



## Focus on Religious Freedom

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***"With countless other people of goodwill, (American Catholics) are concerned that efforts to build a just and wisely ordered society respect their deepest concerns and their right to religious liberty ... one of America's most precious possessions." - Pope Francis***

### **America's First Freedom: Freedom of Religion**

The 4th of July, Independence Day, is the United States' celebration of the love of liberty that is at the heart of our nation's founding principles. "Religious freedom is one of the most cherished of these liberties, and it is anchored in the right of an individual to act upon his or her conscience and deeply held beliefs, both privately and publicly... (it) is America's First Freedom, enshrined in the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and (has affected) the lives of successive generations of Americans for nearly 250 years," wrote Michael Warsaw, *National Catholic Register*.<sup>(1)</sup>

Over the years, this God-given freedom of conscience & religion, protected by the Constitution, has been challenged through regulations and lawsuits brought by individuals and groups misunderstanding or opposed to this freedom. These challenges to religious freedom have accelerated in the past decade. Fortunately, advocacy groups and law firms have emerged to develop a strong understanding of the importance of religious freedom, particularly in serving the vulnerable and working to establish justice in society.

"Barbara Samuells, president of ***Catholics For Freedom of Religion (CFFR)***, a NY based grassroots advocacy group that educates Catholic parishes about the importance of religious freedom, said that religious freedom both 'allows us to teach the truth about our Catholic faith' and carry on the work of the Gospel 'without being pushed out of the public square,' " wrote Peter Smith, *National Catholic Register*.<sup>(2)</sup> Samuells said, "(CFFR) has helped educate families about their children's constitutional right to pray and wear religious identification in public schools and that the wall of separation of church and state was meant to keep government out of the churches, not to keep the church out of the public square."... "(The Founders) knew that when the government steps in and tells people what they can and cannot believe, or what conscience they can and cannot follow, there is always tyranny. In order for our country to flourish, they wanted a moral and religious people."<sup>(3)</sup>

(ncregister.com, 6/29/21(1); ncregister.com, 6/29/21(2)(3); loc.gov; nationalhumanitiescenter.org; cnbc.com, 6/17/21; jurist.org, 6/19/21; the federalist.com, 6/17/21)

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### **Happening Now: Religious Freedom Wins in Supreme Court**

In an unanimous ruling, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of a Catholic Social Services adoption agency in Philadelphia that had lost its contract with the city in 2018 because it would not certify same-sex couples as foster parents on religious grounds. The high court ruled the city violated the Free-Exercise Clause of the First Amendment.