



Election 2012 Election 2012

This is the last of four bulletin inserts offering guidance and reflection points from Illinois' Catholic Bishops in preparation for the elections of November 6, 2012. The first insert was an introduction to this effort; the second and third inserts focused on the formation of a Catholic conscience and how to make prudential judgments about various public policy issues. For a copy of the first three inserts, please go to www.ilcatholic.org.

“[T]he right to religious freedom has its foundation in the very dignity of the human person as this dignity is known through the revealed word of God and by reason itself. This right of the human person to religious freedom is to be recognized in the constitutional law whereby society is governed and thus it is to become a civil right.”

– *Dignitatis Humanae*, 2

This year, our own federal government, through the Department of Health and Human Services, mandated a new and narrow definition of “religious employer.” This unprecedented action could force the punishment or even closure of faith-based soup kitchens, schools and hospitals because these institutions would not fit under the federal government’s definition of “religious.” It is an ominous sign when the federal government issues the edict that Catholic Charities and other religious employers are not religious. The mandate is both illegal and unjust, and constitutes an unprecedented affront to religious liberty.¹ As we did in the *Fortnight for Freedom*, we continue to ask the laity to pray and be active in opposing this mandate that we feel is a violation of the First Amendment of the United States Constitution as well as other federal laws.

As our fellow bishops have written: “Religious liberty is not only about our ability to go to Mass on Sunday or pray the Rosary at home. It is about whether we can make our contribution to the common good of all Americans. Can we do the good works our faith calls us to do, without having to compromise that very same faith?...What is at stake is whether America will continue to have a free, creative, and robust civil society—or whether the state alone will determine who gets to contribute to the common good, and how they get to do it.”²

A law that prohibits Catholics from living the Gospel publicly is a law that prohibits Catholics from living the Gospel faithfully. And so we join our brother bishops in calling upon “all the energies the Catholic community can muster” to oppose this threat to religious liberty.

“Of all the dispositions and habits, which lead to political prosperity, Religion and Morality are indispensable supports,” said George Washington in his Farewell Address. “In vain would that man claim the tribute of Patriotism, who should labor to subvert these great pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of the duties of Men and Citizens.”

It is important to remember that religious liberty is not a Catholic issue. It is not a Christian or Jewish or Muslim issue. It is an American issue. Fundamentally, it is a matter of social justice; for when religious liberty is endangered, the good of society itself is diminished.

As bishops, we seek to bring the light of the Gospel to our flocks, but the work of politics and deciding who will represent us in this representative democracy is up to committed and courageous lay Catholics. We urge you to be both engaged and articulate in insisting that as Catholics and as Americans that we do not have to choose between being either a Catholic or an American. There is an urgent need for the lay faithful, in cooperation with those of other faiths or none, to impress upon our elected representatives the vital importance of religious liberty for a free society.

On November 6, we have an opportunity—and an obligation—to do just that.

Through the intercession of Mary Immaculate, patroness of this nation, may God bless us all and continue to bless the United States of America.

¹ For a list of other recent violations of religious liberty both here and abroad please read “Concerns Raised in ‘Our First, Most Cherished Freedom’” which can be seen at www.ilcatholic.org.

² “Our First, Most Cherished Liberty,” <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/religious-liberty/our-first-most-cherished-liberty.cfm>