



Archdiocese of Philadelphia
Office of the Archbishop
222 North 17th Street
Philadelphia, PA 19103-1299

**IMPORTANT: KINDLY READ AT ALL MASSES
THE WEEKEND OF FEBRUARY 4-5 AND POST PUBLICLY FOR PARISHIONERS**

February 1, 2012

Dear friends in Christ,

The United States Department of Health and Human Services announced on January 20 that almost all employers, including Catholic 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.

In so ruling, the current Administration has undermined both the principle of religious conscience and the First Amendment to the Constitution in an unprecedented way. Unless the ruling is overturned, faithful Catholics will be forced either to violate our consciences, or to drop health coverage for our employees and suffer the penalties for doing so. The Administration’s only concession was to give our institutions a one-year delay to comply. This is not merely inadequate. It is dangerous. And it betrays the good faith of many Catholics who -- until now -- have supported the current Administration with an honest will.

Bishops and lay Catholic leaders across the United States have made it clear that we cannot comply with this unjust law without compromising our convictions and undermining the Catholic identity of many of our service ministries. This is not just another important issue among the many we need to be concerned about. This ruling is different. This ruling interferes with the basic right of Catholic citizens to organize and work for the common good *as Catholics* in the public square.

Today, I ask of you two things. First, we need to pray for our country, for our Church, and for our own right to work freely as a believing community through our ministries in the public square. Second, we need to act. Please visit the Pennsylvania Catholic Conference website at www.pacatholic.org to learn how to contact your federal Representative and Senators. Write them, call them, visit them -- and help them understand the deep resistance of Pennsylvania Catholics to this dangerous ruling. Please also visit www.usccb.org/conscience, to learn more about this attack on religious conscience, and how to work to reverse the Administration’s decision.

Your action on this issue *matters* -- not just today but for many years to come; and in ways that will shape the ability of the Church to witness the Gospel publicly through her ministries well into the future. Please know that you have my gratitude and daily prayers. And please remember me in your prayers as well.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ *Charles J. Chaput, ofc. ep.*

Most Reverend Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap.
Archbishop of Philadelphia