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Diocese of Birmingham

February 3, 2012

Dear Brothers and Sisters in the Lord,

As the Catholic bishops in the state of Alabama, we feel compelled to write to you, the Catholics of Alabama and all men and women of good will, because the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has recently announced a new regulation which strikes at a fundamental right of religious liberty.

This federal agency has mandated that by 2013 almost all employers, including Catholic employers, will be forced to offer their employees health coverage that includes medical procedures and drugs which Catholics consider to be immoral – sterilization, abortion-inducing drugs, and contraception. Almost all health insurers will be compelled by the federal government to include those “services” in the health policies that they write. And almost all individuals will be forced to buy that coverage as part of their policies.

Thus, Catholic hospitals, Catholic colleges and universities, Catholic Social Services, and Catholic schools, among other Church ministries, as well as individual Catholics, will be forced to provide morally objectionable and even abortion causing drugs and procedures.

With this regulation, 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. It was not at random that the writers of the Bill of Rights to the Constitution placed religious liberty as the First Freedom of our country. No country which seeks to coerce its citizens to violate their religious consciences will long maintain its liberties.

This action of the federal government will coerce Catholics to act contrary to deeply held moral principles and to provide contraception and sterilization even though we consider this to be morally wrong. This is not about health care but about the federal government’s attempt to weaken religious liberty in our country. We, as people of faith, and as Americans, must call upon our government to fully respect religious freedom.

We cannot, and we will not, comply with this unjust law. People of faith cannot be made second class citizens. We are encouraged that members of all faiths and many other people of good will have joined us in this vital effort to protect religious liberty in our country. Throughout our history as a nation, the Church has always been able to count on its faithful members to stand up

and protect her sacred rights and duties. I pray and trust that she can count on this generation of Catholics to do the same. Our children and grandchildren deserve nothing less.

As you may be aware, the bishops of our area of the country have recently returned from a visit to Rome. Each bishop makes this visit to Rome every five years in order to pray at the tombs of St. Peter and St. Paul, to meet with the members of the various Vatican offices which coordinate the mission of the Church throughout the world, and to meet with the Holy Father in order to discuss with him the Church in our dioceses. While in Rome, we heard about the challenges Catholics in some parts of the world must confront in order to live their faith.

It was painful to return to our own country and to see that religious liberty in our nation is under attack. Although the Administration has given assurances that the freedom of conscience would be respected in our country, these new federal regulations by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services are a clear assault on the freedoms cherished by Americans.

Therefore, we ask of you to do two things: First, as a community of faith, we must pray that wisdom and justice will prevail and that religious liberty will be restored. We ask for prayer and for fasting. Without God, we can do nothing; with God, nothing is impossible. Second, we recommend visiting www.usccb.org/conscience, to learn more about this assault on religious liberty and how to contact Congress in support of legislation that would reverse the Administration's decision.

May God bless each of you, and may God bless our country!

Sincerely in the Lord,

+ Thomas J. Rodi

Most Reverend Thomas J. Rodi, D.D.
Archbishop of Mobile

+ Robert J. Baker

Most Reverend Robert J. Baker, S.T.D.,
Bishop of Birmingham in Alabama