



CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF LEXINGTON

THE CATHOLIC CENTER

Office of the Bishop

February 9, 2012

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

On August 1, 2011, the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) issued an "interim final rule" that requires virtually all private health insurance plans to include coverage for all FDA-approved prescription contraceptives, abortifacients, female sterilization procedures and related "patient education and counseling for all women with reproductive capacity." Despite outcries opposing the regulation, on January 20, 2012, HHS Secretary, Kathleen Sibelius, responded "... We have decided to add an additional element to the final rule (mandating prevention benefits). Nonprofit employers who, based on religious beliefs, do not currently provide contraceptive coverage in their insurance plan, will be provided an additional year, until August 1, 2013 to comply with the new law." The president of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), Cardinal-designate Timothy Dolan captured the significance of this decision most succinctly when he said, "In effect, the president is saying we have a year to figure out how to violate our consciences." This is an unparalleled attack on religious liberty." Fidelity to our religious and moral convictions means that compliance is not an option for us.

I write to you today, as your Bishop and fellow citizen, out of concern generated by this alarming and serious matter. This mandate negatively impacts the Church and its many agencies and institutions. Additionally, according to the USCCB, it provides no protection for "sponsors and providers of health plans for the general public, to pro-life people who own businesses, or to individuals with moral or religious objections to these procedures." In other words, this mandate strikes at the fundamental right to religious liberty for all citizens. While some voices in the public square and some sectors of the media spin this entire issue as primarily a "Catholic" one, we must be clear that this mandate constitutes an unprecedented attack on the First Amendment rights of all citizens. In the American tradition the right of conscience has always been of paramount importance. Never before in our history has the federal government forced citizens to purchase what directly violates their moral, ethical and religious convictions.

Public statements from the Administration have constantly tried to whitewash the truth by putting forth false and cleverly misleading claims. Let us analyze just one of the many specious responses from the White House to critics of the mandate. We are told, "No individual will be forced to buy or use contraception. Women who want contraception will have access to it through their insurance coverage without paying a co-pay or deductible." This is patently deceptive. Women who want contraception will be able to obtain it without cost **precisely because** women and men who object to it will **be forced to pay for it** through their premiums. The ability to think critically and analyze this reality carefully is essential and makes all the difference in the present moment.

We hold that health care is a basic human right. Preventive health benefits are clearly important for promoting health and wellness. Everyone ought to be in favor of screenings for infections, cancers, diabetes, hypertension, HIV, etc. Access to these diagnostic procedures for adults and children without out-of-pocket costs is highly commendable. Every person deserves available, basic, life-affirming health care. The Administration's health care reform was supposed to serve that goal. In truth, this mandate will produce just the opposite effect, as it

pressures organizations to drop their health care coverage for employees because of moral objections to these inclusions.

The contraceptive mandate poses a false alternative firmly established on faulty assumptions. The faulty assumption that promotes the false alternative is precisely that it classifies a healthy pregnancy as a disease in need of prevention. The Catholic Medical Association (CMA) recognizes that defining a pregnancy as “a disease to be prevented” is bad logic, bad medicine, and bad public policy.

In an audience with US Bishops on January 17, 2012, Pope Benedict XVI warned, "It is imperative that the entire Catholic community in the United States come to realize the grave threats to the Church's public moral witness presented by a radical secularism which finds increasing expression in the political and cultural spheres." We must take this wise counsel from our Holy Father to heart and translate it into action. This is not a time to hope that others will act on our behalf or that truth and justice will somehow prevail without our personal involvement.

As faithful citizens committed to protect the precious legacy of our religious liberty, we must be actively engaged in the public arena to reverse this unconstitutional contraceptive mandate. The unified efforts of so many citizens and national organizations in response to the issuance of the “interim final rule” in the Fall of 2011 fell on deaf ears and hardened hearts. It is vital that all peoples of faith and all citizens troubled by this unprecedented attack on religious liberty unite and redouble our efforts to protect and defend our inalienable rights and our freedom of conscience.

As the Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Lexington, I ask three things of you.

First, as a community of faith, we must commit ourselves to **PRAY AND FAST** 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 ask you to **STUDY**. Learn more about this severe assault on religious liberty. I recommend visiting www.usccb.org/conscience to deepen your understanding of the situation. Reflect on the Sacred Scriptures, the teachings of our Church, especially the Catechism of the Catholic Church and our teachings regarding the dignity of the human person and the sacredness and inviolability of human life.

Third, I invite you to **ACT**. As a faithful citizen and a person of religious conviction, contact our elected representatives in the Congress and the Senate. Urge them to support legislation that would reverse the Administration's decision. We must unite and generate support for any legislative acts that would restore respect for the rights of conscience.

Holy Spirit, come and kindle in us the fire of your love. Through our forthright efforts renew the face of the earth.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "+ Ronald W. Gainer". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Ronald W. Gainer
Bishop of Lexington