



Bishop of Harrisburg

January 27, 2012

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

I write to you concerning an alarming and serious matter that poses the greatest threat to religious liberty in our lifetimes. It negatively impacts the Catholic Church in the United States and strikes at the fundamental right to religious liberty for all citizens of any faith. Our federal government, which claims to be "of, by, and for the people," has 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.

On January 20, just days before the thirty-ninth anniversary of the Roe V Wade decision, the Secretary of the US Department of Health and Human Services announced 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 their health policies. And almost all individuals will be *forced* to buy that coverage as part of their policies. This governmental action is a direct violation of the protections of the First Amendment and the protections given to the Church to engage freely in her mission.

Efforts by the bishops to secure conscience exemptions were disregarded. As a result, unless the rule is overturned, we Catholics will be compelled to either 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 – we will not – comply with this unjust law.

Our opposition to this mandate is not a matter of opposing increased access to healthcare for the poor and needy, for which the Bishops are working. This is an edict directing every citizen to pay for these morally abhorrent services with their tax dollars while ordering the Church, through her institutions, to distribute contraceptives and provide sterilization. It is an unprecedented mandate to violate conscience.

As Americans and people of faith, we cherish our religious liberty and freedom of conscience preserved and protected by the Bill of Rights. As Pennsylvanians, we are conscious of our long history of safeguarding the rights of believers, whether the Amish, Quakers, Jews, and Catholics, just to name some.

Therefore, I am asking that you prayerfully and respectfully make known your objection to this intolerable ruling and insist that your rights of conscience as a Catholic citizen be restored. As a community of faith, we must commit ourselves to prayer and fasting that wisdom and justice may prevail, and religious liberty restored. Please visit www.usccb.org/conscience or www.pacatholic.org 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.

May God bless you for your faith, courage, and resolve.

Sincerely Yours in the Lord,

Most Reverend Joseph P. McFadden
Bishop of Harrisburg

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