

June 21, 2024

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

"Religious freedom allows the Church, and all religious communities, to live out their faith in public and to serve the good of all." (Religious Freedom Week, n.d.) These words from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops pointedly describe the importance of religious liberty. Every year, from June 22-29, we celebrate Religious Freedom Week in our country. This week begins with the feast day of Sts. Thomas More and John Fisher, both of whom were martyred for refusing to compromise their faith to meet the requests of King Henry VIII.

As Catholics and Americans, we understand the significance of religious freedom and the role it plays in allowing us to practice our faith openly and without fear of persecution. An erosion in this liberty often leads to anti-religious sentiments, which increases the likelihood of hostility towards the practice of our faith. We have already experienced this through the misrepresentation of the work of pregnancy resource centers throughout our state and country since the Dobbs decision of the Supreme Court of the United States.

Gravely distorted anti-Catholic sentiments have also been expressed by extreme critics of the Church through Catholic Charities agencies and other Catholic ministries in the care of migrants and refugees coming to our country on our southern border.

Critics of the Church's advocacy for the unborn and for migrants and refugees seek to drive us from the public square by limiting or denying our access to public funds which help us to serve those most in need as an integral expression of our faith, rooted in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

During Religious Freedom Week, it is important for us to reflect on the challenges and threats to religious liberty, both at home and abroad. This week serves as an opportunity for us to unite in prayer and action to defend this fundamental human right. I urge not just Catholics, but all people of faith in our communities to continue to advocate for religious freedom in our society. I also call on our elected officials to stand up for and continue to protect our religious freedom.

Religious freedom is a right and precious gift. Let us stand in solidarity with all those who are persecuted for their faith and work towards a world where religious freedom is respected and upheld everywhere.

Sincerely in Christ,

Most Reverend Timothy C. Senior  
Bishop of Harrisburg