

# US Church Commences Campaign for Religious Liberty

## 'Fortnight for Freedom' Promotes Nationwide Awareness of Religious Liberty

By Ann Schneible

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United States bishops launched a two-week, nation-wide campaign today to promote awareness of the Church's teaching on religious freedom through prayer, study, catechesis and public action.

The United States Conference for Catholic Bishops called for the campaign – dubbed the “Fortnight for Freedom” – in response to the Health and Human Services (HHS) federal mandate that would require employers of Catholic institutions to violate Church teaching by being legally required to pay for insurance that provides abortion-inducing drugs, contraception, and sterilization procedures to employees. The campaign begins today, and will conclude on July 4th, American Independence Day.

Bishops have requested that all parishes encourage the faithful to pray together, such as by reciting a prayer for religious freedom at the end of all the Masses. Parishioners are also encouraged to contact their elected officials, urging them to safeguard religious freedom.

Leading the project is the recently appointed Archbishop William Lori of Baltimore, Maryland. In a video statement made through the USCCB Web site, Bishop Lori says that religious freedom is our “first freedom.” Religious freedom, he says, is “not a privilege that the government grants to its citizens, and so may take away when it wishes. Instead, religious liberty is inherent in our very humanity, put there by the creator.”

“The declaration of independence boldly proclaimed that our inalienable rights are endowed by the creator, not by the state.”

Bishop Lori concludes by calling upon Catholics to be active in defending religious freedom. “As Catholics, as Americans, we have the blessings of religious liberty and freedom of speech. Each of us reflects on these issues facing our country, and each of us should become engaged in the debate in the public square.”

The two-week campaign corresponds with a number of saints who faced persecution by political power, such as St. Thomas More, St. John the Baptist, Sts. Peter and Paul, and the first martyrs of the Church in Rome.

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