



DIOCESE OF GRAND RAPIDS

Office of the Bishop

June 15/16, 2019

My dear friends in Christ,

Religious Freedom Week, an initiative of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), will be observed in dioceses around the country June 22-29. This year's theme, "Strength in Hope," reminds us that we are meant to serve God with a devoted and generous spirit, finding strength in the hope of Jesus Christ, a hope we are commissioned to share with everyone we encounter.

Religious freedom enables us to live out the tenets of our faith unreservedly, not only in our homes and churches but also in the public square. It gives us the space to carry out the mission entrusted to us by Jesus, which we fulfill through prayer, working for justice and the common good, and acts of service and mercy.

Domestically, religious freedom faces erosion at the federal, state and local levels in the areas of health care, employment, and foster care and adoption services. In other parts of the world, where persecution of religious minorities is severe – the Middle East, Myanmar, Nigeria and Sri Lanka – Christians risk violence and their very lives every day for the sake of their beliefs and the practice of their faith.

Attacks on religious liberty are not just an issue for Catholics, but for people of all faith. Wherever religious freedom is restricted or violently tread upon, our inherent God-given dignity as human beings is also endangered.

For these reasons, our observance of "Religious Freedom Week" through prayer, learning and action to defend religious liberty must continue. Each day of the week a new intercession highlighting the challenges to the Church in carrying out its mission will be introduced. Join me in choosing to focus on these areas in the form of prayer, education or dialogue. For information and resources, visit GRdiocese.org.

Pray with me for our country, our world leaders, and those engaged in defending religious freedom. Pray also for our brothers and sisters throughout the world who are persecuted for their faith, that they continue to trust in God's faithfulness through suffering, and for those who persecute them, that the risen Lord might bring peace into their hearts.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend David J. Walkowiak
Bishop of Grand Rapids