



Diocese of Worcester  
Office of the Bishop  
49 Elm Street  
Worcester, Massachusetts 01609

February 4-5, 2012

My 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 severe blow to almost a quarter of those people—the Catholic population—and to the millions more who are served by the Catholic Church.

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 care coverage that includes sterilization, abortion inducing drugs and contraception. Almost all health insurers will be forced to include those so-called “services” in the health policies they write. And almost all individuals will be *forced* to buy that coverage as 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 and people of other faiths our Nation’s first and most fundamental freedom, the free exercise of religion. 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 and 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, only to have their descendants 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 that the Church can count on this generation of Catholics to do the same. Our children and grandchildren deserve nothing less.

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 but with God, nothing is impossible. Second, I would also recommend visiting [www.usccb.org/conscience](http://www.usccb.org/conscience), to learn more about this dangerous assault on religious liberty and how you can do something about it by contacting Congress in support of legislation that would reverse the Administration’s decision.

With every prayerful best wish, I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Robert J. McManus  
Bishop of Worcester