



Diocese of Pittsburgh

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Office of the Bishop

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To the Faithful of the Church of Pittsburgh:

In early August, the Department of Health and Human Services released guidelines as part of the ongoing implementation of the Federal Health Care Plan, scheduled for full implementation in 2014. These guidelines—called the “Preventative Services Mandate”—are scheduled to go into effect on August 1, 2012. They would require that all individual and group health insurance plans, including self-insured plans, cover all FDA-approved contraception and sterilization procedures. Once again, a mandate is a requirement. No options are allowed.

This mandate would apply in virtually every instance where the Catholic Church serves as an employer, requiring the Catholic Church to violate its own beliefs by forcing Catholic entities to provide contraceptive and sterilization coverage.

The mandate contains a so-called “religious exemption.” But the exemption would not apply to the vast array of Catholic institutions where:

- non-Catholics are employed;
- the direct instruction in Catholic beliefs is not the primary purpose;
- the persons served do not share our Catholic faith.
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Practically speaking, under this proposed mandate, there would be no “religious exemption” for Catholic hospitals, universities, colleges, nursing homes and Catholic social service agencies. Just as an example, our own diocesan Catholic Charities—which served 81,000 people last year—would be forced under this mandate to restrict its services and employment only to Catholics or to violate Catholic teaching. Or cease to exist. We certainly cannot compromise our beliefs. The government has no right to tell us that we can or cannot practice our faith.

As I stated in my letter to Kathleen Sebelius, Secretary for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, this mandate is an attack on Catholic beliefs and on the religious liberty of Catholics to adhere to their beliefs as they serve the community in which they live.

The window of time to “weigh in” on this issue is narrow. Any public comments will only be received up to September 30, 2011. I am asking you today to write to Secretary Sebelius asking her to rescind the “Preventative Services Mandate.” Her address is in this week’s *Pittsburgh Catholic*, along with a sample letter that you might consider using. Addresses of our federal representatives are also published in the *Pittsburgh Catholic* and I ask you to share your letter to Secretary Sebelius with them. All the material is also available on our diocesan website (www.diopitt.org) under the Diocesan Legislative Advocacy on the home page.

There come moments when we must defend the rights of our faith and do so publicly. This is one of those moments. Our Constitution gives us that right. This issue is one which necessitates our acting on that right. This issue is dangerous because, if the mandate goes into effect, our freedom to practice our faith freely is in jeopardy.

Grateful for our belief that “Nothing is Impossible with God,” I am

Your brother in Christ,

+ *David A. Zubik*

Most Reverend David A. Zubik
Bishop of Pittsburgh

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