

89 OVERLOOK DRIVE
MASTIC BEACH, NY 11951
PHONE: 631-281-5743

Roman Catholic
Shrine Church of
St. Jude

WWW.STJUDEMB.ORG
RECTORY@STJUDEMB.ORG
FAX: 631-395-5786

“To the Greater Glory of God and the Salvation of Souls.”



Celebration of the Eucharist

SATURDAY EVENINGS
5:00pm Vigil Mass
7:30pm Spanish Mass

SUNDAY
8:00am English & Italian
9:30am Children's Choir
11:30am Adult Choir
5:00pm Youth Mass

MONDAY, TUESDAY,
THURSDAY AND FRIDAY
9:00am Mass

WEDNESDAY
9:00am Mass
Noon Mass

SATURDAY
8:30am Mass

HOLY DAYS AS
ANNOUNCED.

First Sunday of Lent - February 26th 2012

Pastor
Rev. Gregory Yacyshyn

In Residence
Msgr. John Heinlein

Senior Priest
Rev. James Leone

Parish Office Hours

MONDAY, TUESDAY,
THURSDAY, & FRIDAY
9:00am-5:00pm

WEDNESDAYS
9:00am-6:00pm

SATURDAYS
CLOSED

SUNDAYS
10:00am-2:00pm

CLOSED HOLIDAYS

Deacons
Thomas Gillen
Kenneth Geoghan
Mark Herrmann
Joseph Simeone

Useful Numbers

RECTORY
281-5743

PARISH OUTREACH
281-5634

RELIGIOUS
EDUCATION
281-2835

YOUTH MINISTRY
281-5743

NURSERY SCHOOL
395-3959

QUEEN OF APOSTLES
SCHOOL
878-1033

ST. VINCENT DEPAUL
219-3542

**Sacrament of
Anointing of
the Sick**
Available in danger of
death or whenever
there is a personal
need, call the rectory
for an appointment.

**Sacrament
of Penance/
Confession**
SATURDAYS
12:00-12:45pm during
lent and 4:00-4:45pm
also by appointment
WEDNESDAYS
2:00-2:45pm and by
appointment

Parish Outreach
MON.-THURS.
9:00am-1:00pm
CLOSED
FRI., SAT., SUN.,
AND HOLIDAYS

**Sacrament of
Marriage**
Couples wishing to be
married should contact
the rectory at least one
year in advance to meet
with one of the priests
to make wedding
arrangements.
Pre-Cana is required
for all couples.

**Sacrament of
Baptism**
Celebrated on most
Sundays throughout
the year. Please contact
the rectory to set up
an appointment with
a member of the staff
to arrange for the
Baptismal preparation
session and to set a
date for Baptism.

Devotions

MIRACULOUS MEDAL
NOVENA
Mondays after the
9:00am Mass

ST. JUDE NOVENA
Thursdays after the
9:00am Mass

ADORATION OF THE
BLESSED SACRAMENT
Wednesdays
12:30pm-1:00pm
Benediction at 1:00pm

FIRST FRIDAY
8:00pm-9:00pm
Benediction at 9:00pm

THE HOLY ROSARY
Monday through Friday
at 8:30am; Saturdays at
8:00am

Masses for the Week

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 2012

5:00pm Mario Rakvin †
7:30pm Parishioners of St. Jude

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2012

8:00am Victor Mendolia †
9:30am Anna Diadema †
11:30am Angeline Suraci †
5:00pm Carmine Biondi †

MONDAY FEBRUARY 27, 2012

9:00am Guiseppe & Nonciata Scalzo †

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2012

9:00am Intentions of
Joseph & Luigi Petrone

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 29, 2012

9:00am Patricia Luggiero †
12 Noon Saint Jude Guild:
Elsa Crystal Cruciani †
In honor of St. Barbara

THURSDAY, MARCH 1, 2012

9:00am Patrick Thomas Moroney †

FRIDAY, MARCH 2, 2012

9:00am Dorothy Anetrella †

SATURDAY, MARCH 3, 2012

8:30am John Lombardi †
5:00pm Sam Carcione †
7:30pm Giles Wannamaker †

SUNDAY, MARCH 4, 2012

8:00am Parishioners of St. Jude
9:30am Victor Mendolia †
11:30am Christopher E. Clay †
5:00pm James Colbert †

† Denotes Mass is for deceased

FOR THE SICK: Benjamin Archer, Faith Barile, Paul Bidegain, Janeth Billian, Jeanne Blevins, Janet Brandimarte, Francis X. Butler, Maddi Lechner-Citera, Lewis Ciullo, Cathy Cremmens, Anthony Cuccia, Mary Theresa Cunningham, Michael Francis Cunningham, Anna Daly, Natalie Danisi, Joseph DeLuca, Alexandra Ditman, Isabella Grace Dobbeck, Chuck Drake, Nicholas Ferrara, Anthony Fino, Carol Franzone, Christian Gallucci, Frank Gaeta, Bob Gamberale, George Gebhart, Deacon Ken Geoghan, Nora Getchell, Ann Giordano, Michelle Gonzalez, Joan Guarino, Madeline Hale, Charlotte Hall, Catherine Hannon, Steve Herrbrandt, Jo, Richard & Matthew Kaminsky, Father Walter Kedjierski, Cookie Landau, Frances Lee, Christine Leone, Katherine Lindsey, Carmine Linsalata, Brian Loftus, Julius Manchise, Joseph V. Mosca Jr., Joan Muller, Ruth Muller, Ronald Nappe, Frank Nitto, Miguel Oriana, Doris Ortiz, Joan & Jessica Passaro, Jackie Pastore, Gina Pisano, Abdul Rattu, Karen Ratcliff, Aurora Riela, Salvatore Russo, Al & Farah Schacca, Lucille Story, Patricia Swenson, Angelo Tafuro, Joseph Thompson, Al Vanderbilt, Mary Vazzana

FOR THE DECEASED: Ottilie Figlvizzi

FOR THE MILITARY: John Abel, Matt Corica, Joseph Competello, Michael Cuervo, Kenneth Drumm, Jr., Daniel Edwards, Daniel Engo, Michael Hickey, Jeffrey Holmes, Steven Kay, Richard Kruger, Chris Manakides, John Maresca, Joe Occhineri, Anthony Ochoa Jr., Katherine M. Onorato, Matthew Parenti, Rich Pinckney, Tory Pinckney, Gerard Posillico, John Redding, Jr., Eric Reilly, Vinnie Riveria, Randy Sanchez, Steven Schloesser, Carl Seaman, Don Skelton, Bobby Sosa, Derek Trabocchi, Timothy Weisner

Important Lenten Information

LENTEEN REGULATIONS: All Catholics who have reached their fourteenth year are bound to abstain entirely from meat on Ash Wednesday and all Fridays of Lent. All Catholics between the ages of eighteen and fifty-nine inclusive are also bound to observe the law of fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. This means limiting oneself to a single full meal and avoiding food in between meals. Two other light meals, which together do not equal a full meal, may be eaten during the day.

MORNING LAUDS: As has been the custom here at St. Jude, we will pray Morning Prayer (The Prayer of the Church) Monday through Friday at 8:15AM. We will begin on Thursday, February 23rd, followed by the Holy Rosary.

LENTEEN STATIONS OF THE CROSS: The Way of the Cross devotion will be prayed each Friday night during Lent at 8PM. Spanish Stations will be on Tuesdays at 7:30PM. Italian Stations will be on Wednesday at 7:30PM.

SACRAMENT OF CONFESSION/PENANCE: Lent is a special time of grace in the life of the Church. It is a time when many people receive the grace to come back to the practice of the faith. It is also a time of ongoing conversion for each of us. The Sacrament of Confession/Penance is available each Saturday during Lent 12 noon–1PM and from 4PM–4:45PM and on Wednesdays from 2PM–2:45PM. We encourage you to make use of this sacrament. The Confession Schedule for Holy Week will be printed closer to that week. Please mention this opportunity to family and friends who may be looking for the opportunity to come home!

Faith Formation

CONFIRMATION CANDIDATE, SPONSOR AND PARENT MEETING: On March 6th at 7PM in the Parish Center Main Hall. If a sponsor is unable to attend, a parent may attend in their place.

CONFIRMATION CONVERSTATIONS: On March 2nd, 16th & 30th for Conf. Prep. 1 and RCIC1 Upper Students. Please be prompt and attend on your assigned date.

LEVEL 2 FIRST RECONCILIATION SERVICE: On Saturday March 3rd & 10 at 1PM in the Church. Please be prompt and attend on your assigned date.

St. Vincent de Paul

In today's Gospel, Jesus overcomes the temptations to wealth, power and esteem. As we begin Lent, may we open our hearts to the grace of prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

SAVE THE DATE!: Friday, May 11th for the 'St. Vincent de Paul' fundraiser, it's **BUNCO NIGHT!** More info will follow in future bulletins.

For The Sick

We will be updating our sick list. If you, or someone you love, is still sick and needs our prayers, please contact the rectory at 281-5743 or rectory@stjudemb.org before March 12th to be sure their names remain on the sick list. All others will be removed.

Lighthouse Catholic—Media News

We are currently out of Matthew Kelly's book, Rediscover Catholicism, but will be placing an order in the near future. In the meantime, please take a look at the new CD titles available on the kiosk in the church vestibule. Listening to these talks are sure to help you on your spiritual journey, especially during the Lenten season.

First Saturday Devotions

The First Saturday of each month is especially dedicated to Our Blessed Mother. Please join in the praying of the Rosary and the First Saturday Devotion prayers, March 3rd at 8AM, preceding the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass at 8:30AM.



temptations

One of the most often misinterpreted experiences by Christians (and other people of faith) is that of the temptation to sin and to do evil. How many of us have thought ourselves wretched individuals because uncharitable, impure, nasty, or wicked thoughts have entered our minds? While some of these thoughts may clearly be the result of what we willingly read, view, or discuss (for which we then bear direct complicity), many of them may come into our heads completely against our wills.

Why & how does this happen?

St. Jean-Marie Vianney (1786-1859), the patron saint of parish priests was well attuned to this human experience. In his sermon entitled, "Beware If You Have No Temptations," he addresses the topic in detail:

"Whom does the Devil pursue most? Perhaps you are thinking that it must be those who are tempted most; these would undoubtedly be the habitual drunkards, the scandalmongers, the immodest and shameless people who wallow in immoral filth, and the miser, who hoards in all sorts of ways. No, my dear brethren, no, it is not these people. On the contrary, the Devil despises them, or else he holds onto them, lest they not have long enough time in which to do evil, because the longer they live, the more their bad example will drag souls into Hell. Indeed, if the Devil had pursued this lewd and shameless old fellow too closely, he might have shortened the latter's life by fifteen or twenty years, and he would not then have destroyed the virginity of that young girl by plunging her into the unspeakable mire of his indecencies; he would not, again, have seduced that young wife, nor would he have taught his evil lessons to that young man, who will perhaps continue to practice them until his death..."

"So, you will ask me, who then are the people most tempted? They are these, my friends; note them carefully. The people most tempted are those who are ready, with the grace of God, to sacrifice everything for the salvation of their poor souls, who renounce all those things which most people eagerly seek. It is not only one devil who tempts them, but millions seek to entrap them... Why is it, my dear brethren, that when someone gives no thought at all to saving his soul, when he is living in sin, he is not tempted in the slightest, but that as soon as he wants to change his life, all Hell falls upon him.

"When St. Augustine lived in sin and evil, he was not aware of anything by which he was tempted. He believed himself to be at peace, as he tells us himself. But from the moment that he desired to turn his back upon the Devil, he had to struggle with him, even to the point of losing his breath in the fight. And that lasted for five years..."

"The greatest of all evils is not to be tempted because there are then grounds for believing that the Devil looks upon us as his property and that he is only awaiting our deaths to drag us into Hell. Nothing could be easier to understand. Just consider the Christian who is trying, even in a small way, to save his soul. Everything around him inclines him to evil; he can hardly lift up his eyes without being tempted, in spite of all his prayers and penances. And yet a hardened sinner, who for the past twenty years has been wallowing in sin, will tell you that he is not tempted...! For to say that you are not tempted is like saying the Devil no longer exists or that he has lost all his rage against Christian souls. 'If you have no temptations,' St. Gregory tells us, 'it is because the devils are your friends, your leaders, and your shepherds. And by allowing you to pass your poor life tranquilly, to the end of your days, they will drag you down into the depths.' St. Augustine tells us that the greatest temptation is not to have temptations because this means that one is a person who has been rejected, abandoned by God, and left entirely in the grip of one's own passions."

If you have temptations in your life (which you resist) and are concerned for the salvation of your immortal soul, you are in the best of company, for as we read above, the saints were almost constantly afflicted with them; and as we hear in today's holy Gospel, our Divine Savior Himself was beset by them as well in the evil one's (unsuccessful) effort to make Him fall. However, if we do fall into sin (of which we are all capable), we have access to the mercy, strength, and love of God to bring us back to His grace. Despite our failings, let us persevere in faith and trust. If we think we do not have temptations, we are most likely on the "comfortable" road to you-know-where. However, if we are aware of them, and acknowledge our sinful nature, it is a good sign that we are going towards heaven.

Happy and Joyful Lent!
Fr. Greg

Deacon Mark on Telecare

Deacon Mark's preaching on *The Word* on Telecare, Channel 29. The preaching will be broadcast on February 29th through March 3rd. Wednesday at 7PM, Thursday at 9:15AM and 7PM, and Saturday at 12:45PM and 7PM.

Irish Concert

'The Magic of Ireland' and the 'Best of Broadway', 'From Galway to Broadway'. On Friday, March 2nd, 8PM at 'Our Lady of the Snow Church' in Blue Point. Tickets are \$30. Call 631-363-6385 ext 10. Starring: Ciaran Sheehan, 'The Phantom of the Opera', Kimilee Bryant, 'The Pirates of Penzance', 'West Side Story' and 'The Phantom of the Opera,' and Heather Bixler, 'New York Philharmonic Violinist'.

Mass Book for 2013

The 2013 Mass book will open for Mass Intentions on Monday, March 12th, 2012. The book will open for the calendar year of January 1, 2013 to December 31, 2013.

There will be a limit of 5 Mass Intentions per individual requesting on any given day, until April 2nd. Mass offerings are \$20 for an individual intention and \$15 Guild Masses (multiple intentions).

Lenten Fish Fry

St. Jude Parish is hosting the annual Lenten fish fry! Come feed your body and soul. Fridays during Lent ending March 30th, the week before Good Friday. There is plenty of time to enjoy your meal and afterwards join us for the Stations of the Cross at 8PM in the church. Dinner includes: Fish fillet, french fries, coleslaw, roll dessert and soda (or bring a drink of your choice) for just \$8 per person. The fish fry will be held in the parish center hall from 5-7:30PM

Outreach—Thank you

Thank you to all the blood donors who made our blood drive a success. We collected 59 pints. Way to go! Thank you to the St. Jude Shrine Knights of Columbus Council #51446 for donating heroes for our heroes, helping out at the blood drive and coming out to donate blood. Thank you to Diane Buderer who comes from Patchogue every 2 weeks to donate food and essentials to our Outreach. Thank you to all the residents of Mastic Beach who donated money at the Mastic Beach Village Meeting to help stock our shelves this month. God bless you all!

Eagle Scout Project

As you may have noticed an outside podium has been completed off the path on the west side of the church. We are now asking ministries, parishioners, families and friends who may be interested in donating towards purchasing the St. Francis statue that Fr. Greg has chosen to be mounted on the completed podium. All donations can be placed in the regular collection basket, dropped-off or mailed to the rectory. Please be sure to indicate that your donation is for the 'Eagle Scout Project-Statue'. Funds donated to the project are \$895 as of 2/22/12. Cost for statue approximately \$5,000.

Girl Scouts

Girl Scout Sunday is March 11th. All Girls working in religious awards program are asked to attend 9:30AM Mass, please meet Mrs. Schiraldi at 9:15AM.

Divorced/Separated/ Widowed?

Find help for the heartache of divorce, separation, and widowhood. A weekend away for a lifetime of change. The next weekend is March 2-4th at the 'Monfort Spiritual Center' in Bay Shore. For more information and reservations, call John at 516-822-0635. You can also email us at beginningexpericeli@hotmail.com.

Irish Night Dance

The 'Dominican Sisters of Amityville' will be hosting their annual 'Irish Night Dance' for the benefit of their senior sisters on Saturday, March 3rd at 'St. Bridgid's School' in Westbury. The evening will begin with a Mass for "Peace in the World" at 7PM followed by a truly Grand Irish Celebration including Step Dancers, Bag Pipers and music by the 'Celtic Connection Band' at 8PM. Back by popular demand is a traditional hot Irish dinner. For more information or to purchase tickets for this fun evening (\$40 per person) please call the Committee at the 'Dominican Sisters Development Office' 631-842-6000 ext 238 or contact S. Patricia Koehler, O.P., Irish Night Chairperson for ticket form pkoeehler@aol.com.

The expectation of Christ
is part of the
mystery of Christ.
—Blessed John Paul II

"Blessed Are You" Bereavement Conference

Sponsored by 'Catholic Cemeteries' and the 'Office of Faith Formation' in the 'Diocese of Rockville Centre'. For the bereaved and those ministering to them. All faiths welcome! On Saturday, March 17th from 8:30AM-5:30PM at 'Kellenberg Memorial High School' in Uniondale. The 'Bereavement Conference' is designed for anyone who has experienced loss and for those who minister to the bereaved. A keynote speaker and multiple workshops are offered in specific loss, traumatic loss, spirituality and support and workshops for facilitators. Download a listing of workshops or register online and save. "...Blessed are they who mourn for they shall be comforted" (MT5:4). For more information go to <http://www.drvc-faith.org/bereavement.html>.

Catherine McAuley High School Reunion

The CMHS Annual Reunion is on Saturday, April 21st from 12 noon--5PM at 'Russo's on the Bay' in Howard Beach. Alumnae, Former Faculty, Friends and 'Sisters of Mercy' are cordially invited. If you, or someone you know, is a graduate of 'McAuley' or 'Mercy Commercial' and would like further information about the reunion, please call Sister Margaret Dempsey at 718-462-7282 ext 16 or email mdempsey@mcauleybrooklyn.org.

Property Tax Levy Cap

A New York State law newly enacted establishing a cap that applies to school districts and municipalities. The law is complex please visit 'The Citizens Guide to the Property Tax Cap' available on the website www.empirecenter.org. There is also additional information on the district website www.wfsd.k12.ny.us.

St. Jude Easter Fair

This year's Easter Fair is Saturday, March 31st. In past years, our parishioners have been extremely generous with our requests for donations for our fair raffles. We are looking for donations of fully assembled baskets ready to raffle off at the 'St. Jude Easter Fair'. We do have some baskets if needed to get you started. Please let us know if you can help by calling the rectory. Fully assembled baskets shall be turned in by Friday, March 2nd. Thank you for your continued support and generosity. Value for donated baskets should range from \$5 to \$50.

Catholic Ministries Appeal 2012

The Catholic Ministries Appeal has begun in our Parish and across the Diocese. The Catholic Ministries Appeal is the yearly appeal that helps our diocese fund many ministries, services and agencies in the 133 parishes across Long Island. We realize that everyone's financial situation is different. Discuss with your family and prayerfully reflect upon the graces that God has bestowed on you and your loved ones. The decision you make is between you and God, and through prayer and reflection, you will come to a meaningful response. Our Parish Goal for 2011 was \$50,174.00. Our Parish reached our goal and received a 20% parish share of \$10,034.80. Monies pledged and received over goal was \$7,115.00, and we received an 80% parish share of \$5,692.00. The total parish share received for 2011 was \$15,726.80. Our parish Goal for 2012 is \$56,200.00. If we reach our parish goal, St. Jude will receive a parish share of 20% totaling \$11,240.00. For any money pledged and received over goal the parish receives a share of 80%. There is a payment option available (4month or 10 month) on the pledge card that you can use to make a pledge, or pay online; or you may wish to use a credit card. Please call 516-379-5210 ext. 213, and speak to Maggie.



Mass Attendance

	SATURDAY		SUNDAY			Total
	5pm	7:30	8am	9:30	11:30	
Jan. 29	367	175	208	379	600	1919
Feb. 5	332	189	221	372	590	1864
Feb. 12	349	145	182	300	565	1718
Feb. 19	296	145	185	306	565	1689

Weekly Collections

February 19th \$9,863.00

Catholic Ministries Appeal

2012 Goal \$56,200.00

Pledges a/o 2/21/12 \$27,065.00

of Donors 80

Payments a/o 2/21/12 \$10,595.00

Thank you to all who have pledged.

Scripture Readings

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 2012 *Lenten Weekday*

LV 19:1-2, 11-18/MT 25:31-46

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2012 *Lenten Weekday*

IS 55:10-11/MT 6:7-15

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 29, 2012 *Lenten Weekday*

JON 3:1-10/LK 11:29-32

THURSDAY, MARCH 1, 2012 *Lenten Weekday*

EST C:12, 14-16, 23-25/MT 7:7-12

FRIDAY, MARCH 2, 2012 *Lenten Weekday*

EZ 18:21-28/MT 5:20-26

SATURDAY, MARCH 3, 2012 *Lenten Weekday*

DT 26:16-19/MT 5:43-48

SUNDAY, MARCH 4, 2012 *Second Sunday of Lent*

GN 22:1-2, 9A, 10-13, 15-18/ROM 8:31B-34/

MK 9:2-10

Altar Bread and Wine

The altar bread and wine for the week of February 27th have been donated:

In memory of Harry & Patrick Hennessey

Dates are available for weeks of

March 19th and April 2nd, 16th, & 23rd

Wedding Banns

III Daniel Repperger/Kristina Olivo

Baptisms

Gabriella Montalbano, Connor Jayden Krebs,
Giana Elizabeth Cannedy

May God bless them and their families!

Seminary of Immaculate Conception

AT THE FOOT OF THE CROSS: Msgr. Peter Vaccari will present a 'Lenten Day of Prayer' at the 'Seminary of the Immaculate Conception' in Huntington on Sunday, March 11th from 9:30AM-3PM. Program includes conferences, lunch, opportunity for confession, and Mass. Donation \$25 for non-Friends. Sponsored by the 'Friends of the Seminary.' Reservations required. Please call 631-423-0483 ext.102 or email bmarlone@icseminary.edu.

HOW GOD BECAME KING: Sunday, March 25th at 3PM N.T. Wright Professor of New Testament and Early Christianity at the 'University of St. Andrews' will be speaking about "How God Became King: Why we've all misunderstood the Gospels". For further information, contact the 'Seminary of the Immaculate Conception' located at 440 West Neck Road in Huntington. Call 423-0483 ext 112 for more information. Free will offering.

Hibernian Festival Singers

On Sunday, March, 11th at 3PM the 'Hibernians Festival Singers' will be hosting 'Taylor's Traditional Irish Dance Cabaret' direct from Dublin at the 'Bay Shore High School'. The show will feature Ireland's greatest comedian, Noel V. Ginnity, Irish tenor Paul Hennessy, soprano Emer Hartnett, Irish ballad singer Andrew McCarthy, a musical ensemble featuring Pat Maranane, accordionist Aible Grace, uilleann piper Tommy Keane, Ireland's most talented dancers and the 'Hibernian Festival Singers', under the direction of Christopher Bilella. Tickets are \$30 in advance and \$35 at the door. For further information, please call 631-665-1371 or 631-563-1032.

Woman at the Well

Come together with other women as we look at the stories of the Women in the Bible, as well as other women in our church history and see how they relate to our lives today. Join us next Tuesday, March 27th where we will be discussing **The Dreamer, Claudia (wife of Pilate)** 7:30-9PM at 'Mary Immaculate' in Bellport. Class is located in Room 7 of the Church Auditorium.

Bishop Murphy's Letter in the Long Island Catholic

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Last Friday President Obama announced that he had worked out “accommodations” to respond to the legitimate concerns about religious freedom that Catholic bishops and faithful, along with many others, have been raising to the HHS regulations that mandate coverage of artificial contraception, sterilization and abortion-inducing drugs in virtually all health plans as of August 2013. Hopeful as always that truth and common sense would prevail, many of us watched his televised announcement with mounting disappointment. Putting aside some of the president’s remarks that reinterpreted what he has actually said to officials of the USCCB (the U.S. Catholic bishops conference), Mr. Obama raised more difficulties than he claimed he had resolved. While there still may be some hope that meetings with administration officials might clarify some of the issues, the leadership of the U.S. bishops and this bishop remain disappointed and dissatisfied, determined to continue the effort to protect religious freedom and freedom of conscience not only for Catholics but for all Americans.

Put simply, we bishops are more convinced than ever that we need rigorous legislative guarantees of religious freedom in the face of this administration’s continued effort to force coverage of religiously objectionable procedures as part of a universal mandate for all Americans regardless of their religious or conscience reservations. Without ironclad guarantees that to date we have not been given, we will continue to work for the repeal of the mandate.

Sometime this week at least part of the president’s “accommodation” will appear in the Federal Register. At present we are deeply concerned about the inadequacy of what has been proposed to date. What are our reservations?

The administration continues to insist on an overly narrow definition of what persons and what institutions can exercise the right of conscience or religious belief. This is problematic on two levels: the definition in itself is objectionable because government has no right to determine what religious beliefs or conscience will be afforded the right of free exercise. The Constitution guarantees this freedom to all. Second, the administration’s narrow

definition leaves out untold numbers of persons who would and will be forced to violate their conscience and their beliefs or else be subject to stiff penalties.

It remains unclear how the shift of responsibility to pay for these objectionable products and services from the employer to the insurer will be paid for. The only logical conclusion is that the insurer will pass on the increased costs to the insured and we have the same objection as before; using the force of government to compel insureds to pay indirectly for products and services that violate the tenets of their faith is just as objectionable as compelling them to pay directly for these products and services. It makes sense to offer many women’s health services such as mammograms without co-pay. These help diagnose disease. But I have yet to discover how pregnancy can be categorized as a disease. In addition, insurers that now offer plans that do not include these objectionable procedures will, if the HHS mandate stands, have no choice but to offer them. Fidelis Health Care, the largest HMO providing health care coverage for the poor in New York is a Catholic organization that has a corporate membership comprised of the New York Catholic bishops. What happens here?

There are instances in which a religious organization is both employer and insurer. It seems that, notwithstanding President Obama’s announced “accommodation,” these religiously based institutions, as well as student health plans in Catholic colleges, would have to offer this objectionable coverage. One such self-insured religious body is the Diocese of Rockville Centre.

A whole other category of countless persons who would be forced into violating their consciences would be Catholics and others who operate in the secular sphere or work for secular employers. Catholics who own businesses or those who work in businesses who share our moral objections to such products and procedures as abortifacients are forced by government into compliance without any consideration for their religious convictions or their conscientious objections.

When these regulations were presented on January 20, we were informed that the churches and religious organizations which would be exempt in the narrow

definition of the mandate would be given a “grace period” of one year until August 2013 to find out how we must comply. The president of our bishops conference, Cardinal-designate Dolan, referred to this as a year to learn how to violate our consciences. That “grace period” now seems to have been changed to a year-long “process” to determine what religious organizations or individuals may or may not qualify for the new “accommodation.” This is a grave concern for us bishops. It reduces a God-given right, protected by the First Amendment, to a “privilege” to be negotiated with an administration that swore to uphold the Constitution of the United States. The HHS mandate and its support by the administration are deleterious to the life and liberty of citizens who should be able to live secure in the conviction that their right to religious freedom is not being undermined. Indeed, our right to religious freedom must be re-affirmed as soon as possible by all those in our government who have caused this grave situation to surface. The clear assertion of religious liberty is a matter of justice this administration owes to all Americans.

For all these reasons, I am convinced that we need to pass the Restoration of Religious Freedom Act being sponsored in the United States Senate by Senators Rubio and Blunt and many others. While I await the counsel of those who are far more expert than I, it would not surprise me if we will have to have recourse to the courts because of the administration’s intransigence. The First Amendment, conscience protection and the right to religious freedom and its exercise are too valuable, too inalienable, too God-given, too essential for human freedom and dignity for us to let this mandate become the law of the land.

Take action against threats to religious freedom!

Learn more and send messages to Congress by going to www.usccb.org/conscience. If you don’t have Internet access, you can call the U.S. Capitol switchboard at 202-224-3121 and ask to be connected to your Congressional representative’s office.

In Christ,

Bishop Murphy