

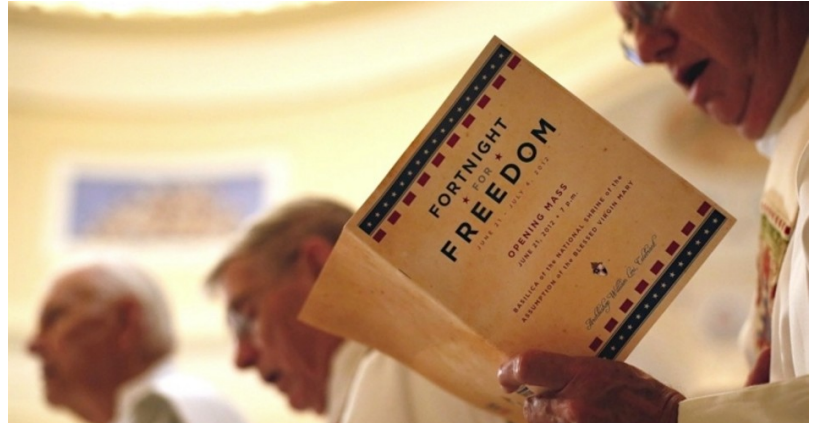


Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on June 22, 2012

## Catholic Bishops Launch “Fortnight for Freedom”

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has launched a “Fortnight for freedom” campaign in the wake of the contraception coverage mandate under the “ObamaCare” health care program.

In 21st century America, few people seem inclined to lose their heads for their religious faith and in this enlightened age of tolerance it may seem to most people quite unnecessary. But United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has chosen the eve of the feast day honoring two 16th century English martyrs to begin a campaign for religious liberty in America. On Thursday, June 21, at 7 p.m., Eastern Daylight Time, Catholics gathered at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption in Baltimore around the country to begin a two-week period of prayer and devotion called a “[Fortnight for Freedom](#)” for the cause of religious liberty throughout the world. The prayer vigil will formally conclude with a 12:10 pm. Mass on Wednesday, July 4th at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C. with Cardinal Donald Wuerl, Archbishop of Washington, as the homilist.



The campaign began on the eve of the feast of Saints [Thomas More](#) and [John Fisher](#), two English Catholics beheaded in 1535 for their refusal to take an oath of allegiance to the King Henry VIII as head of the Church in England. Sir Thomas had served as Lord Chancellor of England and Bishop Fisher was the only one of the Catholic bishops who refused to sign the oath. Their deaths and those of lesser mortals who refused to deny the Church’s ties to the Bishop of Rome marked a dramatic break between the Roman Catholic Church and what became the Church of England. More and Fisher were later canonized and are still honored by the Catholic Church for refusing, in biblical terms, to “render unto Caesar,” (in the person of Henry VIII) that loyalty to the pope — whom they regarded as Vicar of Christ — they believed they owed to God.

The campaign is for religious liberty for all persons around the globe. The Catholic clerics have been especially vocal about religious liberty since a directive was issued earlier this year from the Department of Health and Human Services that effective August 2013, only houses of worship and not religious institutions, such as Catholic hospitals and universities, will be permitted a religious exemption from an onerous requirement of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (informally



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known as “ObamaCare”). ObamaCare mandates that all health care insurance for employees include coverage for comprehensive contraceptive products and services, including those that kill a fertilized ovum, sometimes called abortifacients. The contraception coverage, furthermore, must be made available free and without a deductible.

The Catholic bishops immediately and emphatically voiced their objections to the requirement, noting that cooperation in providing or promoting either contraception or abortion goes against Catholic doctrine and is forbidden by the Church. Yet Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sibelius, a Catholic who issued the contraceptive directive, was welcomed as commencement speaker last month at Georgetown University, a Jesuit institution in Washington, D.C. Though the church faithful have been known throughout the centuries for greeting papal pronouncements with “Roma locuta est, causa finita est” (“Rome has spoken, the case is finished.”), [dissent became popular](#) during the tumultuous decade of the 1960s and accelerated in 1968, when Pope Paul VI reaffirmed the church’s ban on artificial forms of birth control in his encyclical, *Humanae Vitae* (Of Human Life). Catholic universities and colleges had a year earlier declared independence from church authority for the sake of academic freedom at the Land o’ Lakes (Wisconsin) Conference in 1967.

The tension between the prelates and the university administrators rose considerably in 2009, when the University of Notre Dame invited President Barack Obama to be that year’s commencement speaker and to receive an honorary degree for his public service. Church authorities and many Catholics throughout the country were incensed over the invitation, since President Obama is the most prominent advocate of unrestricted abortion “rights” in the United States today. Now, however, the battleground has changed. The conflict over the contraception mandate has caused the most visible and vocal rift between the Catholic Church and the federal government of the United States since the U.S. Supreme Court issued its 1973 *Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton* decisions, holding that state laws prohibiting abortion during the first 24 weeks of pregnancy are unconstitutional. The court also ruled that abortions may not be prohibited in even beyond the 24th week if the mother’s physical, mental or emotional health is threatened by a continuation of the pregnancy.

Ironically the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has long advocated a national health care program, but not one that requires contraception or abortion coverage.

“Across America,” the bishops declare on their [website](#), “our right to live out our faith is being threatened — from Washington forcing Catholic institutions to provide services that contradict our beliefs to state governments prohibiting our charities from serving the most vulnerable. And around the world, it’s even worse — Catholics face persecution and even death for their witness. These rights are fundamental. They belong to each and every human being. We cannot let them be trampled. We cannot remain silent. Please join the movement to protect our right to live out our faith. Sign up to learn how you can help save our religious freedom.”

Dioceses and parishes around the country have scheduled special events around the two-week period that emphasizes prayer, study, catechesis and public action as a witness to the cause of religious freedom. The opening event at the Basilica of the Assumption in Baltimore recalls the celebration of a papal Mass there in 1995, when Pope John Paul II spoke of the challenge to defend religious liberty.

“The challenge facing you, dear friends,” John Paul II said at that time “is to increase people’s awareness of the importance for society of religious freedom; to defend that freedom against those who



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would take religion out of the public domain and establish secularism as America's official faith. And it is vitally necessary for the very survival of the American experience, to transmit to the next generation the precious legacy of religious freedom and the convictions which sustain it."

*Photo: Deacons sing during a liturgy in Baltimore, June 21, 2012, to kick off the "Fortnight For Freedom," a two-week, national campaign to draw attention to religious freedom: AP Images*



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