

Religious Freedom Day

January 16, 2017

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On January 16, 1786, the Statute on Religious Freedom was enacted by the Virginia legislature and is the basis of Religious Freedom Day. Thomas Jefferson had drafted the legislation, which ended the state-church in Virginia by freeing residents from paying taxes to support clergy of the favored denomination, and it protected the civil rights of people to express their religious beliefs without suffering discrimination. Jefferson considered it one of the three greatest achievements of his life - along with drafting the Declaration of Independence and founding what became the University of Virginia.



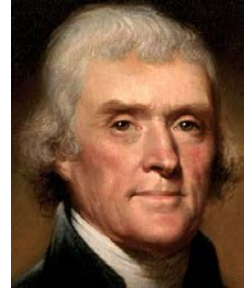
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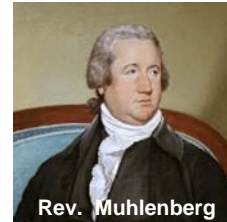
Rev. Muhlenberg

Members of the first Federal Congress, who drafted the Bill of Rights in 1789, built on George Mason's Virginia Declaration of Rights in 1776 and Jefferson's Statute in establishing the First Amendment's guarantee of religious freedom. Interestingly, Rep. Frederick Muhlenberg, the Speaker of the House who oversaw the process in that chamber, was a Lutheran Pastor and his is one of two signatures on the Amendments ratified by the states and added to the U.S. Constitution in 1791.

Today, our first freedom – the freedom to believe and live according to those beliefs - is as precious as ever to most Americans. It is also under fierce assault. From wedding vendors and T-shirt makers to public servants and educators, people are seeing their religious freedom eroded at a frightening pace. More and more Americans are realizing that if we don't use our freedom to defend our freedom, we may lose our freedom.



Since 1993, every U.S. President has declared January 16th to be Religious Freedom Day, and calls upon Americans to observe this day through appropriate activities in homes, schools, and places of worship. So let us recognize this unique time to be grateful to God for our freedom of religion in America, an inalienable right granted by Him but also protected in our U.S. Constitution's Bill of Rights.



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**RELIGIOUS FREEDOM DAY:
APPLICATION POINTS**
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1. Pray for Religious Freedom to be valued in Public Life:

Scripture commands that we are to pray for those in authority (1 Tim. 2:1-4). Ask God to help leaders see that religious freedom is an unalienable right, a right that does not have to be forfeited when believers conduct business, engage in public speech, serve in office or teach in public schools. Ask God to soften the hearts of judges, elected officials, and public servants to the plight of those who are being harassed because of their deeply held beliefs and strengthen their resolve to defend the religious freedom of all Americans.

“Be it enacted by the General Assembly, That no man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place, or ministry whatsoever, nor shall be enforced, restrained, molested, or burthened in his body or goods, nor shall otherwise suffer on account of his religious opinions or belief; but that all men shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain, their opinion in matters of religion, and that the same shall in no wise diminish enlarge, or affect their civil capacities.”

**Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom
January 16, 1786**

2. Promote Religious Freedom

Day in Schools: Educators and administrators should celebrate Religious Freedom Day without fear. Religious Freedom Day is first and foremost a civics lesson, a time to acknowledge one of our most important civil liberties as Americans. Students need to hear that they can express their beliefs at school. The Department of Education guidelines allow for much greater latitude than most school officials and teachers realize. Gateways to Better Education has some excellent resources for educators. Visit www.GTBE.org.

3. Prompt Congress and the new President to protect Religious Freedom in

Policy and Law: During the campaign, Donald Trump spoke about the need to remove the IRS muzzle on ministers by repealing the Johnson Amendment. In response, Rep. Steve Scalise (R-LA) and Rep. Jody Hice (R-GA) have introduced *The Free Speech Fairness Act* which proposes to amend the Johnson amendment to allow non-profits (i.e., Pastors and Churches) to engage in political speech and activities. There is also a need for a *Government Non-Discrimination Act* (or something similar) on the Federal and State levels to protect people of faith from discrimination because of their deeply held beliefs, particularly on marriage. Contact your elected representatives and urge them to support religious freedom legislation. Call (202) 224-3121 for your U.S. Representative and Senators or visit www.FRC.org, then Contact Officials.

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