



RELIGIOUS  
**FREEDOM**  
WEEK

# Adoption and Foster Care

Religious Freedom Week 2021: June 22



**Pray** that children waiting to be placed in a loving home and the caregivers who serve those children will find strength and support from the Church.

## **Reflect**

The command to care for the orphan appears throughout the Scriptures. Over the centuries, the Church responded to this call by building adoption and foster care institutions. The need for these institutions is as great as ever today, but they are being targeted for closures because of their religion. In places like Illinois, Massachusetts, California, and the District of Columbia, service providers with a proven record of excellence in recruiting and assisting foster families have already been forced to shut down because they do not place children with same-sex couples. In Michigan, sexual orientation/gender identity (SOGI) activists went out of their way to challenge Catholic Charities, while Philadelphia Catholic Social Services has taken their struggle to continue to foster children to the Supreme Court. Intolerance for religious organizations has real consequences, and in this case, it is both vulnerable children and adults who want to work with faith-affirming agencies who suffer. Let us pray that our civic leaders will give the Church the space to continue to serve.

## **Act**

The Child Welfare Provider Inclusion Act 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 Representative today and ask them to co-sponsor and support the federal Child Welfare Provider Inclusion Act!](#)

# Catholic Social Services During the Pandemic

Religious Freedom Week 2021: June 23

**Pray** that God would continue to grant Catholic institutions the wisdom and courage to serve a world suffering the effects of the COVID pandemic.

## **Reflect**

The COVID pandemic has inflicted deep wounds on our country. Grandparents and parents have been lost to families. Children have suffered during a formative time of life. Many people have lost jobs. Pope Francis calls the Church to help heal the world, and this world desperately needs healing. Thankfully, many people, including Catholics, stepped in to serve. Catholic schools, like the Archdiocese of Boston, [have led in showing how to safely reopen schools](#). In Hawaii, [Catholic Charities worked to help renters get access to government relief programs](#). In addition to its regular work of advocacy, [Catholic Charities U.S.A.](#) has provided personal protective equipment, organized food donations, and started the [Francis Fund for Eviction Protection](#).

## **Act**

Catholic Charities works to help the most vulnerable. [Find your local Catholic Charities and see how you can get involved today!](#)

# The Equality Act

Religious Freedom Week 2021: June 24



**Pray** that the dignity of all people will be respected in our country.

## **Reflect**

Every human person is made in God's image and deserves to be treated with dignity and respect. That means we need to honor every person's right to gainful and decent employment free of unjust discrimination or harassment, and to the basic goods that they need to live and thrive. The Equality Act purports to protect people experiencing same-sex attraction or gender dysphoria from discrimination in these and other areas. But at the core of the Equality Act is the codification of the new ideology of "gender" in federal law, dismissing sexual difference and falsely presenting "gender" as only a social construct. As Pope Francis has reflected, "It is one thing to be understanding of human weakness and the complexities of life, and another to accept ideologies that attempt to sunder what are inseparable aspects of reality." By requiring all Americans to speak and act as if there is no meaningful distinction between the sexes and as if gender has no connection to the body, [the Equality Act legally and socially harms Americans in serious ways](#) and injures the common good.

## **Act**

The Equality Act discriminates against people of faith and, by including a potential abortion mandate, threatens unborn life. [Tell your elected officials to oppose it!](#)

# Church Vandalism

Religious Freedom Week 2021: June 25

**Pray** that Christian witness in the face of attacks on our churches will convert hearts to faith in Jesus Christ.

## **Reflect**

Recent years have seen a number of high-profile attacks on houses of worship. Beginning in May of 2020, there was a [wave of attacks on Catholic churches and statues](#). Vandals entered churches and desecrated sanctuaries. A man in Florida even attempted to set a church on fire with people inside. There have been at least 61 attacks so far, and that number continues to grow. The precise reasons for these attacks are often unknown. In some cases, they are tied to anger at perceived injustices from the past. Other cases may involve mental illness. In all cases, Catholics must remember that we worship the Lord who reveals the truth and beauty of the gospel in his suffering and resurrection, and that we are called to respond to aggression with compassion.

## **Act**

The recent vandalism of churches and their sacred art gives us the opportunity to bear witness to our hope in the Lord whose beauty is revealed on the Cross. The USCCB Beauty Heals initiative invites us to learn about works of devotional art significant to local churches and how they inspire Catholics to live beautifully. Learn more at [www.usccb.org/BeautyHeals](http://www.usccb.org/BeautyHeals).

# Catholics in Nicaragua

Religious Freedom Week 2021: June 26



**Pray** for our Catholic sisters and brothers who are suffering in Nicaragua.

## **Reflect**

When peaceful protests began in April 2018 in response to a decision to raise taxes and decrease pension benefits, the government's brutal response left at least 19 dead and over 100 missing. Demonstrations continue until today. Protests have been met with government-sanctioned violence to repress dissent and increasingly the government is targeting the Catholic Church. Catholics make up 46 percent of the population, but the Church has played a key role in providing sanctuary, aid, and support to protesters. Initially, given its prestige and well-regarded presence, the Church was asked to mediate a National Dialogue between the protesters and the government. During talks, when the Church insisted that it could not turn away demonstrators in need of aid, President Ortega's administration began attacking the Church and the mediation failed. The government began harassing clergy, arbitrarily arresting some, defaming the Church as "coup mongers" and "terrorists." In one case, paramilitaries laid siege for 15 hours to a church where priests, students, and media had taken refuge. Bishop Silvio Jose Baez of Managua and other clergy were assaulted while trying to shield protesters. With death threats mounting against him for speaking out in support of human rights, Bishop Baez was recalled to Rome for his safety. Since then, Ortega supporters continued to desecrate Catholic churches, and threaten religious and the faithful. In 2019, the government shut off electricity and water to a church where hunger strikers protesting the detention of family members had sought sanctuary. With mobs surrounding churches and security forces filming, parishioners are now afraid to go to Mass. The government also withheld the delivery of sacramental wine and other goods donated to the Church.

## **Act**

In addition to the political turmoil, Nicaragua is one of the poorest countries in Latin America that is often beset with natural disasters. Catholic Relief Services began working in Nicaragua in 1964. [Support CRS's agricultural, emergency relief, health, and youth job training programs to help save lives.](#)

# Conscience Rights for Medical Professionals

Religious Freedom Week 2021: June 27

**Pray** that governments would respect the consciences of all people who care for the sick and vulnerable.

## **Reflect**

For centuries, the Christians have carried on the healing ministry of Christ by building institutions dedicated to medicine and accompaniment of the dying. In recent years, activists have sought to undermine the Church's mission by forcing Catholic hospitals to perform procedures that destroy human life and undermine human flourishing, such as sterilization, gender reassignment surgery, and even abortion. And not only do some activists sue Catholic institutions, individuals who work in secular institutions may find that their conscientious objection to abortion does not receive respect. A nurse in Vermont was forced to choose between her job and her faith when she was told by her employer that she had to participate in an abortion. It is unthinkable that we would undermine our mission to heal by destroying innocent life and harming the persons for whom we are called to care.

## **Act**

While existing federal laws already protect some conscientious objections to abortion, sterilization, and gender reassignment surgery in theory, this protection has not proved effective in practice. These laws can only be enforced by complaint to the Office for Civil Rights at the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), which has in the past refused to fully enforce these laws. The Conscience Protection Act would address deficiencies that block effective enforcement of existing laws, most notably by establishing a private right of action allowing victims of discrimination to defend their own rights in court. [Contact your elected officials in Congress and urge them to support the Conscience Protection Act!](#)

# Pope Francis' Solidarity with Beleaguered Christians in Iraq

Religious Freedom Week 2021: June 28

**Pray** for Christians in Iraq, and that people of all faiths in the land of Abraham may live in peace.

## **Reflect**

Pope Francis' visit to Iraq March 5 – 8, 2021 represented a historic milestone for Christians and the Middle East. The Christian presence in Iraq has dwindled from an estimated high of 1.4 million to less than 300,000. The Holy Father's presence was a much-needed affirmation of his love for this beleaguered people and a call for interfaith harmony. Pope Francis met privately with Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, leader of Iraq's Shiite Muslim population, to build bridges of fraternal dialogue and interreligious understanding. But most of this visit was to express solidarity with Christians. In Baghdad, the Holy Father celebrated Mass in the Syro-Catholic Cathedral of Our Lady of Salvation, the site of a horrific attack by extremists in 2010 who killed two priests and took 150 of the faithful hostage, leaving dozens of worshippers and police dead and even more wounded and maimed. This attack was a harbinger for the brutality that swept through northern Iraq when ISIS took control in the 2014-2017 period. This attack was a harbinger for the brutality that swept through northern Iraq when ISIS took control in the 2014-2017 period. ISIS targeted religious minorities, attacking churches, kidnapping priests and bishops for ransom, seizing women and girls to forcibly convert them or sell them into slavery, and destroying property. Today, although ISIS was defeated, the threat from extremists remains as Christians who return to Mosul and the Nineveh Plains are often still subject to harassment, intimidation, and extortion; the task of rebuilding is daunting. In December 2020 in discussing this historic journey to Iraq, Pope Francis said, "We must work to ensure that the Christian presence in these lands continue to be what it has always been: a sign of peace, process, development and reconciliation between peoples."

## **Act**

Various international Catholic agencies are providing humanitarian assistance to the millions who have been affected and displaced by these conflicts in Iraq. You can join these efforts by [donating to the Knights of Columbus Persecuted Christian fund](#). Support our brothers and sisters in the Middle East today!

# Free Speech

Religious Freedom Week 2021: June 29



**Pray** that Christians will have the courage to speak the truth with kindness and clarity, even in the face of adversity.

## **Reflect**

One of the promises of our country is that many voices, even voices expressing minority views, have a right to express themselves. Is that promise being fulfilled? Just this year, a book on problems with gender ideology by a prominent commentator was removed from Amazon. A Catholic news outlet had its Twitter account suspended for noting that a government official who claims to be a transgender woman is a biological male. While these companies may have a right to control the materials they help to distribute, it is disturbing that the views of some can be protected from scrutiny, particularly when these views do not promote human flourishing. On the feast day of two of our boldest preachers of the gospel, Sts. Peter and Paul, who faced intense hostility, let us resolve to have the courage to speak the truth with grace. And let us pray that the Lord will give us the prudence to be creative and compassionate in our witness.

## **Act**

Connect with the USCCB Committee for Religious Liberty. Text FREEDOM to 84576 and [Sign up for First Freedom News](#), the Committee's monthly newsletter.

