



Iowa Catholic Conference
530-42nd St.
Des Moines, IA 50312
Phone 515-243-6256

March 20, 2012

Fellow Catholics in Iowa:

As the Catholic bishops of Iowa, we are strongly united in our ongoing efforts to protect religious freedom. Regrettably, a Health and Human Services mandate announced last year will require many Catholic and other religious institutions to cover medical services that are in opposition to their religious beliefs. The president's announced accommodation still makes an unacceptable distinction between our houses of worship and our ministries, and still requires all non-exempt employers to facilitate the objectionable coverage.

The mandate represents government coercion of religious people and groups to violate their most deeply held convictions. We believe this dispute is not about access to contraceptives but about the government's forcing the Church to provide them. At a minimum, any federal regulation should fully respect religious freedom and freedom of conscience as enshrined in our Constitution and in particular, the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights.

During this time of Lent, as a community of faith let us commit ourselves to prayer and action. As you know, during the Fridays of Lent, the faithful are obliged to abstain from eating meat. Recognizing the necessity of our dependence on God, we, the Bishops of Iowa, request that all Catholics dedicate the regular Lenten Friday practice of prayer and abstinence as well as the practice of fasting on **Friday, March 30**, to the preservation of religious liberty. Pray for your Church and political leaders that together we can find a solution that respects our respective roles in society.

Please watch www.usccb.org/conscience and www.iowacatholicconference.org for updated information.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Rev. Jerome Hanus, OSB
Archbishop of Dubuque

+ R. Walker Nickless

Most Rev. R. Walker Nickless
Bishop of Sioux City

+ Martin Amos

Most Rev. Martin Amos
Bishop of Davenport

+ Richard Pates

Most Rev. Richard Pates
Bishop of Des Moines