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Bishop of Lubbock

A Statement on Contacting Congress about Health Care Reform **November 5, 2009**

As Bishop of Lubbock, I am the pastor of a local church that extends throughout 25 West Texas counties, from Seminole to Paducah and from Muleshoe to Anson. Centered in Lubbock, this church includes 62 parishes and more than 80,000 parishioners.

Because I am the bishop, I have an apostolic mandate to serve this diocese as the church's principal prophet, priest, and pastor – making certain this church teaches the eternal truth revealed in God's Holy Word; seeing to it that the church is sanctified in grace through authentic sacramental encounters with our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ; and providing for compassionate Christian service to the needy and wounded people in our midst.

With this in mind, I announce today an unprecedented appeal to all Catholics on the Llano Estacado and Low Rolling Plains of West Texas. I am asking my pastors and lay leaders to mobilize our Catholic faithful on an urgent matter of public policy concerning the fundamental and foundational human rights to life, dignity, and freedom of conscience.

I also invite the pastors of other churches, the leaders of other religious congregations, and all people of good will to join us in this effort at contacting our Senators and Members of Congress so we might, together, voice a plea that health care reform legislation includes protection for the unborn and the vulnerable, preserves freedom of conscience, and offers coverage that is affordable as well as accessible to all who live in this highly blessed country.

For many years, the U.S. bishops have explicitly supported decent health care for all, based on our teaching that health care is essential for human life and dignity and on our community's experience in providing health care and assisting those without coverage. These moral principles lead us to work for four priorities in health care reform; namely:

NO ABORTION FUNDING OR MANDATES

Health care reform must maintain longstanding policies that forbid abortion funding and reject any abortion coverage mandates.

A 'CONSCIENCE CLAUSE'

The new legislation must continue providing the "conscience clause" that protects health care workers who refuse to participate in abortions or sterilizations.

AFFORDABILITY

Health care reform must be truly affordable for lower income households as well as for families dealing with catastrophic or chronic illnesses.

AND, IMMIGRANT CARE

The new legislation must provide equity for immigrants in access to health care, including some kind of "safety net" for the undocumented.

If Congress fails to implement these changes, all conscientious Catholics will be called upon to work *against* passage of the health care reform legislation, even though it's sorely needed. Health care reform must be about the common good and *saving* lives, not *destroying* them.

We pray that Congress will act to ensure that needed health care reform will truly protect the life and dignity of all, provide affordable options, protect the most vulnerable members of our society, and preserve our freedom of conscience. Thank you and may God bless America.