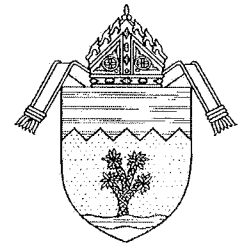


Diocese of Reno

Nevada Catholic Conference



Diocese of Las Vegas

February 3, 2012

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Religious liberty is one of the freedoms we cherish as Americans. The First Amendment of the United States Constitution states that government shall not make any law prohibiting the free exercise of religion. We, the bishops of Nevada, bring to your attention a recent, alarming matter that seriously infringes on this freedom.

On January 20, 2012, the United States Department of Health and Human Services issued a new federal mandate requiring virtually all employers, including faith-based institutions, to provide insurance coverage for abortion-inducing drugs, sterilization and contraceptives. There is an exemption for churches but so narrowly framed that almost all Catholic institutions will have to pay for the coverage. The exemption applies, for all practical purposes, only if our schools, hospitals and charitable agencies hire only Catholics and serve only Catholics. As you well know, many of our institutions serve non-Catholics. For example, Catholic Charities here in our state and throughout the nation provide food, shelter and other essential services for millions of people who are not Catholic.

The issue comes down to this: through this new regulation the federal government requires the Catholic Church to spend its money in a way that forces it to violate its religious principles. In effect, it restricts our free exercise of religion.

What are the effects of this regulation? First to abide by the law would lead us to violate our moral teachings. To ignore the law would place us in violation of this Federal regulation and make us subject to fines or other consequences. To act within the narrow religious exemption would remove us from our mission to serve people who are in need and count on the social safety net we provide. None of these is acceptable for people of faith in a nation that has freedom as the hallmark of its identity. Where else will this regulation lead?

What we are asking you is to help in defending a fundamental freedom. Write or call your senator or representative in Congress. Write to the president. Share this concern with other Catholics or anyone who cherishes the freedoms upon which our nation was founded. We will suggest other action to take in the near future.

We thank you for your attention. Let us pray for one another and let us pray for our nation.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Randolph R. Calvo
Bishop of Reno

Most Reverend Joseph A. Pepe
Bishop of Las Vegas