



DIOCESE OF BRIDGEPORT

238 Jewett Avenue • Bridgeport, Connecticut 06606 • 203-416-1352 • FAX: 203-371-8323

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

May 30, 2009

Dear Friends in Christ:

It is with a great degree of shock and dismay that I must share with you a recent action that the State of Connecticut has initiated with respect to our Diocese.

As you will recall, following the surprise introduction of Bill 1098, which singled out Catholic parishes and would have forced them to reorganize contrary to Church law and the First Amendment, our Diocese responded in the most natural, spontaneous, and, frankly, American, of ways:

- We alerted our membership – in person and through our website;
- We encouraged them to exercise their free speech by contacting their elected representatives; and
- We organized a rally at the State Capitol.

As a result, we helped highlight the unconstitutional nature of this proposal such that the bill was withdrawn even before its first scheduled public hearing. It was an outstanding demonstration of democracy-in-action and a great civics lesson for our children. Our Founding Fathers would have been proud.

Last week, however, we were informed that, in the view of an examiner at the Connecticut Office of State Ethics, this was not a textbook case of citizen democracy and free speech – it actually constituted “lobbying”! Accordingly, the examiner alleges that we failed to register as a lobbyist, a process that would subject the Diocese to intrusive oversight and regulation by the State. As such, the Diocese supposedly violated State law and is potentially subject to civil penalties.

Once again, we should be outraged. “Lobbying”? Exhortations from the pulpit, information posted to the world wide web, a rally in the middle of the day on the State’s most public piece of property? This cannot possibly be what our Legislature had in mind when it enacted lobbying laws to bring more transparency and oversight to a legislative process that has been corrupted by special interests and backroom deals.

Let’s be clear: **we violated no law**. We acted in response to an outrageous proposal that was imminently pending review and threatened to impose dramatic and blatantly unconstitutional requirements on our Church. Unfortunately, this new action cannot be seen as anything other than an attempt to muzzle the Church and subject our right of free speech to government review and regulation. This government action tramples on the First Amendment freedoms of speech, assembly, and religion, and should shock the conscience of all citizens of the Constitution State.

We have now been left with no choice but to file a civil rights lawsuit in Federal Court against the State of Connecticut seeking relief from this shocking government action. A copy of the lawsuit and more information is posted now on www.bridgeportdiocese.com. As your Bishop, I will take every measure possible to defend our faith and our Church from attempts to silence us – **and our individual parishes could be targeted next**.

I invite you, if you wish to do so, to contact your State Legislator **before the session ends this coming Wednesday** to discuss why state lobbying laws, which are designed to protect the integrity of the legislative process and monitor and control backroom manipulation of that process, are now being used to stifle our freedoms of speech, religion, and assembly.

Faithfully,

Most Reverend William E. Lori
Bishop of Bridgeport