



Catholic Diocese of Fort Worth Statement Regarding Religious Freedom Lawsuit

On Monday, May 21, 2012 Bishop Kevin W. Vann announced that the Catholic Diocese of Fort Worth filed suit in Fort Worth federal court seeking to halt unprecedented attacks by various federal agencies on religious freedom.

The Diocese is asking a federal judge to bar federal agencies from formulating and enforcing the nationwide mandate that requires religious institutions to facilitate and fund activities that their religious and moral convictions forbid.

The suit is against the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and Secretary Kathleen Sebelius, the U.S. Department of Labor and Secretary Hilda Solis and the U.S. Department of Treasury and Secretary Timothy Geithner. Despite long and continuing objections by the Catholic Church of the United States and various other religious organizations, federal agencies continue to interfere with the religious beliefs of the Church.

Bishop Vann said the issue is an attack on religious freedom in the form of a Department of Health and Human Service (HHS) mandate that requires all employers to provide health plans to employees that cover abortion-inducing drugs, sterilization and contraceptives. The mandate contains a very narrow exception for certain organizations that the government deems sufficiently “religious.”

These actions by the federal government violate the fundamental rights that our forefather articulated in the First Amendment of the United States Constitution.

“In effect,” Bishop Vann said, “the mandate’s definition of religion prohibits Catholics in the Diocese of Fort Worth from asking what we have asked since the first Catholic institution was created in the Fort Worth area in 1876 ‘Are you poor?’ ‘Are you hungry?’ ‘Do you need help?’ Now the definition of religion used in the mandate would require us to ask, ‘Are you Catholic?’ To remain a religious institution under this definition, we could only help if you are Catholic. If you are not, now we cannot help you.”

The Diocese’s lawsuit is in keeping with the longstanding rights of freedom of religion. In addition to our forefathers’ conviction on this, the Second Vatican Council issued a decree *Dignitatis Humanae* on religious freedom. In this decree, the Council states:

This Vatican Council declares that the human person has a right to religious freedom. This freedom means that all men are to be immune from coercion on the part of individuals or of social groups and of any human power, in such wise that no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits. The council further declares that the right to religious freedom has its foundation in the very dignity of the human person as this dignity is known through the revealed word of God and by reason itself. This right of the human person to

religious freedom is to be recognized in the constitutional law whereby society is governed and thus it is to become a civil right. (2)

The Diocese's lawsuit is about whether the federal government may force religious intuitions and individuals to facilitate and fund services which violate their religious beliefs.

The Catholic Diocese of Fort Worth is comprised of 28 North Texas counties stretching from Central Texas to the Red River. More than 710,000 Catholics reside in the area. The Diocese has 89 parishes or missions and 20 Catholic schools with 6,500 students, including many non-Catholics. Catholic Charities of Fort Worth, which serves the same region, is one of leading social services agencies that minister to people of all races and religion.

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