



Committee for Religious Liberty

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Timothy Cardinal Dolan
Archbishop of New York
Chairman

May 8, 2023

Dear brother bishops,

Religious Freedom Week 2023: Embracing the Divine Gift of Freedom takes place from June 22 to 29. The Week begins with the Feast of Ss. John Fisher and Thomas More, includes the Feast of the Nativity of St John the Baptist, and ends with the Solemnity of Ss. Peter and Paul.

Staff have prepared an attached summary, which can be used for promotional pieces in diocesan papers and other outlets. The Religious Freedom Week logo is [available for download](#).

During Religious Freedom Week, Catholics are encouraged to pray and act each day for religious freedom. The [Pray-Reflect-Act series](#) aims to help Catholics build solidarity with people of faith who are persecuted abroad and find strength to carry out the mission of the Church here in the United States. [Graphics with the prayer intention for each day](#) of Religious Freedom Week are available for download. [Lectionary notes for Sunday, June 25](#) are also available. Please share these materials through your channels where appropriate.

Spanish materials are being prepared and will appear on the website as soon as they are available. Please check www.usccb.org/ReligiousFreedomWeek for updates in the coming weeks. All materials except the talking points are available on the website. Any diocesan staff with questions about Religious Freedom Week should contact Dan Balsarak (dbalsarak@usccb.org) or Aaron Weldon (aweldon@usccb.org).

Thank you again for your support for Religious Freedom Week and for your united voices in the promotion and defense of religious freedom!

With prayerful best wishes for a blessed Easter season, I am

Sincerely yours in our Lord,

Timothy Cardinal Dolan
Archbishop of New York
Chairman, Committee for Religious Liberty

Religious Freedom Week 2023: Embracing the Divine Gift of Freedom

- **Religious Freedom Week takes place June 22 – 29 each year.** It begins with the feast day of Sts. Thomas More and John Fisher, includes the Nativity of St. John the Baptist, and ends with the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul. The theme for this year is **Embracing the Divine Gift of Freedom.**
- The USCCB provides “Pray—Reflect—Act” resources at www.usccb.org/ReligiousFreedomWeek—one for each day on different religious liberty topics. These materials help people learn about religious liberty from a Catholic perspective, pray about particular issues, and act on what they learn by advocating for policies that promote religious freedom.
- The Pray—Reflect—Act resources this year show the breadth of religious liberty issues of concern to the bishops. The Committee for Religious Liberty has collaborated with the Office of International Justice and Peace to raise awareness about [the persecution of the Catholic Church in Nicaragua](#) and [conflicts and religious tensions in Nigeria](#). We need to be in solidarity with people throughout the world who suffer for their faith.
- Domestically, a major area of concern continues to be freedom for Catholic institutions, such as schools, hospitals, and child welfare service providers, to carry out their missions with integrity. In particular, the bishops are [concerned about Catholic healthcare](#), as [the Biden Administration proposed a cascade of changes to federal regulations](#) over the past year that remove conscience protections from healthcare institutions and individuals.
- Some of those proposed regulations rescind rules that protect [religious student groups on college and university campuses](#). These rescissions would leave student groups vulnerable to “all-comers” policies that, while well-meaning, can be used to prohibit religious student groups from ensuring that their leaders and members share their beliefs. The USCCB supports the Equal Campus Act of 2023, which would codify rules meant to protect the rights of student groups to operate in accordance with their distinctive missions.
- The Catholic Church calls the lay faithful to bring their faith to bear on all spheres of life, including their work lives. And Christians are not the only ones who should be able to live out their religion in a holistic way. [All people should be free to allow faith to guide them in their daily affairs, even in work and business](#). A culture that embraces the divine gift of freedom will be one that makes as much space as possible for persons to participate in work life in accordance with their religious convictions.
- Religious Freedom Week is also highlighting issues that currently are taking place primarily at the state level. State governments have proposed laws that forbid “harboring” or transporting undocumented immigrants—even when the “harboring” is just providing a safe place to sleep, or the transporting is just a ride to Mass—which could essentially criminalize much of the Church’s ministry to immigrants. A nation that embraces the divine gift of freedom will respect the dignity of all people and [allow the Church to carry out her mission to vulnerable people, including migrants and refugees](#).

- [The right to maintain the seal of confession](#)—or, clergy-penitent privilege—was upheld in what is possibly the first court case on the right to free exercise of religion in America, *People v. Philips*. Since the Philips case, clergy-penitent privilege has become recognized as a basic right. However, today, some governments are seeking to revoke the privilege in the hopes of exposing crimes against children and vulnerable adults. Indeed, it is essential that, to the extent it can, the Church work with civil authorities to ensure that criminals are brought to justice and communities are kept safe. At the same time, the government has no right to encroach upon this sacred communication. [Clergy-penitent privilege is the recognition of the proper relationship between church and state and the right to free exercise of religion, not only for Catholics, but for people of all faiths.](#)
- Another [issue of special concern](#) is the wave of [attacks on Catholic churches](#) over the past three years. Catholics are not alone in defending their sacred spaces. In Arizona, Native American tribes have been fighting to preserve Oak Flat, a space that has been used for prayer and worship since time immemorial, from being destroyed by a copper mining company. Attacks on sacred spaces, whether from political ideology or commerce, are harmful to religious freedom. A culture that embraces the divine gift of freedom will respect sacred spaces.
- This year, the USCCB Committee for Religious Liberty, in collaboration with the Secretariat of Catholic Education and Our Sunday Visitor Institute, hosted a [religious liberty essay contest](#). The competition was open to high school juniors and seniors. This year’s theme is “Witnesses to Freedom.” Contestants were asked to share the story of witness to freedom—a story of the people who inspire us. The top essays from the competition will be published during Religious Freedom Week.
- Connect with the USCCB Committee for Religious Liberty. Text FREEDOM to 84576 and [Sign up for First Freedom News](#), the USCCB Committee for Religious Liberty’s monthly newsletter.
- Through prayer, education, and public action during Religious Freedom Week, we can promote the fundamental right of religious freedom for Catholics and for people of all faiths.