



FLORIDA CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

The nonpartisan public policy voice of the Catholic Church in Florida

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Statement of the Bishops of Florida on the Fortnight for Freedom June 21 - July 4, 2012

As bishops, we are called to be authentic teachers of our faith and steadfast witnesses to the love of Christ, even in the face of controversy and great debate. It is this responsibility that moves us to jointly and urgently appeal to the Catholic faithful and others of good will to stand together to preserve and protect our human and civil right to religious freedom, which is being diminished and marginalized today on many fronts.ⁱ

To address this concern, we join our brother bishops around the nation to call for a Fortnight for Freedom, beginning June 21, the vigil of the Feasts of St. John Fisher and St. Thomas More, and concluding on July 4, Independence Day. This 14-day period is a special time for prayer and commitment on behalf of our beloved country and in support of our God-given right, which no government has the authority to take from us. Let us pray in thanksgiving for our heritage of religious freedom, reflect on attempts to limit this most cherished liberty and have the courage to take positive action.

Religious freedom is our first civil freedom – first in the Bill of Rights of the U.S. Constitution. This sacred right belongs to us all. It is the basis of our democracy and the very reason that early settlers fled to our protecting shores. We must never take for granted this right for which so many before us fought and gave their lives.

In a January 19, 2012 address, Pope Benedict XVI said, “It is imperative that the entire Catholic community in the United States come to realize the grave threats to the Church’s public moral witness presented by a radical secularism which finds increasing expression in the political and cultural spheres.” Our faith inspires us to protect all human life, promote the dignity of every soul and serve those in need no matter who and where they are, and whether they follow our same faith or have no faith at all. The Gospel demands that we act on our core beliefs. If we can no longer practice our faith as we see it, but only as others do, the common good and our American way of life is at risk.

Today’s challenges to our religious freedom provide an opportunity to join together. During the Fortnight for Freedom, we encourage Catholics to:

- Attend special events and Masses throughout Florida to celebrate and pray for religious freedom. (Please contact your parish or visit your diocesan website to identify local opportunities for participation.)
- Pray daily for the specific intention of defending our religious liberty; this may be done in conjunction with the rosary, a novena or Eucharistic adoration.
- Fast or make an appropriate act of reparation, such as meatless Fridays or a fast day, to create greater openness to the Holy Spirit and unite our sacrifices with those whom have suffered unjust religious persecution.
- Ring Church bells at noon on the Fourth of July; we encourage all other faiths to join us in a national, interfaith effort *to let freedom ring*.
- Read, study and discuss the U.S. Bishops' Statement on Religious Freedom, *Our First, Most Cherished Liberty*. Utilize additional resources available through the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops website at www.fortnight4freedom.org, including frequently asked questions about religious liberty, a study guide on *Dignitatis Humanae*, Vatican II's document on religious liberty, and several one-page informational sheets outlining current threats to religious freedom both in the United States and abroad.
- Learn about Florida's Amendment 8 on the November 2012 ballot, which prevents further erosion of religious freedom at the state level by eliminating discrimination against churches and religious organizations that provide social services.
- Join the Florida Catholic Advocacy Network at www.flaccb.org to receive updates on issues involving religious freedom and opportunities for advocacy at the state and federal levels.

As we commit to take action to protect religious freedom, let us pray that our actions exemplify the teachings of the Gospel and deepen our union with Jesus Christ.

ⁱ Some recent threats to religious freedom include the HHS mandate to provide coverage for abortion-inducing drugs, sterilization and contraception; forcing Catholic foster care and adoption services to shut down for refusal to place children with same-sex couples; state immigration laws that forbid pastoral care of undocumented immigrants; discrimination against Catholic humanitarian services for victims of human trafficking for refusal to refer for abortion services.

Most Reverend Thomas G. Wenski
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Most Reverend Robert N. Lynch
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Most Reverend Frank J. Dewane
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Most Reverend John G. Noonan
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Most Reverend Felipe J. Estévez
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Most Reverend Gregory L. Parkes
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