



**Statement from
Most Reverend Paul J. Swain
Bishop of Sioux Falls
February 2, 2012**

**On the US Department of Health & Human Services' announced mandate
requiring employers to offer health insurance coverage for artificial contraception,
sterilization and abortion-inducing pharmacotherapy**

Several weeks ago Pope Benedict XVI addressed a group of Bishops from the United States and offered these troublesome words:

“ . . . It is imperative that the entire Catholic community in the United States come to realize the grave threats to the Church’s public moral witness presented by a radical secularism which finds increasing expression in the political and cultural spheres. The seriousness of these threats needs to be clearly appreciated at every level of ecclesial life. Of particular concern are certain attempts being made to limit that most cherished of American freedoms, the freedom of religion. Many of you have pointed out that concerted efforts have been made to deny the right of conscientious objection on the part of Catholic individuals and institutions with regard to cooperation in intrinsically evil practices. Others have spoken to me of a worrying tendency to reduce religious freedom to mere freedom of worship without guarantees of respect for freedom of conscience.”

The following day, the grave reality of His Holiness’ warning became evident when the United States Department of Health and Human Services issued a regulation that will effectively require all Catholic institutions that provide health insurance for their employees to subsidize and provide coverage for abortion-inducing drugs, sterilization and contraceptives, all contrary to Church teachings. In the past when federal regulations have been issued that violate one’s religious beliefs, an exception based on conscience was included. Despite numerous requests to continue this tradition fundamental to our nation, the current administration, with authorization from Congress, has chosen to break historical precedent by departing from one of the core ambitions that led to our nation’s founding. Indeed the principle of freedom of conscience was

trivialized further by the Department when it offered an exemption to delay implementation of the new mandate for one year, which Cardinal-elect Timothy Dolan correctly noted was suggesting that “you have a year to figure out how to violate your consciences.” Therefore Catholic health care, educational and other institutions and organizations, including in South Dakota, are being asked to choose to violate the Church’s moral teachings or to not provide health care insurance to employees as the Church’s social teaching calls us to do. Neither is acceptable.

Concerned that this mandate and other threats to religious freedom might soon be enacted, the Bishops of the United States at their November meeting put into place the structure to energetically defend all attempts to contravene the First Amendment to the US Constitution that protects freedom of religion and its free exercise. Those efforts will now be invigorated.

With this letter, I ask that Catholics in the Diocese of Sioux Falls pray and fast for a reversal of this ill-conceived and offensive regulation. I also urge Catholics to contact Senators Johnson and Thune and Representative Noem to urge Congressional action in support of religious liberty and to protect our freedom of conscience.

The Catholic Church is respectful of the essential role of government. However we cannot compromise on core, moral principles, nor surrender the right to freedom of religion and conscience, nor give way under the heavy hand of the inappropriate exercise of government power. This moment reminds me of the wise words of St. Thomas More, who also confronted the improper exercise of governmental authority and was martyred for exercising his conscience. He declared that he was “the king’s good servant but God’s first.” So must we be the government’s good citizen but God’s servant first.