



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

DIocese of YOUNGSTOWN

January 31, 2012

Dear Brothers and Sisters 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 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. 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.

Interestingly, even those who may disagree with the Church’s teaching on the sanctity of human life, such as various major national newspapers like *The Washington Post*, have stated that the government has no business forcing religious organizations to sponsor and pay for procedures and drugs which violate their beliefs.

What will happen if the mandate stands? Our Catholic schools, hospitals and charitable organizations will be placed in the untenable position of choosing between violating civil law and abandoning our religious beliefs. For example, the mandate will allow a Catholic institution one of three options: 1) violate its beliefs by providing coverage for medications and procedures we believe are immoral; 2) cease providing health care insurance for all of their employees and face ongoing and ultimately ruinous fines; or 3) attempt to qualify for the exemption by hiring and serving only Catholics.

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Catholics across America are already fighting this unjust mandate. Leaders of major Catholic organizations – such as the Catholic Health Association, Catholic Relief Services and Catholic Charities USA – have spoken out against this ruling. In the meantime, the Bishops' Ad Hoc Committee for Religious Liberty is actively exploring options for litigation and legislative proposals to remedy this injustice.

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 various official Catholic websites like the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops www.usccb.org/conscience, the Catholic Conference of Ohio <http://www.ohiocathconf.org>, and our own Diocese of Youngstown website <http://www.cathdoy.org> 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 ask you to consider writing now to your Congressional Representative and Senator urging them to support the *Respect for Rights of Conscience Act* (H.R. 1179, S. 1467).

Thank you for your attention to this very serious matter.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "G. Murry, S.J.", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Most Reverend George V. Murry, S.J.
Bishop of Youngstown