

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

understanding the basics ▪ defending a right

Threatened: America's Unique Model (2 of 7)

Writing recently in *America* magazine, Harvard Law Professor Mary Ann Glendon noted that in the United States, "Citizens of all faiths have long taken for granted the unique model of religious freedom that has enabled the nation's diverse religions to flourish and to coexist in relative harmony." How true. Certainly on Long Island, where believers from every tradition live side-by-side, we can quickly overlook the gift of religious freedom that is ours. We can take for granted its splendor and forget the impact it has in shaping our nation and community.

Undoubtedly, America's greatness is built upon hard work and daring. But there is more to the country than sweat and courage. Its greatness stems from the fact that people are free to be themselves, free to live life according to the dictates of their conscience. America's proud heritage of religious freedom, though not always appreciated, has given the country a firm foundation. It has enabled people to be themselves and contribute that greatest gift—their total self, faith included—to the life of the nation.

Presently, however, Professor Glendon sees this vital freedom, so crucial to American life, as endangered. She warns, "Recent legal and political developments...suggest that the first freedom in our First Amendment may be en route to becoming a lesser right—one that can be easily overridden by other rights, claims and interests." Our first freedom is being reduced from the fullness it had in the eyes of our founders to freedom of worship. Freedom of conscience is being left behind. Two examples of this pattern stand out. They directly impact the charitable work of the Church:

In recent years, Boston, San Francisco, the District of Columbia, and the state of Illinois have driven local Catholic Charities out of the work of providing adoption or foster care services—by revoking their licenses, by ending their government contracts, or both—because those Charities refused to place children with unmarried opposite-sex couples who cohabit or same-sex couples.

Notwithstanding years of excellent performance by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Migration and Refugee Services in administering contract services for victims of human trafficking, the federal government changed its contract specifications to require the Church to provide or refer for contraceptive and abortion services in violation of Catholic teaching.

In both circumstances, by curtailing the robustness of our religious liberty and impinging on our freedom of conscience, America's heritage of religious freedom is threatened. Unfortunately, these two instances are part of a bigger trend. More recently, and in an unprecedented manner, the federal government issued a mandate concerning contraception and sterilization which again threatens to limit our cherished first freedom.

"As a community of faith, we must commit ourselves to prayer and fasting that wisdom and justice may prevail and religious liberty may be restored."

BISHOP WILLIAM MURPHY

PRAYER

Almighty God, Father of all nations, for freedom you have set us free in Christ Jesus (Gal 5:1).

We praise and bless you for the gift of religious liberty, the foundation of human rights, justice, and the common good. Grant to our leaders the wisdom to protect and promote our liberties; By your grace may we have the courage to defend them, for ourselves and for all those who live in this blessed land.

We ask this through the intercession of Mary Immaculate, our patroness, and in the name of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, with whom you live and reign, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

*Second in a series of seven bulletin inserts.
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Our Lady of Mercy, Pray for us