



March 11, 2010

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Late last year, the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate passed differing versions of legislation intended to reform our nation's health care system. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) continues to insist that any measure must maintain the longstanding policy against federal funding of abortion, include full conscience protection, and assure that health care is accessible and affordable for all.

Catholic teaching tells us that our support for the dignity of life includes access to affordable health care. This support, however, cannot come at the expense of the respect for life at all stages, from natural conception to natural death.

As negotiations that are now underway could lead to further Congressional action very soon, in accord with Canon 1244, paragraph 2, **I invite you to take part in a day of prayer and fasting on Monday, March 15 for protecting the life, dignity, health and conscience rights of every human person in any legislation that Congress considers.** I also invite Catholics to pray and fast for this intention beyond March 15.

In moments of concern and crisis, Catholic tradition through the centuries has unfailingly urged the faithful to turn to the spiritual aids of prayer and fasting in order to draw closer to our Lord and His will. Through these deliberate actions, we communicate a desire to avoid sin and unify ourselves with that which is right and good. I firmly believe that, working together while open to God's wisdom, the citizens of our nation can respect the dignity of each human person both in law and in practice.

Although the law of fasting binds persons age 18 through 59, anyone can voluntarily fast. Fasting allows a person to eat one full meal as well as two smaller meals, which are not to equal one full meal. In addition, I ask you to consider offering a Rosary, prayers at Mass, time spent in Eucharistic Adoration or other forms of prayer for this important intention. Through our fasting and prayers, we ask the Lord to lead the hearts and minds of our nation's leaders as they make crucial decisions concerning the protection of life.

Due to the uncertainty surrounding Congressional negotiations and the speed at which these discussions could be resolved, electronic media will be the most effective way to keep up with – and take action upon – any legislation. The Virginia Catholic Conference e-mail network will keep parishioners and priests apprised of any further updates on the issue of health care. Please visit www.vacatholic.org to join the e-mail network or to contact your members of Congress via the USCCB action alert.

Faithfully in Christ,

Most Reverend Paul S. Loverde
Bishop of Arlington