



DIOCESE OF FORT WORTH

DIOCESE OF DALLAS



North Texas Catholic Bishops Call for First Amendment to be Upheld in Latest HHS Ruling

Bishops Kevin Vann and Kevin Farrell, bishops of the Catholic Dioceses of Fort Worth and Dallas, respectively, as well as Dallas Auxiliary Bishops Douglas Deshotel and Mark Seitz, join Catholic bishops from throughout the United States in strongly calling for Congress to uphold the First Amendment of the U. S. Constitution in regard to the latest U.S. Department of Health and Human Services rule that would force religious organizations to provide sterilizations, contraceptives and abortion-inducing drugs as part of their health plans.

The Dioceses of Fort Worth and Dallas are among the fastest growing Catholic dioceses in the country, with a current population of 710,000 Catholics in the Fort Worth Diocese alone.

The joint statement of Bishops Vann, Farrell, Deshotel and Seitz is:

The United States is a nation founded on the principle of life, liberty and justice for all and throughout the history of this great nation, the religious communities and those in posts of civil authority have recognized that free practice of religious beliefs are foundational to our country. The First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution states, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” But in recent days the latest salvo in the attack on religious freedom was fired by the Obama Administration and, sadly, by Secretary of Health and Human Services Kathleen Sebelius, a Catholic. On Friday, Secretary Sebelius announced the Administration’s decision to mandate the inclusion of particular health services in insurance coverage which would result in Catholic institutions having to provide coverage that violates Catholic Church teaching and, therefore, Catholic conscience.

The HHS ruling requires that sterilization and contraception, including controversial abortifacients, be among the “preventive services” coverage in almost every healthcare plan available to Americans, including health plans offered by religious organizations.

The one-year concession allowed to implement these provisions is, as Cardinal-designate Timothy M. Dolan, president of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops said, “a one-year period to violate our consciences.” Cardinal Roger Mahony, retired archbishop of Los Angeles, says this is a “full frontal attack” on religious freedom.

As the shepherds for nearly 2 million Catholics in North Texas, we cannot stand by silently.

This decision is outrageous. It is an unprecedented and untenable abrogation of religious freedom in the United States. This ruling, upon its implementation, would force Catholic institutions--hospitals, schools, social service agencies to either violate the fundamental tenets of their faith or stop offering health insurance coverage to their employees, students, and clients.

This is part of a pattern in the United States that has degenerated from the recognition of religion as good and salutary in our society to religion being subjected to punitive discrimination.

We ask that the Catholics of North Texas, and other people of good will, join us by speaking out for the protection of conscience rights and religious liberty that are essential to the common good of our nation and in keeping with the basic human rights enshrined in our American way of life. We ask our civil authorities at all levels of government to “reform the law and change this unjust regulation,” as Cardinal-designate Dolan said after the ruling.

The Catholic Dioceses of Dallas and Fort Worth, just as every religious organization in the United States, must be allowed to follow the fundamental tenets of their faith in all aspects of life without unwarranted government interference as is guaranteed by the United States Constitution.