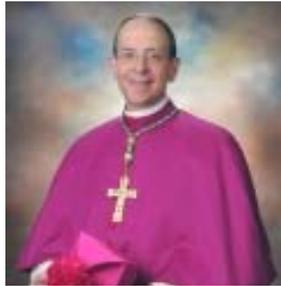


# Religious Freedom Under Threat at Home

by Archbishop William E. Lori, S.T.D., 13 June 2013

On Friday, Catholics throughout the United States will begin observing two weeks known as the [Fortnight for Freedom](#). For a second consecutive year, the U.S. Catholic Church has set aside this time leading up to Independence Day to draw attention to the need to resist erosions of religious liberty so that faith can continue to enrich our public life.

How appropriate that the Fortnight should begin with a nationally televised Mass from our own Basilica of the Assumption, the first Catholic cathedral in the United States. Blessed Pope John Paul II once referred to the Basilica as a worldwide symbol of religious freedom. President Thomas Jefferson assisted in the Basilica's uniquely American design — the brainchild of architect Benjamin Latrobe, who also designed the U.S. Capitol. The Basilica is the embodiment of what it means to be both Catholic and American, the intersection of faith and public life that is at the very heart of the Fortnight for Freedom.



Archbishop Lori

Almost two centuries after the Basilica was completed, why do so many people want faith removed from public view? Why has it become counter-cultural for believers to openly discuss their faith? Why are they discouraged from bringing their faith-inspired values to the public square and to their places of business? Why, when people from nearly every sector of our society promote tolerance and acceptance of almost everything, do they still seek to marginalize God and all things of God? We hope Catholics will spend the Fortnight considering these questions and others.

After all, faith plays an integral role in our collective efforts to promote the common good. Faith inspires people to serve their neighbors, it brings people together, it enriches the national conversation on important public issues, and it centers the lives of countless Americans. And religious liberty protects this important role that faith plays.

From our nation's earliest days, faith has held us together through some of our darkest moments, including times of war and national crisis. Faith has also inspired us to be better members of a human family fractured by racism, violence and poverty. Catholics and other people of faith have brought their religious values to the public square as they've led our country through some of its greatest social challenges. They've led the fight for laws that advocate for the poor and vulnerable, civil rights, responsible immigration reform, and respect for life from natural conception to natural death.

Faith inspires ministries like Catholic Charities, which serves more than 400,000 people each year in the Baltimore area. Each year in our archdiocese, Catholic hospitals care for 1.9 million people annually, and Catholic schools and universities educate nearly 40,000 students. Those who work in these great Catholic ministries live their faith day-in and day-out.

They live the truth that Pope Francis has proclaimed: We're not called to be "part-time Christians," we're called "to live our faith at every moment of every day." As we strive to answer this call, we know that religious freedom protects more than the freedom to worship on Sunday; it also protects our ability to live out our faith the other six days of the week.

Yet the government is eroding this fundamental freedom. To take one example, the Department of Health and Human Services has mandated that religious employers fund and facilitate health coverage that violates their deeply held beliefs or risk crippling fines, restricting the freedom of faith-based social service providers to continue serving the common good in a way that respects their beliefs.

When the HHS mandate is implemented, the poor and those who serve them will be hurt the most. Faith-based schools, hospitals and charitable institutions will be forced to choose between violating their religious beliefs or violating the law and paying steep fines — fines that will undoubtedly restrict their ability to serve those in their care.

The HHS mandate is but one incursion on religious liberty over recent years, among many others. Some states have driven local Catholic Charities out of adoption or foster-care services because these charities wouldn't violate their beliefs. Universities have denied organizational status to faith-based

student groups when they refused to water down their teachings. And school districts have barred the off-hours rental of public school facilities by churches while allowing non-religious groups to rent the same spaces.

Faith contributes greatly to public life. Unfortunately, threats to faith and the religious liberty that protects it are growing. The upcoming Fortnight for Freedom is an opportunity for Catholics and people of all faiths to educate themselves and others about these threats, praying and working together as we stand up for religious liberty — the "most cherished of American freedoms."

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