



## Talking Points on the Fortnight for Freedom (June 21 to July 4, 2016)

- In the statement, [Our First, Most Cherished Liberty](#) (April 2012), the USCCB's Ad Hoc Committee for Religious Liberty announced the first Fortnight for Freedom – a call to fourteen days of prayer, education, and action for religious freedom in the United States and abroad.
- The theme of this year's Fortnight is **Witnesses to Freedom** and will focus on the lives of women and men of faith, from all over the world, who have borne witness to authentic freedom in Christ.
- The Fortnight for Freedom will again take place from June 21 to July 4. This two-week period is a time when our liturgical calendar celebrates a series of great martyrs who remained faithful in the face of persecution by political power, including St. Thomas More and St. John Fisher, St. John the Baptist, SS. Peter and Paul, and the First Martyrs of the Church of Rome.
- We have seen a great diversity of events promoting religious freedom across the country, including interfaith prayer services, special Masses and holy hours, rallies, televised town hall meetings, conferences, and other public events where speakers have highlighted the various threats to religious liberty, especially the HHS mandate and the plight of persecuted Christians around the world.
- This year, the Fortnight for Freedom is noteworthy for a number of reasons:
  - First, there will be a national tour of relics of St. Thomas More and St. John Fisher, both martyrs of the English Reformation. Check the Fortnight for Freedom website ([www.Fortnight4Freedom.org](http://www.Fortnight4Freedom.org)) for details on dates and locations of the relics tour.
  - Second, there are two new major resources this year, in addition to the updating of materials used in past years:
    - **14 stories of "Witnesses to Freedom,"** which highlight individual men and women from the past and present who have witnessed to the faith in extraordinary ways, including St. Edith Stein, Bl. Oscar Romero, the Coptic Christian martyrs, and the Little Sisters of the Poor.
    - **New video on "The Right to Religious Freedom,"** explaining Church teaching on religious freedom and highlighting current challenges to religious freedom, including the HHS mandate and global religious persecution. The video was produced to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Dignitatis Humanae*, the Second Vatican Council's declaration on religious liberty, which was promulgated in December 1965. The video also has a Discussion Guide for parishes that may wish to show the video.

- Third, the U.S. Supreme Court is expected to rule in late June on the cases brought by the Little Sisters of the Poor and many other religious non-profit entities challenging the HHS mandate. The mandate would require them to facilitate insurance coverage of life-terminating drugs and devices, contraception, and sterilization for their employees and their dependents.
- Fourth, we are continuing to see increasing violent persecution of religious believers around the world. The U.S. Secretary of State has recently said that atrocities carried out by the Islamic State against Christians, Yezidis, and other religious minorities in the Middle East are genocide. We pray that the Fortnight will lift up the sacrifice of so many believers. We can honor them by robustly living our faith and by welcoming those who have survived religious persecution and who now seek asylum here in the U.S.
- Fifth, recent political disputes over state-level religious freedom protections, such as legislation that would protect people of faith from government discrimination, have led to attacks on the basic right of religious freedom. Clear and effective teaching on religious freedom, supported by prayer, are especially needed.
- Archbishop William Lori will open the Fortnight with a special Mass on **Tuesday, June 21 at 7:00 pm EDT** at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Baltimore, MD. Cardinal Donald Wuerl will close the Fortnight with a special Mass on **Monday, July 4 at noon EDT** at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C. Bishop David Zubik of the Diocese of Pittsburgh will be the homilist at the July 4 Mass. Both Masses will be televised nationwide on EWTN and CatholicTV.
- Through prayer, education, and public action during the ***Fortnight for Freedom: Witnesses to Freedom***, we will promote the importance of preserving the essential right of religious freedom, for now and the future, for Catholics and for those of *all* faiths.