



THE DIOCESE OF KALAMAZOO

Office of the Bishop

January 26, 2012

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

I write to you today about a matter of great concern to us as faithful Catholics who also are committed to be good citizens of our great country. What makes our country great is that the United States was born out of a commitment to protect the rights of all its citizens, one of the most cherished of which is the right of religious liberty guaranteed by the First Amendment of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. Sadly, recent events are clearly threatening that basic right.

One week ago, the Federal Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) chose to uphold its mandate to require virtually all private health plans to include coverage for all FDA-approved prescription contraceptives, including abortion-inducing drugs, female sterilization procedures, and related patient education and counseling "for all women with reproductive capacity."

To demand that sterilization, abortifacients and contraception be included in all health plans---including those offered by Catholic institutions and employers---flies in the face of the very basic principle of our Constitution to respect the rights of citizens to not be forced to violate their own conscience.

As Cardinal-elect Timothy M. Dolan, archbishop of New York and president of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops stated: "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."

As faithful Catholics, who are also good citizens, we should be deeply troubled at this alarming disregard for our rights. Unless the rule is overturned, Catholic employers---from parishes to hospitals to universities---will be compelled to either violate our consciences or to drop health coverage for our employees and suffer the penalties for doing so. The ruling's only concession was to give our institutions one year to comply.

I join with my brother bishops of the United States on this weekend, urging you to do three things. First, as a community of faith, we need to recommit ourselves to prayer with the hope that wisdom and justice may prevail, and religious liberty may be restored. Second, I would encourage you to learn more about this severe assault on religious liberty by visiting the USCCB website at www.usccb.org/conscience. Third, please voice your concern by contacting your Congressional representatives in support of legislation that would reverse the Administration's decision.

Asking God to give us the grace and to help each of us to remain strong in our faith and asking God's blessings upon our great country to help it to hold fast to the principles which make us great, I am

Faithfully yours in Christ,

Most Rev. Paul J. Bradley
Bishop of Kalamazoo

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