

Current Threats to Religious Freedom

USCCB Fact Sheet

2017

During his September 2015 visit to the United States, Pope Francis emphasized the importance of religious freedom, saying in front of the White House that religious **“freedom remains one of America’s most precious possessions. And, as my brothers, the United States Bishops, have reminded us, all are called to be vigilant, precisely as good citizens, to preserve and defend that freedom from everything that would threaten or compromise it.”**

Although Americans generally do not face the kind of violent persecution endured by many people of faith around the world, Pope Francis has recently spoken of a “polite persecution” that many people face, as “when someone is persecuted not for confessing Christ’s name, but for wanting to demonstrate the values of the Son of God”. Religious freedom continues to be threatened in the U.S.:

- *HHS mandate for sterilization, contraception, and abortion-inducing drugs.* The mandate of the Department of Health and Human Services forces religious institutions to facilitate or fund a product contrary to their own moral teaching. Further, the federal government tries to define which religious institutions are “religious enough” to merit protection of their religious liberty.
- *Catholic foster care and adoption services.* Boston, San Francisco, the District of Columbia, and the State of Illinois forced local Catholic Charities out of adoption or foster care services—by revoking their licenses, ending government contracts, or both—because they refused to place children with same-sex couples or unmarried opposite-sex couples who cohabit.
- *Immigration laws and policies.* Several states have passed laws that forbid what they call “harboring” undocumented immigrants—and what the

Church deems Christian charity and pastoral care to immigrants. After urging a ban on Muslim migrants and refugees during the campaign, the new Administration has imposed special restrictions on entry into the United States from several Muslim-majority countries.

- *Discrimination against small church congregations.* New York City adopted a policy that barred the Bronx Household of Faith and other churches from renting public schools on weekends for worship services, even though non-religious groups could rent the same schools for other uses.
- *Discrimination against Catholic humanitarian services.* After years of excellent performance by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Migration and Refugee Services (MRS) in administering contract services for victims of human trafficking, the federal government changed its grant specifications to require MRS to provide or refer for contraceptive and abortion services in violation of Catholic teaching.
- *Christian students on campus.* In its over-100-year history, the University of California Hastings College of Law has denied student organization status to only one group, the Christian Legal Society, because it required its leaders to be Christian and to abstain from sexual activity outside of marriage.

Pope Francis has asked American Catholics to preserve and defend religious freedom, both in the United States and throughout the world.

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