

On April 25, at 3pm, President Trump hosted a conference call with over 700 Catholic clergy, Catholic educators and Catholic lay representatives.

Catholics for Freedom of Religion's Board of Directors was privileged to be invited onto the call where the main concern was the damage being done by the shutdown of the economy to the financial viability of many Catholic schools.

The President, in his opening comments, acknowledged that in our country 1.7 million students are educated in 6000 Catholic schools. He believes the quality of the Catholic education is very high and benefits all students as well as many in minority and low income neighborhoods.

On a personal note, President Trump said that he had great respect all his life for Catholic schools and remembers well that a Catholic School was one of his neighbors when he was growing up in Queens, NY.

The President also emphasized his support for many issues of critical importance to Catholics. He gave examples of his actions to protect life such as the expansion of the Mexico Policy which blocks foreign aid and federal funding from promoting abortion and speaking out for Life in person at the 2020 March for Life.

With so many Catholic leaders on the call, it was appropriate also for the President to reiterate that he has restored the voice of the pulpit regarding the morals of political issues and proposals. Under this administration clergy will not be audited or harassed because they speak Biblical and moral truths that impact politicized issues.

With Catholic education as the main focus of the call, President Trump detailed damage being done by the shutdown of the economy and emphasized that Catholic schools and parishes were very carefully included in eligibility for the CARES ACT Paycheck Protections Program and the Economic Injury Disaster Loan Program (PPP) through the Small Business Administration (SBA).

Per the US Treasury's site "The CARES Act provides fast and direct economic assistance for American workers and families, small businesses, and preserves jobs for American industries."

[A statement from the SBA makes it clear that](#) "faith-based organizations are eligible to receive SBA loans regardless of whether they provide secular social services. That is, no otherwise eligible organization will be disqualified from receiving a loan because of religious nature, religious identity, or religious speech of the organization."

President Trump welcomed Cardinal Dolan onto the call to comment and the Cardinal spoke about the imminent possibility of many Catholic schools not being able to open in the Fall because of parents' loss of income during the shutdown.

Then Cardinal O'Malley explained that the shutdown of Catholic schools in Boston would cost the city millions of dollars annually causing President Trump to ask what that cost would be on a nationwide basis. A Catholic educator on the call answered that closing Catholic schools nationwide would cost an annual 24 billion dollars to taxpayers.

President Trump heard many urgent requests for financial relief for parents and schools and responded that some of the ways schools may be helped were not even mentioned on the call, leaving us to hope that this administration is thinking outside the box to come up with help for our Catholic schools.

It was obvious the President understands the precarious situation of many Catholic schools and the need for immediate plans for help going forward. He pointed out that his administration has been a strong support for life and for religious freedom and that the election in November will have significant consequences for school choice, including faith-based schools.

Near the end of the call, President Trump asked for comments from those listening and four people were able to make statements.

I was brought onto the call and told the President that I represented Catholics for Freedom of Religion (CFFR) and we have been working since the last administration's egregious denials of religious liberty. I said that, among other things, CFFR works to teach children their rights to pray and live their faith in public school and that his Jan. 16, 2020, announcement of his support for religious freedom in public schools was most appreciated.

I added that we were not surprised he would help students' religious freedom because of his administration's consistent actions in support of Life and Religious Liberty. I said that in my lifetime he is the President most strongly supportive of faith and morals and of restoring God to his rightful place in our nation.

I assured President Trump that we are praying for him.

Barbara Samuells, President  
Catholics for Freedom of Religion