



Diocese of Duluth

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As many of my brother bishops across the United States have done in their dioceses in recent days, I am writing to you, the faithful of the Diocese of Duluth, concerning an alarming and serious matter that negatively impacts the Church in the United State 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 month that almost all employers, including Catholic employers, will be forced to offer their employees health coverage that includes sterilization, abortion-inducing drugs and contraception. This blatant disregard for our religious values is difficult to reconcile with the Obama Administration's earlier assurance that it would provide "robust" conscience protection for religious groups in health care reform. Almost all health insurers will be forced to include those "services" in the health policies they write. And almost all individuals, including the nearly one quarter of Americans who are Catholic, will be forced to buy that coverage as a part of their policies.

In so ruling, the Administration has assailed the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, denying to Catholics our Nation's first and most fundamental freedom, freedom of religion. Unless this rule is overturned, we 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. As Cardinal-designate Timothy Dolan described it, "In effect, the president is saying we have a year to figure out how to violate our consciences."

This is unacceptable. As my brother bishops have said, we cannot — we will not — comply with this unjust law. "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). People of faith cannot be made second-class citizens. Leaders of Catholic health care organizations and Catholic colleges have joined us in opposing this injustice. And we are already joined by our brothers and sisters of other 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 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. I therefore ask of you two things. First, as the People of God 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, all things are possible. Second, I ask you to visit 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.

I am grateful for your faithfulness and support.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Paul D. Sirba
Bishop of Duluth