

Sts. Thomas More and John Fisher

Pray that like Sts. Thomas More and John Fisher, we might have the wisdom and the courage to be good servants of our country, though always servants of God first.

Reflect: Religious Freedom Week is a fitting time to reflect not only on religious liberty, but on what it means to be both American and Catholic. Perhaps somewhat ironically, two English saints point us in the right direction. We remember the martyrs Sts. Thomas More and John Fisher, in part, because they were steadfast in the truth, and thus exemplify courage in the exercise of conscience. They also show us what patriotism means for Christians. They loved and served their country. Thomas More carried out his lay vocation as a civil servant, while John Fisher lived out the clerical vocation as a most faithful bishop. At the same time, when forced to choose between the king of England and Christ the King of the Universe, they adhered to Jesus and His Church. We need the fortitude and wisdom to animate the Church today, as we navigate these tumultuous times. Sts. John Fisher and Thomas More, pray for us!



(CNS composite photo/Public domain)

Act: Connect with the USCCB Office of Religious Liberty! Sign up for our newsletter at www.usccb.org/freedom, follow us on Twitter at @USCCBFreedom, and text “FREEDOM” to 84576 to receive news updates and action alerts.



RELIGIOUS
FREEDOM
WEEK

June 22–29

Persecution of Christians and Religious Minorities in the Middle East

Pray that our Christian sisters and brothers in the Middle East, and all religious minorities, who are suffering from attacks by extremists and interminable conflicts may be freed from violent persecution.

Reflect: In January 2018, Pope Francis warned that Christians “face challenges today that demean human dignity: they flee from situations of conflict and poverty; are victims of the trafficking of human beings...; they suffer hardships and hunger, in a world ever richer in means and poorer in love, where inequalities continue to increase.” This is especially true in the Middle East, where wars have caused thousands, including Christians, to flee from Syria and Iraq into Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and beyond, where their presence taxes meager resources. Will they be able to return and if so, will they find the security needed to rebuild their lives and livelihoods? With the number of Christians declining there, will the Middle East lose the unique contributions that Christians have made over the centuries?



CNS/Paul Haring

Act: The Church in the United States stands in solidarity with Christians in the Middle East. Consider joining efforts to support Middle Eastern Christians with a donation to the Knights of Columbus, Aid to the Church in Need, Catholic Relief Services, and Catholic Near East Welfare Association.



RELIGIOUS
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June 22–29

Faithful Public Servants

Pray for Catholics, and all people of faith, who seek to serve our country in government as elected officials, judges, administrators, and staff.

Reflect: In recent years, Catholic nominees to the federal judiciary have faced questions about their faith. In one exchange, a nominee was told, “The dogma lives loudly within you, and that’s of concern.” Other nominees have endured questions about their membership in the Knights of Columbus, the largest Catholic fraternal organization in the country. These religious tests are unjust and unconstitutional. At a time when our country is highly polarized, our leaders in the Senate should be working to foster tolerance, not fueling divisions. Lay Catholics exercise their apostolate by building up the common good as civil servants. Let us pray and act for our sisters and brothers who, like St. Thomas More, seek to faithfully serve both God and country.



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Act: It is time for discriminatory, anti-Catholic questions to stop. Contact your senators today and urge them to reject religious tests for nominees for public office!



RELIGIOUS
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June 22–29

Religious Persecution in Myanmar

Pray that the Rohingya—our Muslim brothers and sisters from the Rakhine region, whose rights and very identity are not recognized by the Myanmar government—may find the respect that recognizes the dignity of all human beings.

Reflect: Since 2017, over 700,000 Rohingya fled Myanmar as their villages were burned, women raped, and men killed in what a United Nations official has termed “genocide.” Many refugees are crowded into camps in Bangladesh, while others have boarded flimsy boats going to Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia, where their fate is uncertain. They are being pressured to return but what guarantees are there that they will be treated with dignity and as equal members of society by a government that has declared them to be “stateless”? The Catholic Church in Myanmar has worked actively to mediate between the Buddhist majority and the Rohingya. Pope Francis visited Myanmar and Bangladesh in late 2017. At an interreligious and ecumenical meeting in Dhaka, he said, “We all are images of God, including the Rohingya,” and he went on to say, “your tragedy is very difficult, but it has a place in our hearts.”



CNS/Paul Haring

Act: Reach out to Muslim neighbors and members in your community to express solidarity with their efforts to build a culture that recognizes and respects the rights of all people. Support Catholic Relief Services and other Catholic organizations that seek to build bridges of understanding between different faith communities and to counter intolerance and extremism.



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Adoption And Foster Care

Pray for children awaiting adoption, for parents seeking to adopt, for children receiving foster care, for foster parents providing care to children, and that Catholic and other faith-based organizations may have the freedom to serve all those seeking adoption and foster care services in accordance with their faith.

Reflect: The Epistle of St. James teaches that true religion is to care for the orphan and the widow. Today, the Church puts that teaching into practice through her child welfare service organizations. Catholic and other faith-based institutions play an absolutely vital role in serving the many children who find themselves in some of the most difficult circumstances. Recently, the opioid crisis has put a strain on the foster care system. Yet, at a time when we need more care providers, particularly ones that are effective at recruiting prospective foster and adoptive parents, some state and local governments have shut people of faith out, because faith-based providers seek to serve in accordance with their convictions about the nature of the family and what is best for children. Several agencies have already had to end their child welfare services. If this trend continues, more children and families will be affected.



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Act: The Child Welfare Provider Inclusion Act (CWPIA) prevents faith-based child welfare service providers from being targeted by government discrimination. The Act would prohibit the federal government and any state that receives certain federal funding from discriminating against child welfare service providers on the basis that they decline to provide a child welfare service that conflicts with their sincerely held religious beliefs or moral convictions. Contact your U.S. senators and representatives today and ask them to co-sponsor and support the federal Child Welfare Provider Inclusion Act!



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Economic Disputes Lead to Religious Tensions in Nigeria

Pray that herders and farmers in Nigeria, whose conflict over access to land and resources has fueled religious tensions, may find the means to compromise and work out their differences in a non-violent manner.

Reflect: The most populous country in Africa, Nigeria has the “resource curse”—having abundant resources which different groups vie to control, leading to violent conflicts, over 2 million people internally displaced, and grinding poverty for the have-nots. Many small ethnic groups feel oppressed and fight for recognition. Violence can stem from economic, political, and social reasons but because the population is almost evenly divided between Christians (in the south) and Muslims (in the north), such violence is interpreted as religious. Boko Haram, an extremist group whose name means “Western education is forbidden,” has fomented Muslim-Christian discord but in fact has attacked and killed more Muslims than Christians. Current fighting between Fulani herdsman (Muslim) and farmers (Christian) has exacerbated religious tension. Archbishop Ignatius Kaigama of Jos called for transcending religious divides and promoting inter-ethnic and inter-religious harmony.



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Act: Support Aid to the Church in Need, Catholic Relief Services, USCCB’s Solidarity Fund for Aid to the Church in Africa, and other organizations that are helping the internally displaced, providing livelihood training and healthcare, and offering peacebuilding between those of different faiths.



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June 22–29

Religion, A Public Good

Pray that the religious dimension of the common good will receive due recognition in our political culture, and for the conversion of the hearts of those seeking to remove religious symbols from public life.

Reflect: This year, the Supreme Court is set to decide on a case involving a cross in Bladensburg, Maryland, that was erected to memorialize soldiers who died in World War I. The land on which the cross stands is now maintained by the government, and activist groups object that this arrangement amounts to a violation of the First Amendment's Establishment Clause. Of course, nobody believes this is an instance of Congress establishing a state church. These efforts are part of a larger effort to ban religious symbols from public spaces. This is an affront to American pluralism, a pluralism in which the religious impulse of all people is respected and reflected in our public spaces. As Catholics, we seek to inspire a culture in which the human spirit can flourish. Public religious symbols are a part of that culture.



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Act: Public display of religious symbols makes America beautiful. Learn about the monuments and religious displays in your area, and visit one if possible. Write a letter to the editor defending these treasures if they are attacked.



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June 22–29

Incarcerated Persons

Pray that the dignity and right to religious freedom of incarcerated persons would be respected.

Reflect: Pope Francis has spoken of the throwaway culture, a culture in which people are treated like objects to be discarded when they are not “useful.” That culture can manifest itself in how our society treats people in the criminal justice system. In Arkansas, a Muslim man had to fight in court to grow a half-inch beard. Similarly, Jewish prisoners in some states have struggled to be permitted to receive kosher meals. Recently, a Muslim man in Alabama could not have his imam present with him when he was executed. Catholic teaching on religious liberty is rooted in the dignity of the human person. That dignity is not lost when a person commits a crime. And traditionally, Catholics have understood ministry to prisoners as a work of mercy. Indeed, Catholics hope that incarcerated persons find strength in their faith. For American culture to be one of life, not a throwaway culture, our criminal justice system needs to recognize the dignity of all people.



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Act: Find out how you can support Catholic prison ministry. In many dioceses, Catholic Charities coordinates prison ministry. Contact your diocese to see what you can do to participate in this ministry of care for incarcerated persons.



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