

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

understanding the basics ▪ defending a right

More than Freedom to Worship (4 of 7)

The Health and Human Services mandate brings to the fore a fundamental question concerning the religious freedom that we cherish as Americans. What is it? Our shepherds offer a clear answer in their document *Our First, Most Cherished Liberty*.

“Religious liberty is not only about our ability to go to Mass on Sunday or pray the Rosary at home. It is about whether we can make our contribution to the common good of all Americans. Can we do the good works our faith calls us to do, without having to compromise that very same faith? Without religious liberty properly understood, all Americans suffer, deprived of the essential contribution in education, health care, feeding the hungry, civil rights, and social services that religious Americans make every day, both here at home and overseas.”

The bishops spell out the risk the nation runs if our religious freedom is reduced to mere freedom of worship.

“What is at stake is whether America will continue to have a free, creative, and robust civil society—or whether the state alone will determine who gets to contribute to the common good, and how they get to do it. Religious believers are part of American civil society, which includes neighbors helping each other, community associations, fraternal service clubs, sports leagues, and youth groups. All these Americans make their contribution to our common life, and they do not need the permission of the government to do so. Restrictions on religious liberty are an attack on civil society and the American genius for voluntary associations.

“The Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America issued a statement about the administration's contraception and sterilization mandate that captured exactly the danger that we face:

Most troubling, is the Administration's underlying rationale for its decision, which appears to be a view that if a religious entity is not insular, but engaged with broader society, it loses its ‘religious’ character and liberties. Many faiths firmly believe in being open to and engaged with broader society and fellow citizens of other faiths. The Administration's ruling makes the price of such an outward approach the violation of an organization's religious principles. This is deeply disappointing.

This is not a Catholic issue. This is not a Jewish issue. This is not an Orthodox, Mormon, or Muslim issue. It is an American issue.”

“As a community of faith, we must commit ourselves to prayer and fasting that wisdom and justice may prevail and religious liberty may be restored.”

BISHOP WILLIAM MURPHY

PRAYER

Almighty God, Father of all nations, for freedom you have set us free in Christ Jesus (Gal 5:1).

We praise and bless you for the gift of religious liberty, the foundation of human rights, justice, and the common good. Grant to our leaders the wisdom to protect and promote our liberties; By your grace may we have the courage to defend them, for ourselves and for all those who live in this blessed land.

We ask this through the intercession of Mary Immaculate, our patroness, and in the name of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, with whom you live and reign, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.