DIOCESE OF VENICE IN FLORIDA
OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

January 31, 2012

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

An alarming and serious matter that negatively impacts the Church in the United States directly has arisen, and 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. Further, 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.

We cannot—we will not—comply with this unjust law. People of faith cannot be made second class citizens. Do not be misled by attempts to turn this into a debate about Church teaching or the morality of contraception. The issue here is religious liberty and freedom of conscience.

Already our brothers and sisters of all faiths and many others of good will have joined 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. Future generations deserve nothing less.

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.

I take this opportunity to extend to all of you my continued consideration and prayers. United in prayer and in confidence in God's goodness, I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ Frank J. Dewane

+ Frank J. Dewane
Bishop of the Diocese of
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