



DIOCESE *of* LACROSSE



OFFICE OF THE
BISHOP

29 January 2012
Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

May the Lord give you peace.

Please allow me a moment to share some news with you concerning an alarming and serious matter that negatively impacts the Church in the United States directly, 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; 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. 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. Our brothers and sisters of all faiths, and many others of good will, already join us in this important effort to safeguard 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.

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I am, therefore, asking three things of you. First, as a community of faith, we must commit ourselves to some extra time of prayer and fasting. I leave that time open to your good judgment and charity. We must pray that wisdom and justice may prevail and religious liberty may be restored. Without God, our efforts will amount to nothing; with God, our faith can move mountains!

Secondly, I encourage you to please visit the Bishops' Conference website at: www.usccb.org/conscience. There you can find a video presentation from Cardinal-designate Timothy Dolan, the Archbishop of New York and the current President of the Conference of Catholic Bishops, concerning the importance of this matter and learn more about this severe assault on religious liberty.

Thirdly, and most significantly, information is available there, and I hope you will use it to contact our representatives in Congress prevailing upon them to support legislation that would reverse the Administration's decision.

Thank you for your kind attention to this letter and for any further support you may offer. Obviously, this is a matter of grave importance for us as Catholics; please remember, it is also a matter of grave importance for us as Americans. God be with you.

Praying for all of your special intentions and the needs of your families, I am

Sincerely yours in Jesus and Mary,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ William Patrick Callahan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend William Patrick Callahan
Bishop of La Crosse