



DIOCESE OF JUNEAU, ALASKA
OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

LETTER FROM BISHOP BURNS TO BE READ AT ALL THE MASSES ON
JANUARY 28-29, 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 federal government, which claims to be “of, by, and for the people,” has just dealt a heavy blow to almost a quarter of those people—the Catholic population—and to the millions more who are served by the Catholic faithful.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services announced last week 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. On September 28, 2011 I signed a letter with the other two Catholic Bishops in Alaska asking the Department of Health and Human Services that this not take place.

Nevertheless, with this ruling, the Administration has cast aside the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, denying to Catholics our Nation’s first and most fundamental freedom, that of religious liberty. And as a result, unless the rule is overturned, we Catholics will be compelled either to violate our consciences, or to drop health coverage for our employees (and suffer the penalties for doing so). The Administration’s sole concession was to give our institutions one year to comply.

The Church cannot comply with this unjust law. People of faith cannot be made second class citizens. We are already joined by our brothers and sisters of all faiths and many others of good will in this important effort to regain our religious freedom. Our parents and grandparents did not come to these shores to help build America’s cities and towns, its infrastructure and institutions, its enterprise and culture, only to have their posterity stripped of their God given rights. In generations past, the Church has always been able to count on the faithful to stand up and protect her sacred rights and duties. I hope and trust she can count on this generation of Catholics to do the same. Our children and grandchildren deserve nothing less.

And therefore, I would ask of you two things. First, as a community of faith we must commit ourselves to prayer and fasting that wisdom and justice may prevail, and religious liberty may be restored. Without God, we can do nothing; with God, nothing is impossible. Second, I would also recommend contacting Congressman Young and Senators Begich and Murkowski asking them to support legislation that would reverse the Administration's decision. This can also be done by visiting www.usccb.org/conscience . This website is also a place to learn more about this severe assault on religious liberty, and how we should work together on this matter.

All bishops of the country have been asked to have a letter similar to this read at all the Masses this weekend. I am grateful for your attention to this important matter of conscience. May the Lord continue to bless us as we seek to live the Gospel of Life in our society.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Edward J. Burns". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Edward J. Burns
Bishop of Juneau