



# Bishops of Maryland Raise Concern over Erosion of Religious Freedom

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In a joint statement released today, Maryland's bishops call on Catholics and all Marylanders to reaffirm and uphold America's First Freedom and the foundational principles upon which its democratic society is built. "Religious liberty – a right rooted in our human dignity and protected by the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution – is being silently and subtly eroded," wrote the bishops of Maryland in the statement. "[I]n recent years there has been a subtle promotion of the idea that religious liberty should be restricted to Sunday morning worship."

The Most Sacred of All Property: Religious Freedom and the People of Maryland is signed by Washington Archbishop Donald Cardinal Wuerl, Baltimore Apostolic Administrator Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien, and Wilmington Bishop W. Francis Malooly. The statement was issued with input from a task force chaired by John Garvey, President of The Catholic University of America, that included experts in legal, theological, and historical issues.

"Religious liberty is the most important civil rights issue of our time. This thoughtful statement by the Maryland Catholic bishops is a reminder of the role it has played in our history, and of the continuing need to cherish and protect it," noted Garvey. The statement will be distributed to Maryland's nearly 280 Catholic parishes and other Catholic institutions, as well as to all of Maryland's state and Congressional elected officials.

Highlighting concerns that "[t]he right to exercise our faith and follow our conscience in all aspects of our lives is a right increasingly viewed with hostility," the statement outlines examples of increasing restrictions on religious liberty at the federal, state and local levels. Most recently, the media reported on the controversy over the refusal of the United States Department of Health and Human Services to renew a grant to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops aiding trafficking victims because the Bishops Conference would not refer clients for abortions.

"Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religious belief. No one should be subject to coercion because of those beliefs. ... Society as a whole benefits when all citizens in our pluralistic democracy – including religious citizens and institutions – remain free to participate in public life and to do so in accordance with their sincerely held beliefs," wrote the bishops.

Attached is a summary of the statement. A copy of the complete statement along with additional resource materials may be found at [www.mdccathcon.org/religiousfreedom](http://www.mdccathcon.org/religiousfreedom).

Maryland Catholic Conference advocates for the Church's public policy positions before the Maryland General Assembly and other civil officials. The Conference represents the three dioceses with territory in the state – the Archdiocese of Baltimore, the Archdiocese of Washington, and the Diocese of Wilmington.