



Catholic Diocese of Sioux Falls
Office of the Bishop

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June 1, 2012

Dear Catholic Faithful of the Diocese,

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in a document entitled *Our First, Most Cherished Liberty*¹ have summoned our participation in a “Fortnight for Freedom.”

We suggest that the fourteen days from June 21—the vigil of the Feasts of St. John Fisher and St. Thomas More—to July 4, Independence Day, be dedicated to this “fortnight for freedom”—a great hymn of prayer for our country. Our liturgical calendar celebrates a series of great martyrs who remained faithful in the face of persecution by political power—St. John Fisher and St. Thomas More, St. John the Baptist, SS. Peter and Paul, and the First Martyrs of the Church of Rome. Culminating on Independence Day, this special period of prayer, study, catechesis, and public action would emphasize both our Christian and American heritage of liberty. Dioceses and parishes around the country could choose a date in that period for special events that would constitute a great national campaign of teaching and witness for religious liberty.

I invite each of you to join in this fortnight that we might successfully raise awareness of the dangers diminishment of our religious liberties and conscience protections present and to pray that such infringements are stopped. With this letter, I offer the following ways for participating in this historic event:

- 1) Attend “God’s Faithful Servants First,” a gathering to pray in defense of freedom of religious conscience that will be held on Thursday, June 21 at 7 PM on the steps of the Cathedral of St. Joseph. The gathering will feature speakers who will offer examples of how governmental infringement on our religious liberty will lead to a detrimental impact on individuals, Catholic institutions and private businesses and comments by me as bishop, along with music offered by O’Gorman High School students. The approximately one-half hour program will conclude with a Holy Hour and Exposition in the Cathedral.
- 2) Pray the prayer for religious freedom that the USCCB has authored daily. Copies are available in parishes or under the “Religious Liberties” tab on the Diocesan website www.sfcatholic.org.
- 3) Participate in a Diocesan day of fasting to be held on Friday, June 22. Fasting can include abstaining from meat or making a similar act of penance or reparation.
- 4) Pray a novena of rosaries concluding with the July 4 culmination of this Fortnight.
- 5) When the bells of churches across the Diocese toll at noon during the Fortnight and especially on July 4, recall the bold assertion of the Declaration of Independence, that “(w)e hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of happiness²” by holding a personal moment of silence.

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The religious liberties that we enjoy as citizens are a cherished freedom and a core motivation for our country's founding. It is important that we remain free to exercise our consciences so that we might be God's good servant first.

I thank you for your participation in this Fortnight and for your efforts to raise awareness to the concerns of governmental infringement on our liberties.

St Thomas More, pray for us.

Yours in Christ,

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The Most Reverend Paul J. Swain
Bishop of Sioux Falls

¹- *Our First, Most Cherished Liberty*, Ad Hoc Committee for Religious Liberty, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, April 2012

² - Declaration of Independence, Continental Congress, July 4, 1776