



To: Pastors, Parish Administrators, and Parish Life Coordinators
From: Robert Tayek, Diocesan Director of Communications
Re: Bishop Letter to be Shared at All Masses (January 28-29, 2012)
Date: 27 January 2012

This message is written on behalf of Most Reverend Richard Lennon, Bishop of Cleveland.

This week the federal government's Department of Health and Human Services issued a mandate which requires religious non-profits to cover sterilization, contraceptive services, and some abortion-inducing drugs as part of their employee healthcare benefits. If implemented, this will have profound ill-effects on the Catholic Church in the United States.

In light of this announcement, Bishop Lennon requests that you kindly copy and distribute his attached letter at all Masses this weekend, January 28-29. The Bishop also requests that his letter be read at all Masses this weekend.

Because of the serious nature of this matter, your cooperation is greatly appreciated.



Diocese
of
Cleveland

Cathedral Square

40/2012
26 January 2012

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

I write to you concerning a serious matter that will negatively impact the Catholic Church in the United States if it is allowed to take effect as planned by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The proposed action of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services strikes at the fundamental right to religious liberty for all citizens of any faith.

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 this rule is overturned, 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. 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 of America 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, all the faithful have witnessed to the importance of the fundamental rights guaranteed by our country's founding documents. I trust that at this moment all of us will stand up for and work for the protection of those rights, especially the right to religious liberty for all America's citizens. Our children and grandchildren deserve nothing less.

Therefore, I ask of you two things. **First**, as a community of faith we must commit ourselves to prayer and fasting that wisdom and justice prevail, and that religious liberty remain a fundamental right for all Americans! Without God, we can do nothing; with God, nothing is impossible. **Second**, I 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.

Thanking you for your understanding and cooperation on this very important request, I
am

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ Richard Lennon

Bishop of Cleveland