



## Focus on Religious Freedom

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*"Human rights, of course, must include religious freedom..."  
Pope Benedict XVI*

### **Jan.16 is No Ordinary Day ... It's National Religious Freedom Day!**

The observation of Religious Freedom Day every year on Jan. 16 may be the most important, and most overlooked, American observance on the calendar. It stands with such critical historical moments in U.S. history as the signing of the Mayflower Compact, the Declaration of Independence, and the ratification of the First Amendment to the Constitution.

On January 16, 1786, the Virginia Assembly passed the ***Virginia Statute of Religious Freedom***, written by Thomas Jefferson, that became the model for the First Amendment's religion freedom clauses that guarantee no creation of a state religion and the free practice of religion according to one's conscience: "all men shall be free to profess, and...maintain their opinions in matters of religion, and that the same shall in no way diminish, enlarge, or affect their civil capacities." <sup>(1)</sup>

**"Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof... - First Amendment: Constitution of the United States**

Each year, since 1993, the President issues a proclamation designating January 16th as Religious Freedom Day in commemoration of the many faiths that make up our country, in recognition of religious freedom as the essential foundation for all our liberties and as a call for Americans to go forth to live out their faith and exercise their religious liberty.

*"Now, therefore, I, George Bush, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim January 16, 1993, as Religious Freedom Day. I urge all Americans to observe this day with appropriate ceremonies and activities in their homes, schools, and places of worship as an expression of our gratitude for the blessings of liberty and as a sign of our resolve to protect and preserve them."*

(Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom(1); firstliberty.org; daily citizen.com, 1/16/19)