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To the Catholic Charities and Catholic Charities Foundation Boards of Directors:

I am writing to ask you to intercede in a serious matter affecting the well being of the agency and staff that have been entrusted to your care. I no longer have the standing of an employee, but you know that I served Catholic Charities as best I could for over 12 years, most recently as Chief Program Officer. You also know that I always strove to speak honestly to you, even in difficult times. Today we face another difficult time.

It is hard to overstate the anguish that is being felt by most of the staff. These past few months have been very difficult. This past week has been devastating.

Difficult issues such as how society and a Church view an important institution such as marriage will always bring about conflict and uncertainty. And I have no quarrel with the Catholic Church entering the debate and clearly stating its views on what constitutes civilly recognized marriage. It has the right, probably the duty, to do so.

My concern, however, rises sharply as the Church has now extended the argument to actively oppose gay and lesbian spouses from obtaining health insurance. It is even more troubling that in its zeal to prevent this, the Church now denies coverage to heterosexual parents who are unemployed or stay home to care for their children. It is difficult to comprehend this assault on the family when the Church has usually been its strongest defender.

It seems that the Archbishop has defended this latest step as an unfortunate consequence of his obligation to speak clearly on the issue of marriage. In a recent letter from Ed, the action is described as necessary to remain "consistent with the tenets of our religious faith." But that is not true. The Archbishop and his closest advisors have made this choice, and I grant that they are sincere and believe in their convictions. But that does not mean that their choice is the only choice or that their choice is the right one.

With respect to its views on marriage, the Church has been very clear. There is no confusion in the minds of the faithful or the general citizenry of Washington on this matter. But the Archbishop has not made the case why he felt it necessary to take the additional step of preventing gay and lesbian spouses – and now stay at home or

unemployed parents -- from receiving health care. It is unnecessary to take this action. Other choices are available. This is not just my opinion. The Archbishop of San Francisco and the President of Georgetown found a better way. We could too.

I say it is unnecessary, but I also believe it is wrong. In coming to this conclusion I do not profess to be a moral theologian, but I am not unschooled in such matters. With my teachers, I wrestled with such issues in my years in the seminary. And during my eleven years as an active priest in the Midwest, I had the privilege to be with people – men and women, gay and straight, young and old – as they faced the difficult but honorable task of sorting out what is right and wrong and what they should do, especially when it is not clear or easy.

In the matter before us, I cannot see why it is necessary to link the two questions of marriage and health care. It is not needed to provide clarity for the Church's view on marriage. That case has been made very publicly and clearly. Nor is it necessary to do so to further safeguard marriage. Marriage as we know it; and through it the creating of children will survive and thrive long after we are all gone.

Some, including the Archbishop, have argued that by providing health care to a gay or lesbian spouse that we are somehow legitimizing gay marriage. With all due respect, that is a false argument. Providing health care to a gay or lesbian partner – a basic human right according to Church teaching – is an end in itself and no more legitimizes that marriage than giving communion to a divorced person legitimizes divorce, or giving food or shelter to an alcoholic legitimizes alcoholism.

Nor is this a situation where it is necessary to confront something so evil that we cannot let it stand. Gay and lesbian persons are not evil. They are sisters and brothers, children of God that have the same dignity and rights as anyone. Even the Catholic Church formally recognizes and states that. So why does the Archbishop work so hard to link the issues? I do not know. He has not made the case why they are linked and why stay at home parents should now be caught in the crossfire. It would seem that the Archbishop has the duty to clearly explain how the consequences of withholding health care – something the Church has viewed as a basic right – is proportional to its stated end of safeguarding marriage. It seems to me both unnecessary and disproportional.

And so I ask you to wrestle with these questions. In doing so, I know that most of you are not professional theologians, and I know that it is hard to confront an Archbishop when all of us were taught from an early age that they are to be respected and not questioned. I have great respect and affection for the Church. I and my closest friends have spent most if not all of our adult lives working in and for the Church. But the Church and its leaders are human and make mistakes. They can be wrong – sometimes terribly wrong – but I will not go through our history on that in this letter.

As you reflect on what you should do, let me offer an allegorical way of thinking that might accompany your sober reflection. Imagine a conversation with God at the end of your life. Will God say: "I want to thank you for your service as a Board member of

Catholic Charities, especially for preventing gay and lesbian persons from obtaining health care. I know it was a tough choice, especially when you had to also exclude stay at home or unemployed parents, but it had to be done.”

I suppose it is possible that such a conversation might take place someday. But I really do not think so. More likely God’s conversation might follow the lines of Matthew 25: “Where were you when innocent people were denied health care in my name? Why did you say nothing? Did you not see me in these persons that many in society consider to be among the least? Why did you not defend them?”

Finally, I appeal to you in your fiduciary capacity as a member of the Board. You are obliged to act in the best interest of the agency, to safeguard its mission and its assets. You are appointed by the Archbishop, but your duty is to Catholic Charities.

Right now, the agency you represent, is suffering. Every day it loses more respect in the community, especially among the political and economic leadership. Its goodwill and name are being squandered. More importantly, the greatest asset of the agency – its staff – feel a profound sense of humiliation and shame. Many are actively looking to leave. Catholic Charities will be forever handicapped in attracting new staff with such a draconian benefit plan as recently amended.

I am asking you to act in your capacity as a Director to change direction on this question. One abiding lesson I learned as a manager is that the best time to correct a mistake is as soon as you realize it. A lesson I have learned in life is that it is never too late to correct a wrong. I hope and pray you see it similarly.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tim".

Timothy J. Sawina