



THE DIOCESE OF SPRINGFIELD-CAPE GIRARDEAU

Office
of the
Bishop

January 31, 2012
Feast of Saint John Bosco

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We are facing a grave and unprecedented attack today on the religious freedom we enjoy in the United States. The Obama Administration, through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, has recently imposed a nationwide mandate that health insurance plans cover contraceptives, abortion-inducing drugs, and sterilization procedures.

For over 2,000 years the Catholic Church has taught that abortion, sterilization, and contraception are wrong. In fact, less than 90 years ago, all Christian congregations morally objected to these practices. However, sadly today, and despite the fact that the Church's position has never wavered on these issues, the views of many Catholics on them is no different than those of most non-believers. Perhaps this is why the Obama Administration has chosen this moment in history to try to force the Catholic Church, as well as other communities of faith, to act against basic moral convictions. Given the fact that many of our own people do not subscribe to what the Church teaches, does the Administration assume that most of our faithful will not care? I hope you prove them wrong.

First, I invite you to examine whether you have fairly considered, and are living, the Church's consistent teaching on the moral issues of abortion, contraception, and sterilization. The Catholic Church will never yield in her defense of both the sacredness of human life and the inseparability of the unitive and procreative aspects of conjugal love. This is a moment where each of us will be called to take a stand either for or against the Church. My prayer is that this will be a moment of recommitment, deeper conversion, and reconfirmation of our faith by the Holy Spirit; a period of grace which always accompanies times of difficulty in the life of the Church.

Second, I ask you to take action to prevent the government from punishing us for living what we believe. Many brothers and sisters of varying faiths join us in this important effort, as well as other persons of good will. 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 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.

By this rule, the Obama Administration intends to force the Catholic Church to act against its basic moral convictions. This rule will force Christian employers to offer abortion-inducing drugs in their health plans. By this rule, the Obama Administration casts aside the long-standing respect our government has shown in not forcing churches to act against their religious beliefs.

We cannot—and we will not—comply with this unjust law. I call on all Catholics in

our diocese to act now to seek the immediate reversal of this rule.

Contact President Barack Obama and express your profound disappointment in the new contraceptive and abortion mandate.

Senator Roy Blunt is the sponsor of the Respect for Rights of Conscience Act, which would reverse this mandate. Contact him and thank him for his sponsorship of this bill. Contact Senator Claire McCaskill and request that she co-sponsor this bill.

Contact your U.S. Representative and urge his or her support for the Respect for Rights of Conscience Act in the U.S. House.

If you would like more information on what you can do, visit the Web sites of the diocese and the Missouri Catholic Conference. Through our diocesan newspaper, *The Mirror*, and electronic media, I will keep you up-to-date on this important issue. I also ask that you pray and fast for a reversal of this bad decision.

Devotedly yours in Christ,

+ James V. Johnston, Jr.
Most Reverend James V. Johnston, Jr., D.D., J.C.L.
Bishop of Springfield-Cape Girardeau