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OFFICE OF CATHOLIC
CHARITIES & SOCIAL
CONCERN

To: All
From: Deacon Paul Friedrich, Chair of the Ecumenical & Interfaith Commission
Re: **Religious Freedom Week 2024**
Date: June 22-June 29

Dear Friends in Christ,

Religious Freedom Week for 2024 begins on Saturday June 22nd with the Feast of Saints Thomas More and John Fisher and ends on Saturday June 29th with the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul. During this time, I ask all Catholics in our Diocese to pray, reflect and act to promote this essential mandate. When we promote religious freedom, we promote the common good and thus strengthen the life of our nation and the community of nations.

Religious Freedom is both American values and an important part of Catholic teaching on human dignity. Without religious freedom, people will be deprived of essential contributions in education, health care, feeding the hungry, civil rights, and social services, that faithful Americans make every day in our communities, in our country and abroad. Religious Freedom is critical for maintaining a free, innovative, and productive civil society.

Please include the following prayers from the United States Council of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) in the daily mass intercessions. You may also share the **2024 Religious Freedom Week Resource** to Pray-Reflect-Act during this special time.

- June 22nd: We pray that all people of faith are free to gather in houses of worship without fear.
- June 23rd: We pray for all people of faith who live in fear of persecution under unjust blasphemy laws.
- June 24th: We pray that the Holy Spirit would give us the courage to bear witness to the truth of the gospel, even in the face of social and legal pressure.
- June 25th: We pray that the Lord would protect all migrants and refugees, and that all those who work with people on the move would be free to serve.
- June 26th: We pray for our Christian brothers and sisters in India, who face harassment and violent attacks.
- June 27th: We pray that business leaders would be free to promote a culture of life in their workplaces.
- June 28th: We pray that God would give us the grace to remember the dignity of all and invite others to do the same.
- June 29th: We pray that God would give us the grace to remember the dignity of all and invite others to do the same.

Yours in Christ,

Deacon Paul Friedrich

Religious Freedom Week 2024



June 22: Respect for Sacred Spaces

Pray that all people of faith would be free to gather in houses of worship without fear.

Reflect

The very nature of a sacred space is that it is set apart from other spaces as a place to seek communion with the divine and thus should be treated with respect. In a pluralistic society such as ours, respect for sacred spaces is especially vital for the sake of civil peace, which is part of the common good. In recent years, a wave of vandalism and arson has hit Catholic churches and statues. Christians are not alone in defending their sacred spaces. There is no greater threat to religious liberty than for one's house of worship to become a place of danger, and the country sadly finds itself in a place where that danger is real. We Catholics can express our solidarity with the whole human family by working to build a culture where all houses of worship are treated with respect.

Act

Religious communities express their faith through their sacred art and architecture. Sacred spaces and devotional art all testify to the strength and hope of these diverse communities. How has this legacy affected you? Share with your family and fellow parishioners!



June 23: Blasphemy and Apostasy Laws

Pray for all people of faith who live in fear of persecution under unjust blasphemy laws.

Reflect

All around the world, people accused of blasphemy and apostasy are suffering for their faith or lack thereof. In 2022, the Pew Research Center found that 79 countries out of 198 they studied have laws banning blasphemy. According to Pew, 90 percent of countries in the Middle East and North Africa have blasphemy laws as well as 34% of countries in the Asia/Pacific region, 31% of European countries, 34% of Latin American countries, and 38% of Sub-Saharan African countries. Penalties for blasphemy vary considerably, ranging from fines to prison sentences to executions. Seven countries have the death penalty for blasphemy – Nigeria, Pakistan, Iran, Afghanistan, Somalia, Mauritania, and Saudi Arabia.

Act

Under the guidance of the Holy Father, Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) provides pastoral and humanitarian assistance to the persecuted Church around the world. Today, ACN continues working to counter the persecution of Catholics. Connect with ACN and support their work today at www.churchinneed.org/.



Religious Freedom Week 2024



June 24: Freedom to Speak the Truth

Pray that the Holy Spirit would give us the courage to bear witness to the truth of the gospel, even in the face of social and legal pressure.

Reflect

All baptized Christians are called to share the joy of the gospel with others. But in numerous settings—schools, the workplace, health care—individuals are being pressured to conform to the orthodoxy of gender ideology. Under the current administration, government agencies are proposing regulations that, in the name of prohibiting harassment, would chill or prohibit speech that upholds the nature of conjugal marriage, the bodily reality of human beings, and even the sanctity of life. We certainly should approach people who disagree with us on these issues with tenderness and compassion, but that does not mean we should be forced to speak untruthfully. And in a pluralistic society, the government should afford ample space for people of different backgrounds and worldviews to be able to work together.

Act

Be an example of how people of faith can voice beliefs about love and marriage with clarity and compassion. The Love Means More initiative is an ongoing campaign that takes a deep dive into the meanings of love. Learn more at lovemeansmore.org/.



June 25: Service to Immigrants

Pray that the Lord would protect all migrants and refugees, and that all those who work with people on the move would be free to serve.

Reflect

As part of their duty to uphold the common good, civil authorities are responsible for ensuring public order, including by maintaining national borders. At the same time, the Church is commanded by Jesus Christ to serve vulnerable populations, including migrants and refugees, and recognize their God-given dignity. The Church has long sought to serve the needs of “people on the move,” from providing for basic needs, to assisting with refugee resettlement, to offering legal services to help newcomers navigate the expectations of their receiving country. A nation that respects its religious institutions will recognize the Church’s right to carry out her mission to vulnerable people, including migrants and refugees.

Act

Catholic social teaching recognizes a country’s right and responsibility to manage its borders in accordance with the common good, and the U.S. bishops have been vocal proponents of immigration reform for many years. However, bills recently put forth in Congress, such as the USCCB-opposed Secure the Border Act (H.R. 2), which targets organizations serving newcomers, underscore both the partisan nature of the immigration debate and the potential for religious groups to be scapegoated for the consequences of public officials failing to achieve just, bipartisan solutions on immigration.



Religious Freedom Week 2024



June 26: India

Pray for our Christian brothers and sisters in India, who face harassment and violent attacks

Reflect

Traditionally, many cultures and religious communities have thrived alongside one another in India which, according to its Constitution, was established as a “socialist, secular, democratic republic” so that all citizens were to be treated equally regardless of religious identity. But since 2014, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, have promoted a Hindu nationalist ideology (Hindutva) so that to be Indian is to be Hindu. Consequently, Muslims (about 14% of the population), Christians (slightly over 2%), and other religious minorities face discrimination and find themselves under attack. In response, the Catholic Bishops Conference of India has called the faithful to prayer and peaceful engagement as citizens, while also demanding that the government uphold the Fundamental and Minority Rights guaranteed by the Constitution.

Act

Catholic Near East Welfare Association (CNEWA) was founded by Pope Pius XI in 1926 as an instrument of love and a sign of hope for those in need scattered throughout the historic but unstable lands of the ancient Eastern churches—the Middle East, Northeast Africa, India and Eastern Europe. Connect with CNEWA at cnewa.org/.



June 27: Faith at Work

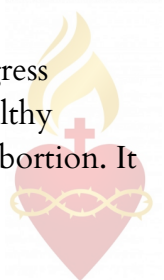
Pray that business leaders would be free to promote a culture of life in their workplaces.

Reflect

The Catholic Church calls the lay faithful to bring their faith to bear on all spheres of life. Whether we are praying, serving those in need, or working at our daily jobs, we are always Catholic. The Pregnant Workers Fairness Act (PWFA) was passed with the support of the USCCB. The bishops commended the PWFA’s requirement that employers grant pregnant women reasonable workplace accommodations. However, in its rules implementing the PWFA, the Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) requires that employers give employees leave for the purposes of obtaining an abortion. A federal mandate that private entities be complicit in second- and third-trimester abortions is unprecedented. And the EEOC’s stated interpretation of PWFA’s religious exemption appears to render it effectively meaningless.

Act

Meanwhile, religious employers should honor the pro-woman, pro-life intent of the law Congress passed, and grant pregnant employees reasonable accommodations that allow them to have healthy pregnancies. It will make for a stronger case in the event an employee asks for leave to get an abortion. It is also the right thing to do. Sign up for [action alerts](#) from the USCCB!



Religious Freedom Week 2024



June 28: Civility

Pray that God would give us the grace to remember the dignity of all and invite others to do the same.

Reflect

As Catholics, we take to heart Jesus' invitation to follow the example of the Good Samaritan, who challenges us to "become neighbors to all" (no. 80). As a Church and a nation, we are polarized and divided. But as Pope Francis writes in *Fratelli Tutti*, we can seek "a better kind of politics, one truly at the service of the common good" (no. 154). We can see ourselves as members of one family. We can seek to encounter and to grow. We can identify common values. We can listen to understand. We can seek the truth together. We can jointly come up with creative solutions to the problems that face our world

Act

Interested in learning more about civil dialogue or about how your community can engage in civil dialogue more often? Join USCCB's Civilize It Campaign to help promote dignity beyond the debate. Visit www.usccb.org/civilizeit for more information, to take the pledge, or plan an opportunity for civil dialogue in your community.



June 29: Catholic Healthcare

Pray that governments will respect the consciences of all individuals and institutions that care for the sick and vulnerable.

Reflect

For centuries, Christians have carried on the healing ministry of Christ by building institutions dedicated to medicine and accompaniment of the dying. However, Catholic hospitals and medical professionals face numerous challenges to their mission today. For years, activists have sought to undermine the Church's mission by forcing Catholic hospitals to perform procedures that destroy human life and undermine human dignity, such as sterilization, sex reassignment surgery, and even abortion, and people of faith who work in secular institutions may find themselves coerced into performing abortions. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) would consider it to be discrimination for a health care worker to categorically object to performing gender transition procedures, regardless of whether that objection is a matter of religious belief or clinical judgment.

Act

Sign up to receive alerts on new opportunities to let government agencies in Washington know that you support the Church's right to operate her institutions in accordance with her faith in Jesus Christ.

