



## THE MOST SACRED OF ALL PROPERTY: RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND THE PEOPLE OF MARYLAND

PARISH RESOURCES

November 2011

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### BULLETIN AND PULPIT ANNOUNCEMENTS

*May be used on a rotating basis*

#### **What does religious freedom mean in America today?**

Have you read recently about religious professionals forced to choose between their jobs and their moral convictions? Are you curious what religious freedom means for Americans today? Maryland's Catholic bishops invite you to read and reflect upon their new statement. "The Most Sacred of All Property: Religious Freedom and the People of Maryland." The document reviews the history and role of religious freedom in our society, highlights present-day threats to this freedom, and offers ways to get involved. Copies of the statement can be found in the back of the church or by visiting [www.mdccathcon.org](http://www.mdccathcon.org).

#### **Maryland's proud history of religious toleration**

Did you know that Maryland was founded as a place of religious toleration? Or that a law approved in Maryland in the 17<sup>th</sup> century was the first in the nation to protect individual freedom of conscience? Maryland's Catholic bishops invite you to read and reflect upon their new statement. "The Most Sacred of All Property: Religious Freedom and the People of Maryland." The document reviews the history and role of religious freedom in our society, highlights present-day threats to this freedom, and offers ways to get involved. Copies of the statement can be found in the back of the church or by visiting [www.mdccathcon.org](http://www.mdccathcon.org).

#### **Religious freedom: Integral to a good and just society**

Did you know that religious freedom has made it possible for religious individuals throughout our nation's history to advocate for things like the abolition of slavery, the rights of workers and those with disabilities, and for civil rights for African Americans? Maryland's Catholic bishops invite you to read and reflect upon their new statement "The Most Sacred of All Property: Religious Freedom and the People of Maryland" The document reviews the history and role of religious freedom in our society, highlights present-day threats to this freedom, and offers ways to get involved. Copies of the statement can be found in the back of the church or by visiting [www.mdccathcon.org](http://www.mdccathcon.org).

### HOMILY HINTS

*May also be used as bulletin announcements*

#### ***History of Religious Freedom in Our State, Nation, and World***

- As Marylanders, we have a proud history of religious freedom. While Europe was engulfed in religious wars, Maryland was expressly chartered as a place of religious toleration where people of different faiths could live together peacefully. It was founded by a Catholic, Lord Baltimore, who had been given a land grant by a Protestant, King Charles I of England.

- Religious liberty was so important to Maryland’s first settlers that, in 1649, Maryland approved the first law in the New World to protect an individual’s right to freedom of conscience (the “Toleration Act”).
- Maryland’s early history teaches us that religious freedom must be protected, or it will be lost. Within several decades of the Toleration Act, the colony’s dedication to religious freedom was lost. The Church of England became the established religion in Maryland and Catholics and others were the victims of **official** discrimination. Penal laws were enacted that forbade Catholics from worshipping publicly, closed Catholic chapels, and restricted Catholics to practicing their religion in their homes. Catholics lost the right to vote and were barred from holding public office.
- Our nation’s founding fathers recognized that religious freedom was a necessary component of a healthy democracy, and so guaranteed it in the First Amendment to the Constitution.
- Maryland expressly protects religious freedom in our state constitution, and the United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights does so as well.
- Allowing individuals to exercise religious freedom has yielded great public benefit. For example, it allowed the Quakers to call for an end to slavery, for the Church to stand up for the rights of workers and those with disabilities, and for Rev. Martin Luther King to lead the civil rights movement. Today, we see the public good of religious freedom in the numerous schools, hospitals, and social service organizations run by churches and religious organizations.

### ***Church Teaching***

- While religious freedom is an important and necessary civil right protected by government, it is more fundamentally a right due each person because of his or her human dignity. (*Dignitatis Humanae*, 2)
- Each person is made in the image and likeness of God. We are therefore made to know Him and to seek His truth. This search for truth must be open to every person and free from external or psychological coercion. (*Ibid*).
- Even God respects our right to freely search for the truth. He himself is Truth, but he offers Himself to us in humility and meekness; He does not force Himself on us through coercion or compulsion. God respects our right to accept Him or reject Him; so too must government and society. (*Dignitatis Humanae*, 11)
- Once a person has found, or believes he has found, the truth, he must be free to live his life according to that truth. (*Dignitatis Humanae*, 2)
- Thus, religious freedom protects the ability to practice any faith or no faith. It defends a person’s right to convert from one faith to another. It preserves the right to follow one’s conscience, in acts both internal and external, in private and in public, as an individual and as a member of a community. (*Ibid*)

## *Scripture*

- **“God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them.”** (*Genesis 1:27*) – We are made in the divine image, and so are made to be in relationship with God.
- **“[God] wills everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth.”** (*1 Tim 2:4*) – God desires that each person know the truth, which is Jesus Christ, and so He always allows us the freedom to search for the truth.
- **“For, although we are in the flesh, we do not battle according to the flesh.”** (*2 Cor 10:3*) – The Lord does not use compulsion to draw us to Himself, but rather the conviction of love, sacrifice, and humility.
- **John 6** – Christ teaches that He is the Bread of Life and declares that we shall have no life without eating His flesh and drinking His blood. This “hard saying” (*60*) meant that, “many (of) his disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him (*66*).” While Christ grieved over their leaving, He allowed them to go and did not compel them to stay and believe. He even asked the Twelve, “Do you also want to leave?” The Lord respects our decision to accept or reject Him.
- **“He said to them, ‘Then repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God.’”** (*Matt 22:21*) We have a duty to be responsible and law-abiding citizens. We also have a duty to live out our Catholic faith in all aspects of our lives. These two responsibilities do not contradict, but rather complement, each other. Civil laws that require someone to violate his or her faith as a condition of participation in public life violate the right to religious freedom. They attempt to give to Caesar what rightly belongs to God.

## *Faith in the Public Square*

- With freedoms come responsibilities. Churches and people of faith belong in the public square and have an obligation to express their views on day-to-day social and political questions.
- As Catholics and citizens, we have a right and duty to advocate for laws that uphold the common good by protecting the poor, the dignity of life, the value of family, and religious freedom of all.
- We bring to the public square a voice that speaks especially for those who have no one to speak for them – the unborn, the poor and those in need, newcomers to our country, prisoners, those with physical and mental disabilities, the elderly and families struggling to provide their children with a safe home, a good education, and adequate healthcare.
- We speak from a uniform point of view, one that is accessible not only to Catholics, but to all who recognize that a proper understanding of human nature must determine how we fashion our society and the laws that govern it.
- Unlike many advocacy groups, the Catholic Church’s voice does not fit neatly into typical political distinctions, nor does it follow the dictates of popular opinion. We do not speak as Republicans or Democrats; we are too liberal for conservatives and too conservative for liberals.

We are not a “single issue” advocacy group, but rather speak out on a broad variety of topics considered by our lawmakers.

### ***Threats to Religious Freedom***

- When we think of violations of religious freedom, we often think of places like China or parts of Africa and the Middle East, where Christians live under severe oppression and risk their lives to exercise their faith. These violations are very grave and our brothers and sisters in Christ deserve our prayers.
- We are blessed in the United States to enjoy many religious liberties, and for that we should be truly grateful. However, there is a new current in American society that promotes the idea that religious freedom should be restricted simply to Sunday morning worship. Some believe that religious or moral beliefs should play no role in public life and that religious individuals should not be allowed to have their religious or moral beliefs guide their professional or public actions.
- This view of religious freedom is a subtle but gross misinterpretation of this cherished right. To live out our religious or moral beliefs in our public and professional lives is not to impose our beliefs on others but to exercise religious freedom to its fullest extent. Religious freedom loses its meaning if government or society can tell people of faith when, how, and with what limits they can exercise their beliefs.
- Sadly, this misguided understanding of religious freedom has led to real violations of the rights of people of faith, often in areas relating to life issues and human sexuality. Here are some recent examples:
  - Pro-life pregnancy resource centers in Baltimore City and Montgomery County had their free speech rights violated when those jurisdictions passed laws to regulate the centers simply because of their pro-life mission. No similar restrictions were placed on abortion clinics.
  - Religious professionals who understand marriage to be the union of one man and one woman have been sued and investigated for discrimination for declining to participate in same-sex marriage ceremonies. In New Mexico, a Christian photographer was found to have engaged in illegal discrimination for declining to photograph a same-sex ceremony. In Vermont, a Catholic married couple who own an inn are being sued for declining to allow a reception for a same-sex couple to be held on their property.
  - A nurse in New York was forced – under threat of the loss of her job and nurse’s license – to participate in a late-term abortion of a baby with Down syndrome, despite having told her employer in a job interview and later in writing that her Catholic faith prohibited her from participating in abortions.
  - Catholic Charities in Washington and Boston have had to close their adoption services after same-sex marriage laws there would not allow them to place children exclusively in homes with both a mother and a father.

## PRAYERS OF THE FAITHFUL

In thanksgiving for the gift of religious liberty, that we who enjoy it may use it to seek and promote truth, justice, and beauty, we pray to the Lord...

For our president, governor, representatives, and judges, that all those in authority may recognize the great value of religious liberty and work to protect it for all people, we pray to the Lord...

For those who do not value religious liberty, that they may embrace religious freedom as a universal human right, we pray to the Lord...

For all those whose religious liberty has been threatened or infringed upon, that their rights may be restored and protected, we pray to the Lord...

For all those who suffer persecution for their religious beliefs and for their persecutors, that the grace and peace of Jesus Christ will comfort and guide them, we pray to the Lord...

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ***Dignitatis humanae, Vatican II's Declaration on Religious Freedom.*** May be accessed at [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decl\\_19651207\\_dignitatis-humanae\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651207_dignitatis-humanae_en.html)
- ***Religious Freedom: The Path to Peace, Message of Pope Benedict XVI for the 2011 World Day of Peace.*** May be accessed at [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/messages/peace/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_mes\\_20101208\\_xliv-world-day-peace\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20101208_xliv-world-day-peace_en.html)
- ***Catechism of the Catholic Church***, paragraphs 2104 – 2109
- ***Let Freedom Ring: A Pastoral Letter on Religious Freedom***, Bishop William Lori of the Diocese of Bridgeport. May be accessed at [http://www.bridgeportdiocese.com/index.php/ourbishop/article/pastoral\\_letter\\_2010\\_10](http://www.bridgeportdiocese.com/index.php/ourbishop/article/pastoral_letter_2010_10)
- ***The Williamsburg Charter: A Reaffirmation of the First Amendment.*** May be accessed at <http://religiousfreedom.lib.virginia.edu/const/Willburg.html>
- ***Catholics and Latter-Day Saints: Partners in the Defense of Religious Freedom***, Francis Cardinal George. May be accessed at [www.usccb.org/seia/catholics-latter-day-saints.pdf](http://www.usccb.org/seia/catholics-latter-day-saints.pdf)