover drugs and procedures that violate their conscience in their health insurance plans.

"When the ability of feeding, housing, and healing the struggling of the world is curtailed and impeded if one does not also help women abort their babies, one can hardly be faulted for being tempted to the 'sin against the Holy Spirit' and just consider all as lost," Cardinal-designate Dolan said.

Addressing the opening Mass the previous evening, Cardinal Daniel DiNardo, archbishop of Galveston-Houston and chairman of the USCCB Committee on Pro-Life Activities, excoriated the HHS rule.

"Never before in our US History has the Federal Government forced citizens to directly purchase what violates our beliefs. At issue here as our President of the Conference stated it this past Friday, is the survival of a cornerstone constitutionally protected freedom that ensures respect for conscience and religious liberty," said Cardinal DiNardo.

He cited the January 19 address of Pope Benedict XVI to U.S. bishops visiting Rome, in which the pope said, "it is imperative that the entire Catholic community in the United States come to realize the grave threats to the Church's public moral witness presented by a radical secularism which finds increasing expression in the political and cultural spheres. The seriousness of these threats needs to be appreciated at every level of ecclesial life." Cardinal DiNardo said that the pope had "nailed" the issue in light of the HHS announcement and tied the issue directly to the March for Life. "His calls for courage to counter a reductive secularism which would delegitimize the Church's participation in public life and debate have targeted the issues we face in our pro-life efforts, to defend those who defend human life and to defend their religious liberty!"

The full text of both homilies is available online: www.usccb.org/about/media-relations/resources/2012-national-prayer-vigil-for-life-homilies.cfm

Keywords: National Prayer Vigil for Life, March for Life, Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate

U.S. BISHOPS VOW TO FIGHT HHS EDICT

January 20, 2012

**Unconscionable to force citizens to buy contraceptives against their will
No change in limited exemption, only delay in enforcement
Matter of freedom of conscience, freedom of religion**

WASHINGTON—The Catholic bishops of the United States called "literally unconscionable" a decision by the Obama Administration to continue to demand that sterilization, abortifacients and contraception be included in virtually all health plans. Today's announcement means that this mandate and its very narrow exemption will not change at all; instead there will only be a delay in enforcement against some employers.

"In effect, the president is saying we have a year to figure out how to violate our consciences," said Cardinal-designate Timothy M. Dolan, archbishop of New York and president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

The cardinal-designate continued, "To force American citizens to choose between violating their consciences and forgoing their healthcare is literally unconscionable. It is as much an attack on access to health care as on religious freedom. Historically this represents a challenge and a compromise of our religious liberty."

The HHS rule requires that sterilization and contraception – including controversial abortifacients – be included among "preventive services" coverage in almost every healthcare plan available to Americans. "The government should not force Americans to act as if pregnancy is a disease to be prevented at all costs," added Cardinal-designate Dolan.

At issue, the U.S. bishops and other religious leaders insist, is the survival of a cornerstone constitutionally protected freedom that ensures respect for the conscience of Catholics and all other Americans.

"This is nothing less than a direct attack on religion and First Amendment rights," said Franciscan Sister Jane Marie Klein, chairperson of the board at Franciscan Alliance, Inc., a system of 13 Catholic hospitals. "I have hundreds of employees who will be upset and confused by this edict. I cannot understand it at all."

Daughter of Charity Sister Carol Keehan, president and chief executive officer of the Catholic Health Association of the United States, voiced disappointment with the decision. Catholic hospitals serve one out of six people who seek hospital care annually.

"This was a missed opportunity to be clear on appropriate conscience protection," Sister Keehan said.

Cardinal-designate Dolan urged that the HHS mandate be overturned.

"The Obama administration has now drawn an unprecedented line in the sand," he said. "The Catholic bishops are committed to working with our fellow Americans to reform the law and change this unjust regulation. We will continue to study all the implications of this troubling decision."

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP



February 1, 2012

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

I write to you 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.

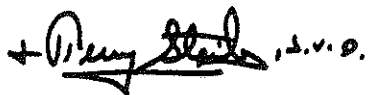
The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services announced last week that almost all employers, including Catholic employers, will be forced to offer their employees' health coverage that includes sterilization, abortion-inducing drugs, and contraception. Almost all health insurers will be forced to 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.

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). The Administration's sole concession was to give our institutions one year to comply.

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.

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.

In the Divine Word,

 + *J. Terry Steib, S.V.D.*

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