

February 11, 2012

Dear Fathers,

In the interest of informing our Catholic people about the government's plan for health care, in particular the mandate from Health and Human Services requiring sterilization and contraception, including abortion-inducing drugs, be offered free-of-charge, I would ask that you read the following statement to the faithful gathered for Holy Mass this weekend or next:

On Friday, February 10, in response to concerns that the recent Health and Human Services mandate tramples on religious liberty and conscience protection, the President announced some changes to the plan.

After reviewing the proposed changes, the leadership of the *United States Conference of Bishops* responded that there are still some serious unanswered questions, as well as serious reasons to oppose the infamous mandate.

The serious questions include how the changes will affect Catholic insurance companies and self-insured plans, such as the Diocese of Wichita, as now the insurance issuer will be required to offer sterilization and contraception, including abortion-inducing drugs, regardless of an objection in conscience.

There are serious reasons to oppose the mandate, for even if a religious employer is not required to insure services it regards as morally-objectionable, an employee can request coverage for them, which the insurer must provide as part of the religious employer's plan at no extra cost to the employee (the employer will likely end up paying for the services through higher premiums). Also, the government is taking it upon itself to define who is religious enough for conscience protection.

In short, even with the President's changes, the mandate still tramples on religious liberty and conscience protection, and so we must continue to work for its repeal.

The Bishops' Conference will continue to study the President's proposal in order to provide further guidance. In the meantime, the Catholic faithful are asked to keep praying for an acceptable resolution to this dilemma, and to insist that elected officials pass and that the President sign the Respect for Rights of Conscience Act.

On this, the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, let us beg Mary's intercession for the protection of human life and dignity in our nation, especially that the conception of a child not be seen as a disease to be prevented.

Confident of your concern and prayers, I am

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Michael O. Jackels
Bishop of Wichita