**Join the bishops in prayer for the culture**

The bishops of the United States are inviting Catholics to join a movement of prayer, penance, and sacrifice for the sake of renewing a culture of life, marriage, and religious liberty in this country. Inform your court, parish, diocese, family and friends.

Join the movement in three ways:

1. Pledge to fast on Fridays: [www.usccb.org/fast](http://www.usccb.org/fast).
2. Sign up to receive the Friday Fast, a weekly email or text message. (Text FAST to 99000 to subscribe via text message).
3. Like the Facebook page “Call to Prayer for Life, Marriage, and Religious Liberty”

Cardinal Seán O’Malley, Chairman, of the United State Conference on Catholic Bishops Committee on Pro-Life Activities, said, “It is a great blessing to be joined in prayer with thousands of Catholics nationwide. The Call to Prayer is a reminder for all of us that we rely on God for everything; it is an invitation to grow in faith and love as we pray and fast together for the protection of life, marriage and religious liberty. Everyone can make a difference for the good of the Church and society through participation in this important campaign. Please join me and so many others in holding up the power of prayer.”

**Beware of state and local ‘nondiscrimination’ laws**

Kristina Arriaga, executive director of the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, spoke to the Catholic Daughters National Board at their annual legislative meeting in conjunction with the March for Life. She urged Catholic Daughters and other citizens to become informed on the issue of sexual non-discrimination, saying that there is an enormous push to pass these laws at state and local levels. She said citizens are not aware of the many legal issues that can result for small businesses, churches and religiously-affiliated schools and hospitals. In Canada, priests, bishops and publishers have been prosecuted for speaking and writing about these moral issues. See related article on next page.

**Cardinal calls for compassion**

Once again, the national board of Catholic Daughters of the Americas sat in the front row at the Opening Mass of the National Prayer Vigil for Life.

In his homily, Cardinal O’Malley said, “The feelings of the woman in the Gospel must be like the young woman caught in a crisis situation of an unwanted pregnancy. She feels overwhelmed, alone, afraid, confused.

“We must never allow that woman to perceive the Pro-Life movement as a bunch of angry self-righteous Pharisees with stones in their hands, looking down on her and judging her.

“We want the woman to experience the merciful love of Christ. Jesus does not condone the woman’s fall, but He does not condemn her. He invites her to make a new start, to know that she is forgiven and loved.

“Pope Francis urges us to practice ‘the art of accompaniment’ which teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other, in this case, the woman in crisis. This accompaniment must be steady and reassuring, reflecting our closeness and our compassionate gaze which heals, liberates and encourages growth in the Christian Life.”
Bishops urge Congress to reject ENDA

Three chairmen of U.S. bishops’ committees expressed their opposition to the Employment Non-Discrimination Act of 2013 (ENDA) passed by the U.S. Senate last fall. The bill is in the U.S. House.


The bishops said ENDA goes beyond prohibiting unjust discrimination and poses several problems:

1) it lacks an exception for a “bona fide occupational qualification,” which exists for every other category of discrimination under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, except for race;

2) it lacks a distinction between homosexual inclination and conduct, thus affirming and protecting extramarital sexual conduct;

3) it supports the redefinition of marriage, as state-level laws like ENDA have been invoked in state court decisions finding marriage discriminatory or irrational;

4) it rejects the biological basis of gender by defining “gender identity” as something people may choose at variance with their biological sex; and

5) it threatens religious liberty by punishing as discrimination the religious or moral disapproval of same-sex sexual conduct, while protecting only some religious employers.

Emphasizing the dignity of all people, the bishops quoted Pope Francis’ statement that “Work is fundamental to that dignity.” They added that “the Catholic Church has consistently stood with workers in this country and continues to oppose unjust discrimination in the workplace. No one should be an object of scorn, hatred, or violence for any reason, including his or her sexual inclinations.”


What Is Conscience Protection For?

Taken from USCCB by Aaron Matthew Weldon

“If you follow commentary on the court battles over religious liberty here in the United States, you will occasionally read statements that refer to a need for “balance” on matters of conscience protection. The thinking for some seems to be that people of faith, or even simply people of good will, should be able to compromise on their convictions when those convictions don’t conform to the expectations of the broader culture....

“But conscience is not a bargaining chip in a negotiation.

“Conscience is not merely a feeling, as if I am acting in good conscience whenever I do what feels good. Rather, conscience is a means by which one grasps the truth. In political matters, my conscience guides me to the truth about how I ought to act with respect to family, neighbors, local community, and nation.

“The right to follow one’s conscience is more than a right to be left alone. It is the right to pursue the truth and to act in accord with that truth. When we follow the dictates of our consciences, we act in accordance with the truth as best as we can understand it. In other words, we submit to the law of our loving Creator, not to a coercive agent such as the state. When we obey our consciences, we conform our lives to the truth that makes us truly free.

“When the state attempts to coerce individuals and entire communities to act against their consciences, as it is doing now with the HHS “contraceptive mandate,” it is usurping the place of truth as the guide for the lives of its citizens. However, as Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, later Pope Benedict XVI, affirms, “truth is not a product of politics.” When a state seeks to order the lives of its citizens as if truth were a product of politics, then it has radically overstepped its bounds. It becomes a tyrant rather than a servant. People who seek to do what is right, who order their lives to the truth, cannot compromise on conscience, for such a
compromise suggests that one should willfully act against what is right.” Read it all at http://www.usccb.org/about/pro-life-activities/life-issues-forum/life-issues-forum-what-is-conscience-protection-for.cfm