

## Prayer for Religious Liberty

O God, our Creator,  
from your provident hand we have received  
our right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.  
You have called us as your people and given us  
the right and the duty to worship you, the only true God,  
and your Son, Jesus Christ.

Through the power and working of your Holy Spirit,  
you call us to live out our faith in the midst of the world,  
bringing the light and the saving truth of the Gospel  
to every corner of society.

We ask you to bless us  
in our vigilance for the gift of religious liberty.  
Give us the strength of mind and heart  
to readily defend our freedoms when they are threatened;  
give us courage in making our voices heard  
on behalf of the rights of your Church  
and the freedom of conscience of all people of faith.

Grant, we pray, O heavenly Father,  
a clear and united voice to all your sons and daughters  
gathered in your Church  
in this decisive hour in the history of our nation,  
so that, with every trial withstood  
and every danger overcome—  
for the sake of our children, our grandchildren,  
and all who come after us—  
this great land will always be “one nation, under God,  
indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.”

We ask this through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

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The Catholic Bishops in our country have recently called for a *Fortnight for Freedom* from June 21 to July 4 as a “special period of prayer, study, catechesis, and public action” regarding religious freedom.

We need to remind ourselves, the Catholic faithful of our diocese, and our neighbors that religious freedom is a God-given right and not something that is bestowed by civil authority. Also, religious freedom is not limited to freedom of worship within the private setting of Church or home. It also includes freedom with regard to the many ways in which we are called to live and announce the Catholic faith in public (cf. Vatican II, Declaration on Religious Freedom, *Dignitatis humanae*, Dec. 7, 1965, especially n. 2-3).

Religious freedom was on the minds of the founding fathers of the United States of America. It is one of the fundamental rights explicitly mentioned in the Constitution of our Country. Unfortunately, the exercise of religious freedom is being challenged in a number of ways. It is certainly a matter of concern when we are told what we are to believe or when we are told that we are to act in a way that is contrary to the teachings of Christ and the Church.

The 2012 Statement on Religious Liberty of the USCCB, explain that the the *Fortnight for Freedom* is intended to be “a great hymn of prayer for our country.” Yes, prayer is the most important component of this observance. And so I am pleased to announce our diocesan plan for prayer, study, catechesis, and public action.

1. *A Holy Hour for Religious Freedom* will be celebrated at four locations in our diocese during the Fortnight (Thursday, June 21 - St. John Gualbert Cathedral, Johnstown; Sunday, June 24 - Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament, Altoona; Thursday, June 28 - St. Benedict Church, Carrolltown; Sunday, July 1 - Our Lady of Victory Church, State College). Each of these services will begin at 7PM. The service will include the celebration of Evening Prayer with Eucharistic Adoration and Benediction.
2. All parishes are to include prayers for religious freedom in the General Intercessions at all Masses (Sunday and Weekday) during the Fortnight.
3. All parishes are to have a common recitation of one the prayers that are included with the materials from the diocesan Liturgy Office, including the USCCB Prayer for Religious Freedom, or the USCCB Litany for Liberty. The common recitation would be at all Masses (Sunday and Weekday) during the Fortnight either at the conclusion of the General Intercessions or at the end of Mass. Copies of the prayers should be made available for parishioners and they are to be encouraged to pray them at home.
4. With this focus on prayer, I ask you to write to your elected officials (including the President of the United States and U.S. Senators and Representatives in Congress) to tell them that we are praying for our country and our country’s leaders that all will recognize the need to safeguard religious freedom.

Knowing that the issue of religious freedom may not be glamorous or exciting, and the efforts being made to pray, study, catechize, and act in support of religious freedom may be perceived by some as onerous or futile, it is recommended to read the encouraging words of St. Paul who focused on freedom in the face of such challenges.

The whole created world eagerly awaits the revelation of the sons of God. Creation was made subject to futility, not of its own accord but by Him who once subjected it; yet not without hope, because the world itself will be freed from its slavery to corruption and share in the glorious freedom of the sons of God.  
(Romans 8:19-21)