



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

DIOCESE OF LAFAYETTE
P. O. BOX 3387
LAFAYETTE, LOUISIANA 70502-3387
TELEPHONE: 337-261-5614 FAX: 337-261-5603

February 6, 2012

My Dear People:

I write to you on a matter of grave importance for Catholics in the United States. On January 21, 2012, the United States Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services announced a ruling that almost all employers, including Catholic employers, will be forced to offer health insurance coverage which includes sterilization, abortion-inducing drugs and contraception. Institutions have a year to comply with this rule. Almost all insurers will be forced to include these services in their health insurance policies. The counter argument is that the rule contains a religious exemption. However, the exception is so narrowly defined that many of our Catholic colleges, hospitals and charity agencies would be forced to comply.

While in Rome for our *ad limina* visit with our Holy Father, Archbishop Gregory Aymond of New Orleans wrote a letter to all of the dioceses in Louisiana. I join my voice to his and those of my brother bishops in the United States to vigorously protest this governmental action as a violation of the protections of the First Amendment of the Constitution. Allowing the government to crack the armor of protection for the free exercise of religion in the United States would set a dangerous precedent with far reaching consequences. Efforts by the bishops to secure conscientious exemptions were disregarded. This is the type of radical secularism consistently condemned by our Holy Father.

The Church's teaching against early abortion is based on respect for all human life, male and female. Its teachings against contraception and sterilization are based on respect for the power to help generate a new human life, a power held by both men and women.

I therefore ask you to contact Congress in support of legislation which would reverse the administration's decision. Please visit the www.usccb.org/conscience website to learn more about this assault on our religious liberty and to learn how to contact your appropriate representative. I also ask you to pray and fast to change the hearts of decision makers. May Almighty God confirm us in faith and fortitude to do what is right.

With prayers for your good health and for all of God's blessings, I am

Sincerely yours in Our Lord,

+ *Michael Jarrell*

Most Reverend Michael Jarrell
Bishop of Lafayette

MJ:mhb

PLEASE READ THIS LETTER AT ALL MASSES OR PLACE IT IN THE PARISH BULLETIN AT YOUR EARLIEST CONVENIENCE.