

Love One Another

June 21, 2012

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Tonight, we officially begin the initiative set by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, the “Fortnight for Freedom.” While this specific call to action began with the Catholic Church, we are learning more and more that the idea of fighting for religious freedom is universal.

In fact, many faith leaders have stood in agreement with USCCB president Cardinal Timothy Dolan of New York, including the president of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison. Harrison is vocal in his opposition to the current healthcare guidelines from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, expressing his sentiments in various formats including the written word, and even Congressional testimony.

In a letter to the Roman Catholic Church, Harrison writes, “As creedal and confessional Lutherans committed to the life giving Word of God without reservation, and to the church catholic, we are thankful for your witness in the wake of the HHS mandates. We stand with you against government intrusion into the principled practices of what is a violation of a religious conscience. We stand with you in concern for the unborn. We stand with you for the sanctity of marriage. The first amendment defines our most cherished liberties, including the free exercise of religion. That free exercise is not limited to assemblies of Christians in sanctuaries.”

This morning, I accepted an invitation to attend a catechetical meeting from his faith organization, at a Pewaukee conference center. There, LCMS leaders presented me, as Archbishop of Milwaukee, Resolution 6-04. This resolution, adopted at their district convention on June 10, officially commends the Roman Catholic Church for its stance on religious freedom and defense of the rights of the unborn.

I received a copy of the framed resolution from Rev. Dr. John C. Willie, president of the LCMS South Wisconsin District, and Rev. Peter Bender, pastor of Peace Lutheran Church, Sussex. I am proud that my brothers and sisters of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod stand with us in our struggle to preserve and protect our religious freedom.

We will not permit any government entity or group to restrict the practice of our faith to worship services. Additionally, we will reject any attempt to remove religion from the marketplace of society or attempts to define who we are as faith communities.

This is our God-given right, protected by the Constitution. As we initiate our Fortnight for Freedom, may our prayers and actions raise our consciences and strengthen our resolve to protect and preserve the freedom of religion. Together, we must engage our best efforts, for the Lord commands us to LOVE ONE ANOTHER.

Hope starts here,

Most Reverend Jerome E. ListECKi
Archbishop of Milwaukee

Fortnight for Freedom: Lutherans Commend Catholic Commitment

(Updated 6/22/12) **MILWAUKEE** – While debates on the Affordable Care Act’s impact on religion and contraception continue nationwide, members of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in southeastern Wisconsin officially stand in agreement with the Archdiocese of Milwaukee and the Roman Catholic Church; opposing the current HHS mandate.

The South Wisconsin District of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod passed an official resolution on June 10, commending the Roman Catholic Church for “its stance on religious freedoms and defense of the rights of the unborn.”

Archbishop Jerome E. ListECKI received a copy of the official resolution at the LCMS’ annual catechesis symposium on Thursday, June 21, 2012 at the Country Springs Hotel, Pewaukee.

In a letter written by LCMS President Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison – read by Rev. John Wille – Archbishop ListECKI and the entire U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops were thanked for their role in defending religious freedom.

“We are honored to publically stand with you in this grave moment of government infringement on the rights of religious citizens,” Rev. John Wille read. “We stand with you against government intrusion into the principle practices of religious institutions; we stand with you in asserting the rights of religious people to determine what is a violation of a religious conscience. We stand with you in concern of the unborn. We stand with you for the sanctity of marriage.”

In receiving the award, Archbishop ListECKI reminded those present that it was religious community leaders – both Catholic and Lutheran alike – who created schools, hospitals and welfare programs before the government stepped in.

“Who helps foreign people in our communities? We do so by our beliefs. Let me tell you, it was our parochial sisters – Lutheran Sisters and Catholic Sisters – throughout our country that helped to shape the systems that we have today,” he explained. “You were providing the education when the government did not. You were providing the health care when the government was not. You were out there treating people, responding to people’s needs . . . when the government was not.

“The historical memory of current government leaders, is extremely short. No one is going to tell us and our faith – we as believers – that we cannot take our faith, the faith that drives us to serve citizens of this country and our community, out into the public. They’re not going to do that,” he added adamantly.

While there are differences in the Catholic and Lutheran faiths, there is a common thread binding them together, the archbishop noted.

“We share in the mandate that is given to us from the Gospel to reach out. We don’t look at whether a person exercises this faith or that faith. We understand that they are a child of God, and therefore we have a mandate to respond.”

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Affordable Care Act, signed into law in March 2010, requires group health plans to include accessibility to “all Food and Drug Administration approved contraceptive methods, sterilization procedures, patient education and counseling for all women with reproductive capacity.”

While the mandate exempts “group health plans sponsored by certain religious employers,” it defines a religious employer as “one that: (1) has the inculcation of religious values as its purpose; (2) primarily employs persons who share its religious tenets; (3) primarily serves persons who share its religious tenets; and (4) is a non-profit organization under Internal Revenue Code section 6033(a)(1) and section 6033(a)(3)(A)(i) or (iii). 45 C.F.R. §147.130(a)(1)(iv)(B).”

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops believes the HHS’ definition of a religious employer is an unacceptable constraint on religious liberty, as it may exclude Catholic schools, charitable agencies, healthcare facilities, and educational institutions.

This resolution is a noteworthy example of interfaith unity, as Catholics and Lutherans come together in support of common beliefs, religious freedom and life beginning at conception.