



THE ARCHDIOCESE OF SAN FRANCISCO

OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

ONE PETER YORKE WAY, SAN FRANCISCO CA 94109-6602 • PHONE (415) 614-5500

February 6, 2012

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

I write to you concerning an alarming and serious matter that negatively impacts the Church in the United States directly, and that strikes at the fundamental right to religious liberty for all citizens of any faith.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services promulgated a new and radical interpretation of religious freedom last week when it announced new regulations regarding health insurance coverage of reproductive services which will be mandatory for employers in the United States.

For the first time in federal law, the government has determined that religious institutions such as Catholic hospitals, Catholic Charities and Catholic Relief Services are not truly religious employers because they do not have as their primary purpose "the inculcation of religious values" and do not primarily limit their services to those of their own faith.

In other words, the religious activities of our Catholic hospitals, our social services to the poor, and our outreach to the hurting and the marginalized in our society are not truly religious activities protected by the first amendment because they enshrine the Catholic belief -- shared by virtually every religious community in the United States -- that religious communities are called to reach out to feed the poor, shelter the homeless, and heal the sick precisely as a religious activity.

The implications of this insidious new legal and policy principle, if allowed to stand, are chilling. Once it is accepted that religious institutions that serve the poor, the sick and the elderly do not enjoy the full protections of religious liberty, future administrations could compel religious hospitals and service organization to pay for insurance and other policies that mandate abortion or euthanasia. In addition, such a principle would likely create crises of conscience for religious institutions of virtually every faith, so that over time they would be forced out of the mainstream of the social fabric.



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We cannot - we will not - accept this unjust redrafting of the principle of religious liberty which our Founders so rightly saw as an inalienable gift of God. People of faith cannot be made second class citizens. And faith based service to those in need in our society cannot be classified as non-religious by our national government. We are already joined by our brothers and sisters of many other faiths as well as others of good will in this important effort to regain our religious freedom. Indeed, many journalists across the political spectrum, both supporters and opponents of the present administration, have called for a reversal of this policy.

Therefore, I ask for your help. Please email or write the White House and your representative in congress to call for a reversal of this new regulation. The addresses are listed below. Finally, please join me in prayer for our Church and for the wider religious community engaged in this struggle.

May God bless you and your family, and keep you always in His loving care.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend George Niederauer
Archbishop of San Francisco
