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Contract: Deacon Jim Armstrong, APR
Executive Director, Communications
Jarmstrong@dioceseofcleveland.org

A statement from the Most Reverend Nelson Perez, D.D. Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Cleveland, regarding awareness for Religious Freedom Week, June 22-29, 2019

It is with great hope that I encourage the faithful to pray and act in support of religious liberty at home and abroad during Religious Freedom Week 2019 which begins on June 22, the Feast of Saints Thomas More and John Fisher, and ends on June 29, the Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul.

The theme for this year, *Strength in Hope*, is taken from the Second Vatican Council's Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity: "Among the trials of this life they find strength in hope, convinced that 'the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come that will be revealed in us' (Rom. 8:18)" (Apostolicam actuositatem, 4).

Religious Freedom Week provides an opportunity for our Catholic community to pause in prayer and reflect on how we may always be faith-filled servants when facing the challenges found in today's society. Reflecting upon Religious Freedom Week helps us to increase our understanding of how to serve our neighbors without having to ignore our faith. I encourage people of faith to reflect on the importance of religious freedom so that we might have the space to carry out our mission of service and mercy.

Archbishop Joseph E. Kurtz of Louisville, Kentucky, the chairman of the USCCB's Committee for Religious Liberty reminds us that, "Catholics face challenges both in our current political climate of polarization and within the Church." Christian child welfare institutions and Catholics in public life are encountering significant obstacles to their work, while our brothers and sisters in areas of Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and elsewhere suffer violent persecution. Bishop Kurtz added, "We want to build solidarity and to encourage Catholics to persist in the struggle to advance the kingdom of God by finding hope in Jesus Christ."

Daily reflections and other important information on the celebration of Religious Freedom Week and additional resources can be found at www.dioceseofcleveland.org/religiousfreedom.