

**BISHOP ZUBIK CALLS HHS CONTRACEPTION AND STERILIZATION
MANDATE AN ‘ATTACK ON THE RELIGIOUS LIBERTY OF CATHOLICS’**

Pittsburgh—In a letter to federal and state government officials, Bishop David A. Zubik called recently released federal guidelines mandating that health insurance plans cover contraception and sterilization procedures “an attack on Catholic beliefs and the religious liberty of Catholics to adhere to their beliefs.”

The guidelines were released in early August by the Department for Health and Human Services and will become effective on August 1, 2012. The guidelines mandate that all individual and group health insurance plans cover all FDA-approved contraception and sterilization procedures.

“This mandate would apply in virtually every instance where the Catholic Church serves as an employer, requiring the Catholic Church to violate its own tenets by forcing Catholic entities to provide contraception and sterilization coverage,” Bishop Zubik wrote.

His letter was sent to Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius, Pennsylvania Senators Pat Toomey and Bob Casey and regional federal congressional representatives Jason Altmire, Mark Critz, Mike Doyle, Mike Kelly and Timothy Murphy. He also wrote to Governor Tom Corbett and regional Pennsylvania House and Senate representatives asking their assistance.

Noting that the mandate contains a “religious exemption,” Bishop Zubik explained that the “exemption is so narrowly drawn that it is unprecedented in federal law. “The so-called ‘religious exemption’ would not apply to the vast array of Catholic institutions where non-Catholics are employed, the direct instruction in Catholic beliefs is not the primary purpose, (or) the persons served do not share Catholic religious tenets,” Bishop Zubik stated.

“Practically speaking,” Bishop Zubik wrote, “under this proposed mandate there would be no ‘religious exemption’ for Catholic hospitals, universities, colleges, nursing homes and Catholic social service agencies.” Bishop Zubik wrote that “this mandate is an attack on Catholic beliefs and on the religious liberty of Catholics to adhere to their beliefs as they serve the community in which they live.”

Bishop Zubik cited the example of Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Pittsburgh that served over 81,000 people last year “without regard to the religious beliefs—or non-belief—of those it served.” “Under this mandate,” Bishop Zubik wrote, “Catholic Charities of Pittsburgh would either be forced to cease to exist, or to restrict its employees and its wide-ranging social services to practicing Catholics alone.”

“In the past,” Bishop Zubik wrote, “it was only asked that we serve everyone. Today, the proposed federal mandate would have the government telling us what we must believe as well.” Bishop Zubik called on Secretary Sebelius to “rescind the ‘Preventive Services Mandate’ because it is an unprecedented federal interference in the religious liberty and freedom of conscience of the Catholic community.”

Our bishop has asked all priests to consider putting this information as an insert in our Sunday bulletins as we are doing here at North American Martyrs Parish. He urges us all to write to Secretary Sebelius soon since the public comment period on the guidelines ends September 30th. To express your concern, please write to:

Kathleen Sebelius, Secretary
U.S. Department for Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

The following is a sample letter:

Dear Secretary Sebelius:

In early August, the Department for Health and Human Services released guidelines that would force Catholic institutions to subsidize through their health care plans contraception and sterilization procedures.

This is a direct threat to the religious liberty of Catholics, freedom of conscience and the social service ministry of the Catholic Church. The so-called “religious exemption” in the mandate is no exemption at all as it would require any Catholic institution that serves non-Catholics or employs non-Catholics to violate Catholic belief or close its doors.

I ask that you do all possible to rescind the “Preventive Service Mandate” as an unprecedented federal interference in the right of Catholics to serve their community without violating their fundamental moral beliefs.

Sincerely,
(your name)