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New York Catholics challenge Fortnight for Freedom

Jamie Manson | Jun. 15, 2012 NCR Today

Joining Catholic communities around the country, members of the Upstate New York chapter of Call to Action have sent a letter to their bishops and Cardinal Timothy Dolan explaining they will be withholding contributions to the Bishop?s Catholic Communications Campaign this weekend. The letter is signed by CTA representatives from Albany, Binghamton, Syracuse, Utica and Buffalo and two Roman Catholic priests. They are encouraging Catholics to instead donate a sum of money to support a specific activity of my local parish and/or other charitable organizations.

They are distributing ?donation withholding? statements to be placed in the basket during the collection for the campaign. The form reads:

> ?I believe that the Bishops do not speak for me on the issue of religious liberty. After learning of the campaign being promoted by the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops called Fortnight for Freedom I have decided that in good conscience I cannot support the stated causes for which my donation would be used.?

It also includes a line where protestors can inform the bishop which charity they are supporting and the amount given.

Here is the full text of the letter:

> Catholic Bishops Message Should Get Back on Message That Unifies Not Divides
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> The prophetic voice of the Catholic Church is never more compelling than when it speaks of the needs of the poor. It is the selflessness exhibited by Mother Teresa, Dorothy Day and other great servants that has attracted so many to the Catholic Church and its ministries. The eloquent declaration by Cardinal Joseph Bernardin of the church's affirmation of a "seamless garment" of life promoted a message of great idealism and unity for Catholics.
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> That prophetic voice of affirmation and unity has been lost and smothered by the divisive message of the church hierarchy. It has adopted a voice of condemnation against those who disagree on issues related to contraception, celibacy, homosexuality and the role of women in the church. The latest example of this crusade is the treatment of religious orders of nuns, many of whom are dedicated to serving the poor and marginalized in our society, who have become the new target for "reform." Now, the United States Catholic Bishops Conference (?USCBB?) has announced its "Fortnight to Freedom" campaign to promote religious liberty during the two weeks leading to July 4th. This campaign seems motivated by political concerns designed to protect the institutional church rather than its members and to use its members as a political weapon against its opponents. It will be up to the sisters and the laity to restore the message of the "seamless garment."
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> The Fortnight to Freedom is a campaign and voice that many of us choose no longer to support in our

politics. Nor will we support it with our contributions.

The USCBB will be sponsoring the Catholic Communications Campaign in May and June, an annual collection in parishes that is used in diocese and on a national level to promote media initiatives. We - a group of Catholic laity - will not be participating in this campaign. We do not want our funds to be used to promote the message of condemnation by the bishops and maintain institutional liberty while denying freedom of thought and liberty within the church membership.

We urge Catholics, instead, to consider alternate giving during that weekend and donate those contributions to a parish food pantry, Catholic Charities or another charitable program. The message of the church needs to return to the promotion of a "seamless garment of life." This unbalanced message of condemnation and ostracism of those who disagree is imploding the church from within, and it needs to end.

We believe the USCBB is pushing the envelope with the Fortnight to Freedom, so we are withholding ours and giving, instead, to those most in need.

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