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## Focus on Religious Freedom

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### Learning and Working to Understand and Preserve Religious Liberty as the Foundation of All Our Liberties

On Jan 16, 2024, our annual Religious Freedom Day, the U. S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) published the first annual report on the “State of Religious Liberty in the United States.” The research and preparation of the report was done by the USCCB’s Committee for Religious Liberty, chaired by Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades of the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend, IN.

The report reminds us that religious freedom/the right of conscience is often called our First Freedom because of its importance as the basis for all of our liberties as stated in our Declaration of Independence. “We are endowed by our creator” with inalienable rights and our founders believed these rights “among them, life liberty and the pursuit of happiness” were not the gift of any earthly ruler but were self-evident rights from our creator. (Declaration of Independence)

Our founders did not create a Christian nation, but a nation founded on the Judeo-Christian ethic grounded in the Ten Commandments. Having experienced government dictated religion in their mother countries and by studying the long history of such mandated beliefs, our founders knew the inevitable tyranny that always followed. They knew a plurality of religions would encourage tolerance and understanding among sects and prevent persecution.

Americans of all faiths or of none are blessed to have the founding documents which clearly protect the rights to believe and practice one’s own conscience. Catholics, the Bishops assert, have a vital role in preserving religious freedom and providing for the common good.

In upcoming articles we will discuss the five main concerns explained in the report and relate the concerns to the cultural and regulatory pressures threatening religious freedom. If we don’t understand our religious freedom and recognize the direct and indirect threats, we may inadvertently damage or lose that liberty which is the rightful inheritance of generations to come.

Richard Henry Lee, founder and signer of the Declaration of Independence explained: ***"It is true, we are not disposed to differ much, at present, about religion; but when we are making a constitution, it is to be hoped, for ages and millions yet unborn, why not establish the free exercise of religion, as a part of the national compact."***

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