NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://www.ncronline.org)

Lori: Faith serves public life, witnesses moral values democracy needs

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Baltimore

Archbishop William Lori of Baltimore held up statesman Sargent Shriver and other Catholics like him as "a living example of how faith enriches public life" on Friday at a standing-room-only Mass opening the second Fortnight for Freedom.

"Faith serves the public life not only by the sheer magnitude of its humanitarian services," he said, "but by its witness to Christ Jesus, to its witness to those moral truths and values without which democracy cannot flourish."

Celebrated at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Baltimore, the evening Mass began 14 days of prayer, education and action on religious liberty issues called for by the U.S. bishops.

Concelebrating the Mass with Lori were Cardinal Edwin O'Brien, grand master of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem and former archbishop of Baltimore; Bishop W. Francis Malooly of Wilmington, Del., who is a former Baltimore auxiliary bishop; Auxiliary Bishop F. Richard Spencer of the U.S. Archdiocese for the Military Services; Baltimore Auxiliary Bishop Denis Madden; and about 50 priests.

As chairman of the U.S. bishops' Ad Hoc Committee for Religious Liberty, Lori has been at the forefront of national efforts aiming to protect religious liberty from government infringement.

Chief among perceived threats to religious liberty is the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' mandate that most employers, including Catholic hospitals, schools and charities, provide insurance coverage for artificial contraception, sterilization and abortion-inducing drugs, which the church morally opposes.

The mandate is part of the 2010 Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. New proposed rules for the mandate is to take effect for religious organizations Aug. 1; it is to be implemented with their first insurance premium renewals. It went into effect Aug. 1, 2012, for nonreligious organizations, and several businesses are currently fighting it in the courts.

Lori and others have argued that all Catholic organizations should be exempt from the mandate.

"The church does not have two wings: a 'faith and worship' division on one hand, and a 'service' division on the other," he said in his homily Friday. "What we believe and how we worship give rise to a life of service."

He noted that Catholic Charities USA is the nation's largest nongovernmental social services provider, and Catholic schools educate more children than any other nongovernmental system.

"The efforts of the government to divide the church into a worship wing and a service wing do not spring from a theoretical interest in how churches are organized or how they function," Lori said. "It is part of a broader

movement to limit religious freedom to 'freedom of worship' -- to accord a fuller degree of religious freedom to houses of worship but a lesser degree of religious freedom to charities, hospitals and universities.

"If left unchecked, this tendency will continue to diminish the influence of religion in helping to shape the character of our country, not only by our words and worship, but by the way we conduct our ministries of service," he added. "Faith and worship inspire and sustain the service the church offers, yet the government is insinuating a contrary gospel in the church's daily life."

In addition to the HHS mandate, Lori also condemned efforts to marginalize the church's definition of marriage through anti-discrimination laws, and to criminalize church-provided services to people who are living in the country illegally.

In a May 31 letter sent to Catholics in the archdiocese of Baltimore, Lori pointed to local campaigns to curtail freedom of speech and religion, including a Johns Hopkins University pro-life student organization that was initially denied club status, a Baltimore City ordinance compelling signage about abortion to be posted at pro-life crisis pregnancy centers, and a lawsuit seeking to end prayer at Carroll County Board of Commissioners meetings.

The bishops first held a Fortnight for Freedom last year. The observance opened on the eve of the feast of St. Thomas More and St. John Fisher, 16th-century English martyrs. It ends July 4, Independence Day.

"We continue to live in an age of martyrs ... when believers are tortured and killed because they are believers in places like Iran, Iraq, China and Nigeria," Lori said in his homily Friday. "Let us keep the flame of faith and the flame of freedom burning brightly not only for our children and for our children's children, but also for the sake of these persecuted believers who see in our form of government and in our great land a beacon of hope."

Maria Trejo, 33, a parishioner of St. Joseph in Cockeysville, said she shares Lori's concern about the HHS mandate and changing definition of marriage.

"We wanted to get more involved and see what we can do to help," she told *The Catholic Review*, Baltimore's archdiocesan newspaper. "We know that prayer has power, and we should never give up. We should fight for what we believe in, despite the politics against us."

Robert Miller, 47, attended the fortnight Mass with his wife and two children. A parishioner of Holy Apostles in Gambrills, Miller said he feels "very strongly" about the need to protect religious freedom, and thinks Catholic business owners should also be exempt from the HHS mandate.

"Prayer is something that is very powerful, and the more you pray, the more you expect," he said. "What you hope is that other people will come to pray, and it will become a huge movement. That way it will hopefully move the politicians and get us the traction that we need."

On Saturday in Washington, the Knights of Columbus sponsored a 7 p.m. Mass at St. Peter on Capitol Hill, followed by a candlelight vigil on the U.S. Capitol grounds.

The national event will culminate with a July 4 noon Mass at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington.

[Maria Wiering is a staff writer at *The Catholic Review*, newspaper of the Baltimore archdiocese.]

Source URL (retrieved on *2016-05-25 12:17*): http://www.ncronline.org/news/faith-parish/lori-faith-serves-public-life-witnesses-moral-values-democracy-needs