

Archbishop's letter urges participation in Fortnight for Freedom June 21 – July 4, 2014

My Dear Friends in Christ,

Pope Francis has reminded us that “no one can demand that religion should be relegated to the inner sanctum of personal life, without influence on societal and national life, without concern for the soundness of civil institutions, without a right to offer an opinion on events affecting society” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 183). And yet, that is what government does when it seeks to define religious liberty as only the freedom to worship, without respect for the deeply held moral beliefs of people of faith.

For the third year, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops is calling for a Fortnight for Freedom from June 21—the vigil of the Feasts of St. John Fisher and St. Thomas More — to Independence Day on July 4 to highlight the threats to our religious freedom. I urge all of the faithful to participate to whatever degree they are able. The work of protecting our freedom to serve belongs, as Pope Benedict XVI said, to “an engaged, articulate, and well-formed Catholic laity endowed with a strong critical sense vis-à-vis the dominant culture.” “Freedom to Serve” is the theme chosen for this year’s Fortnight for Freedom, emphasizing the link between religious liberty and service to the poor and vulnerable. Consider these areas in which our freedom to serve is under challenge today:

“Freedom to Serve” is the theme chosen for this year’s Fortnight for Freedom, emphasizing the link between religious liberty and service to the poor and vulnerable. Consider these areas in which our freedom to serve is under challenge today:

- *The HHS mandate for sterilization, contraception, and abortion-inducing drugs.* The mandate of the Department of Health and Human Services forces religious institutions to facilitate and/or fund a product contrary to their own moral teaching. Further, the federal government tries to define which religious institutions are “religious enough” to merit protection of their religious liberty. Private businesses whose owners have religious objections to the mandate are also affected. This issue will be settled by the Supreme Court this summer.
- *Catholic foster care and adoption services.* Boston, San Francisco, the District of Columbia, and the State of Illinois have driven local Catholic Charities out of the business of providing adoption or foster care services—by revoking their licenses, by ending their government contracts, or both—because those charities refused to place children with same-sex couples or unmarried opposite-sex couples who cohabit.
- *State immigration laws.* Several states have passed laws

- that forbid what they deem as “harboring” of undocumented immigrants—and what the Church deems Christian charity and pastoral care to these immigrants.
- *Discrimination against Catholic humanitarian services.* After years of excellent performance by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Migration and Refugee Services (MRS) in administering contract services for victims of human trafficking, the federal government changed its contract specifications to require MRS to provide or refer for contraceptive and abortion services in violation of Catholic teaching.

As these examples make clear, the challenge to religious liberty facing people of faith in the United States today is real and it is grave.

So what can you do?

- Be informed about the issue. Go to www.catholiccincinnati.org and click on “Preserve Religious Freedom” on the bottom right of the home page. There you will find a locally produced video and up-to-date information, plus links to the USCCB website.
- Answer the “Call to Prayer for Life” from the USCCB. While the mandate is being challenged in the courts, the “Call to Prayer” asks that Catholics celebrate Eucharistic holy hours monthly, pray the rosary daily, say special prayers of the faithful at all Masses, fast and abstain from meat on Fridays. There is a Facebook Page at <https://www.facebook.com/CallToPrayer>.
- In addition, during that Fortnight, attend any special prayer opportunities available in your parish, and participate in Mass on July 4, the culmination of the Fortnight.
- Display the “Preserve Religious Freedom” sign (available [HERE](#).) As in the past, the Archdiocese has also made it possible for parishes to buy sturdy yard signs with the same message and same design to make our public witness visible throughout our 19 counties.
- Contact your elected officials and those running for office this year and encourage them to make a public stand for this fundamental right. We urge our elected officials to promote all the principles of Catholic Social Teaching in the public square, including protecting religious freedom.

The ability of our Catholic ministries of education, health care, and charity to serve all people regardless of faith, economic position, or immigration status is endangered by the serious threats to our religious freedom. Please join again this summer with our fellow Catholics, and with people of other faiths and no faith, to preserve our God-given and Constitutionally-protected “freedom to serve.”

With prayerful best wishes, I am,
Sincerely yours in Christ,
Most Reverend Dennis M. Schnurr
Archbishop of Cincinnati