CURRENT THREATS TO RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

USCCB Fact Sheet **2015**

In his speech to the European Parliament in November 2014, Pope Francis asked, "In the end, what kind of dignity is there without the possibility of freely expressing one's thought or professing one's religious faith?"
Pope Francis has repeatedly emphasized that it is incomprehensible and alarming that people continue to suffer discrimination, restriction of their rights and even persecution for publicly professing their faith. Undeniably, "Serious violations inflicted on this basic right [religious freedom] are causes of serious concern," and all people must work to defend "the intangible dignity of the human person against every attack." Yet, religious liberty continues to be under threat, even in the United States:

- *HHS mandate for sterilization, contraception, and abortion-inducing drugs*. The mandate of the Department of Health and Human Services forces religious institutions to facilitate and/or fund a product contrary to their own moral teaching. Further, the federal government tries to define which religious institutions are "religious enough" to merit protection of their religious liberty.
- *Catholic foster care and adoption services*. Boston, San Francisco, the District of Columbia, and the State of Illinois have driven local Catholic Charities out of the business of providing adoption or foster care services—by revoking their licenses, by ending their government contracts, or both—because those Charities refused to place children with same-sex couples or unmarried opposite-sex couples who cohabit.
- *State immigration laws*. Several states have passed laws that forbid what they deem as "harboring" of undocumented immigrants—and what the Church deems Christian charity and pastoral care to these immigrants.
- *Discrimination against small church congregations*. New York City adopted a policy that barred the Bronx Household of Faith and other churches from renting public schools on weekends for worship services, even though non-religious groups could rent the same schools for many other uses.
- *Discrimination against Catholic humanitarian services*. After years of excellent performance by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Migration and Refugee Services (MRS) in administering contract services for victims of human trafficking, the federal government changed its contract specifications to require MRS to provide or refer for contraceptive and abortion services in violation of Catholic teaching.
- *Christian students on campus*. In its over-100-year history, the University of California Hastings College of Law has denied student organization status to only one group, the Christian Legal Society, because it required its leaders to be Christian and to abstain from sexual activity outside of marriage.

In his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis clearly outlined the importance of a preserving a robust sense of religious freedom. He argued that a "healthy pluralism…does not entail privatizing religions in an attempt to reduce them to the quiet obscurity of the individual's conscience or to relegate them to the enclosed precincts of churches, synagogues or mosques." Therefore, it is essential that a proper sense of religious pluralism be fostered and defended not just in the United States, but throughout the world.

What can you do to ensure the protection of religious freedom at home and abroad?

The U.S. Bishops have called for a Fortnight for Freedom from June 21 to July 4, 2015. Please visit www.fortnight4freedom.org for more information on this important time of prayer, education, and action in support of religious freedom!