

FAITH IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE

- ✓ We affirm the fundamental principle of religious liberty as set forth in both the U.S. and California constitutions that includes the right of people to practice their faith and to join in public debates on the issues of the day.
- ✓ We support legal protections - for both persons and organizations - from overly broad or unnecessarily coercive state or federal mandates that impinge on religious freedom.
- ✓ We support the religious rights of medical professionals, students, persons living in institutional settings, those confined to prison or anyone who faces unique challenges to the exercise of his or her religion.

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY IS PRECIOUS AND FRAGILE

“The right to religious freedom includes ‘the freedom to follow one’s conscience in religious matters and, at the same time, freedom of worship... the freedom to choose the religion which one judges to be true and to manifest one’s beliefs in public.’”

Pope Francis

“Free exercise and enjoyment of religion without discrimination or preference are guaranteed...”

**California State
Constitution**

The “religious freedom clauses” of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution were crafted as a restraint on Congress – prohibiting the government from *establishing* a religion or prohibiting its free *exercise*. California, like most states, recognizes the wisdom of this policy and guarantees residents religious freedom and liberty of conscience in its constitutions.

Throughout most of American history, there was little dispute about the clauses – most people shared a common commitment to religious liberty and recognized the value of religious organizations in our communities. But this changed as culture and politics began to narrow the role of religion in public life.

Of late, this trend has led to government policies that limit the freedom of religious organizations to provide adoption services, to care for the most vulnerable such as migrants, to educate the young, to offer medical services and to simply live out their faith convictions. Unnecessary restraints on religious organizations – especially when non-sectarian alternatives are readily available – undermine the diversity of communities and the people of our great state. At times, the narrowing of religious expression begins to infringe on the religious liberties of individuals.

Yet at the same time, the free exercise clause has been interpreted in different ways, most recently in a unanimous U.S. Supreme Court decision affirming the rights of churches to govern themselves free of state interference—rejecting the arguments that churches are subject to the same regulatory oversight as secular institutions and employers.

We work to reconcile the tension between the interpretation of the two clauses. We promote the value of religious organizations in the public square to promote the common good.

The Bishops call upon California’s Catholic community, and all California citizens of goodwill, to join them in supporting legislation protecting the rights of all churches and religious institutions to be free from excessive government coercion compelling them, under the color of law, to violate their sincerely-held religious and moral beliefs.

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