



OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

ARCHDIOECESIS OF DETROIT  
1234 WASHINGTON BOULEVARD  
DETROIT, MICHIGAN 48226

6 February 2012

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I write to you concerning an alarming and serious threat to religious liberty in the United States. Under the First Amendment to the Constitution, we should be left free to love God according to our conscience. The government should not force us to choose between violating our consciences or violating the law. And yet, the federal government has just dealt a heavy blow to the fundamental right to religious liberty for all citizens of any faith.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services announced last month that almost all employers, *including Catholic and other religious 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. The Administration’s sole concession was to give our institutions one year to comply.

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). Shockingly, the Administration has adopted a definition of religion so narrow that it would force us to *only* offer charity to those who are Catholic. Under the Administration’s logic, we would have to ask people for their baptismal certificate before we allow them to enter one of our soup kitchens. Surely, one could not claim that Mother Teresa was engaging in religion only when she was in the chapel and not when she reached out to others in whom she saw the face of Christ. Yet, this is the meaning of the Administration’s definition of religion.

We cannot—we will not—comply with this unjust law. This is not just a “Catholic” issue. Rather, this decision affects religious believers of all traditions. 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. 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 call upon this generation of the faithful of the Archdiocese of Detroit to do the same. Our children and grandchildren deserve nothing less.

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. Second, I would also recommend visiting the website [www.usccb.org/conscience](http://www.usccb.org/conscience), to learn more about this issue and how to contact Congress in support of legislation that would reverse the Administration’s decision.

America is a better place when we are free to love God. Please join with me in ensuring that this assault on religious liberty is overturned. Asking God’s blessings upon you through the intercession of our patroness Saint Anne, I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ,

The Most Reverend Allen H. Vigneron  
Archbishop of Detroit