

# Hospitals won't comply with unjust laws and won't close, bishop says

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. – The Catholic Health Association's board of trustees recently reaffirmed its opposition to any attempts by Congress or President Barack Obama to broaden abortion access and its commitment to keep Catholic hospitals open, Bishop Robert N. Lynch of St. Petersburg said in a Feb. 6 blog entry.

"Idle threats about the certain closing of Catholic hospitals if certain things happen are simply that – idle," said the bishop and CHA board member, writing about the board's Feb. 4-6 retreat in the St. Petersburg area.

"We are here today and will be here tomorrow to provide the healing hand of Christ to others as long as we can financially survive in a challenging situation and comply fully with our ethical and religious directives," he added in his blog on the diocese's Web site.

The U.S. bishops' "Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services" guide Catholic health care facilities in addressing ethical questions such as abortion, euthanasia, care for the poor, medical research and other issues.

Although the CHA gathering "was essentially a planning retreat," the board re-emphasized "some actions taken at previous board meetings," Bishop Lynch said.

CHA "will join with the church and all other pro-life parties to vigorously oppose any and all attempts by this Congress or administration to broaden abortion access," he said.

"Catholic hospitals will not allow abortions to be performed in their facilities" and will not comply with any laws mandating abortion or other procedures that violate the ethical and religious directives, "even if our actions constitute civil disobedience," he added.

"No Catholic institution or employee of an institution can or will be made to violate the dictates of their conscience resulting from federal or state legislative action,"

Bishop Lynch said.

He said Catholic hospitals “won’t comply” with laws that violate conscience “but we will not close.”

Among the reasons he cited were that:

- Catholic hospitals are sometimes the sole provider of health care in a large geographical area, especially in rural areas.
- The hospitals have an obligation to their physicians, nurses and other employees; to their bondholders; and “to the poor, unprotected and to our communities which benefit from our presence.”