



17 December 2007

Dear Members of the Wisconsin Legislature,

I write to you in light of the recent legislative action on Assembly Bill 377, with regard to emergency contraception. This letter also serves as a follow-up to my letter of October 24th, wherein I indicated a strong concern that conscience exemption for institutions and individuals be preserved. The Assembly recently voted not to accept the amendments with regard to conscience exemption for which I had hoped, but a final vote on the bill, as it stands, was delayed until mid-January. I write at this time to indicate a clear change in my position toward this particular legislation.

But first, let me indicate what has not changed. As bishops, we want women to be protected from the consequences of rape. We deeply care about the safety of women, about their inherent dignity, and their God-given rights. In fact, Catholic hospitals have always provided emergency contraception when this was appropriate, that is, when every effort had been made to assure that emergency contraception would not prevent implantation in the womb of a pre-born human being – because this would amount to abortion.

Biology tells us that a fertilized egg is a unique individual of the human species. I am writing to all legislators in the State of Wisconsin who accept this datum of science and the subsequent conclusion of reason. I am not writing specifically to Catholic legislators, because this is not a distinctively Catholic issue, but a matter of biology and human rights.

In the paragraphs above I have referred to what has not changed, that is our compassionate concern for women who have suffered the terrible tragedy of rape. The hoped-for effect of the Wisconsin Catholic Conference's earlier stance of neutrality on this bill was to protect women who are the victims of rape, while also protecting the possible pre-born human being, by affirming the necessary conscience exemption for institutions and individuals with regard to the appropriate testing, so as to avoid abortifacient emergency contraception. It is my judgment as Bishop of Madison that the earlier position of neutrality did not have its hoped for effect, and so it is now moot, and this neutrality position has now expired. Our conference's neutrality stance has also unintentionally provoked scandal among Catholics who have been persuaded by statements in the media that we are becoming less fervent in our defense of the dignity of pre-born human life.

As we continue along the line of what else has changed, I would point out the following: 1) It is clear that we have more time to debate this issue, until mid-January, which is good – I had no expectation that we would have such an additional time period. 2) It is clear that the Assembly, in rejecting explicit conscience exemption language in this AB 377, is opening the door to the coercion of consciences by the state. As the Wisconsin Catholic Conference, we had been advised that there would be statutory protection of conscience exemption from another statute. If this were assured, there would be no reason why the Assembly would have rejected conscience exemption protection for the reasons they gave. Therefore, I am firmly convinced that our conscience exemption protection is threatened by the approach in the legislation presently being considered. 3) It is clear that Planned Parenthood, NARAL, and their colleagues are more interested in promoting a state-supported, contraceptive ideology than they are in simply, reasonably, protecting women.

So I urge you, by this letter, to oppose AB 377. Please think about it in this season, where the beautiful glow of lights symbolize our hope for peace, which as Pope Benedict has recently indicated, can only happen when there is respect for every human being, protecting every woman and every pre-born human child. This is definitely a time for you to reconsider your vote on AB 377. Circumstances have changed and we are called to change accordingly.

Without clear assurance of conscience protection for institutions and individuals, and with the manipulation of this legislation to promote a contraceptive ideology, it is clear to me that we must oppose the particular version of this bill which will come up for a vote in mid-January. I might add that Bishop Jerome Listecki of LaCrosse finds himself completely in accord with the sentiments that I have expressed. Let us go forward during this holiday season with a sense of the peace that Christmas brings, which depends on the promotion of a culture of life, the life of women who have a right to defend themselves, and the right of pre-born human beings who have a right to a future.

With prayerful best wishes and gratitude for your consideration, I am,

Sincerely Yours,

The Most Rev. Robert C. Morlino
Bishop of Madison

O F F I C E O F T H E B I S H O P

Diocese of Madison · 702 S. High Point Road · P.O. Box 44983 · Madison, WI 53744-4983

Phone: 608-821-3001 · Fax: 608-821-4552