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It can be argued that freedom of conscience is the foundation of all human rights — more critical than freedom of religion.



North American Division Addresses Vaccines and Religious Freedom

Orlan Johnson, director of public affairs and religious liberty (PARL) for the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists, reported at the Year-End Meetings on what actions the PARL department has taken since the beginning of the pandemic, and what it is doing regarding vaccine exemptions.

There are many Bible scholars and historians alike that believe that the American Declaration of Independence was one of the first civic documents that met a modern definition of human rights." Mainly, it is because the U.S. Constitution recognizes a number of inalienable human rights, including but not limited to freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and also freedom of religion.

As we consider the concept of freedom of religion, that specific freedom is also inextricably tied to the freedom of conscience. Why is freedom of Conscience so important? It is because conscience shapes human choic-

es and is the primary identifier that distinguishes human beings from other creatures. It can be argued that freedom of conscience is the foundation of all human rights and in my opinion it is even more critical than even one's freedom of religion or belief. There are no admissible limitations to this personal freedom of conscience or religion, as long as one's personal convictions are not imposed on others or harm them. Therefore, if one's religious convictions do not impose an undue hardship on the employer and/or other employees, a reasonable accommodation should be granted.

The primary purpose of our church's Religious Liberty Department is to provide support and assistance for members who are standing for the religious teachings and doctrines of the Seventh-day Adventist Church ("Church"), as expressed in its system of beliefs and policy statements. However, we recognize that at times our members

Vaccines and Freedom, *continued from cover...*

will have personal concerns and even conscientious convictions that go beyond the teachings and positions of the Church. In these cases, the church's religious liberty leaders will do what they can to provide support and counsel, even assisting members in writing their own accommodation requests to employers and others.

As it relates to recent vaccine mandates imposed by a number of public and private sector entities, our role and work has not changed. We continue to assist both

members and non-members in drafting letters supporting their personal convictions. Some may ask why only assist the individual to draft their own letters? The answer is to primarily avoid confusion as it relates to the Church's own positions and its fundamental beliefs. Our Church is not a monolithic group and our members' personal religious convictions can be based on a very wide spectrum of personal beliefs. Therefore, it will often be the case that in such circumstances the Church will not desire its support or advocacy for the member to be reflected in public correspondence or communications in the name of our Church. In addition, it is essential that the Church must preserve its ability to speak to issues that are central to its system of beliefs and identity, and that its influence not be diluted by pursuing certain personal convictions and agendas of members, that are not central to the Church's gospel and prophetic concerns.

There will not be one individual who desires support for their conscientious belief that will not get our assistance, so long as they claim the need is based on a sincere religious belief as opposed to simply a personal objection based on other non religious reasons. All of our union PARL directors have agreed to do so and have even established a working template to be used in helping individuals with their correspondence

to their employers and others.

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 requires employers to accommodate those religious beliefs that are "sincerely held." Federal law is fairly clear that employers are generally responsible for engaging in the interactive process with an employee as soon as it learns that an employee needs an accommodation. Contrary to popular opinion, the employee does not even have to make this request in writing. Every time an employee indicates he or she is having a problem at work related to his or her sincerely held religious belief, the employer should recognize this as an accommodation request. Once the employer is aware of the employee's need for an accommodation, it is responsible for making a good faith effort to communicate with the employee about the accommodation. Employees also should be provided a form to confirm their request in writing and provide additional details as necessary. It is important to note that the religious exemption is a personal religious conviction exemption and not a participatory denominational exemption. So whether you are a member of our Church or not should not be a factor in your employer granting your exemption.

These issues can be very challenging to process and at times may lead to high levels of frustration. However, it is essential that we

"... it is essential that we as Seventh-day Adventist Christians conduct ourselves in a Christlike manner regardless of one's personal convictions."

as Seventh-day Adventist Christians conduct ourselves in a Christlike manner regardless of one's personal convictions. It is a well tested tool of the devil to cause negative discourse and division among God's people. He will cause politics and other personal agendas to create strife which will eventually separate us from God.

I would posit to everyone here today that we can be different without being divided.

The Religious Liberty Dpt. continues to assist both members and non-members in drafting letters supporting their personal convictions.

Former Trump Official Michael Flynn Says U.S. Needs One Religion

Michael Flynn, ex-National Security Adviser under President Donald Trump, stated that Christianity should become the United States' only religion during the "ReAwaken America" tour in November.

"If we are going to have one nation under God, which we must, we have to have one religion. One nation under God, and one religion under God," Flynn said.

Author and investigative journalist Carl Bernstein, who did much of the original reporting on the Watergate scandal, said, "It should be a surprise to no one that Michael Flynn is saying the kind of things that he is saying," during an interview on CNN the next day.

Flynn is appealing to the nearly 50% of Republican supporters of Trump who, in an exit poll, expressed they believe "Christianity is being taken away from them." The nationalist wing of American Christianity has long been pushing for an estab-

lished national religion, but even much of mainstream Christianity has been pulled into acceptance of the "official religion" idea.

Francis Schaeffer, late Presbyterian minister and apologist, disagreed strongly with dominionism, writing, "[A]s we stand for religious freedom today, we need to realize that this must include a general religious freedom from the control of the state for all religion. It will not mean just freedom for those who are Christians. It is then up to Christians to show that Christianity is the Truth of total reality in the open marketplace of freedom."

In his article in the July/August issue of Liberty Magazine, John Whitehead noted that "the activism of the true Christian flows from a sense of loving care for what God has created. This means the Christian has a responsibility to assist in preserving both freedom and order — indeed, to work for justice — while keeping

"The Christian has a responsibility to assist in preserving both freedom and order."

in mind one's fallen nature, spiritual priorities, and the limitations of the political process.

The Department of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty will continue to follow and keep you up to date on the nationalist movement.

SCOTUS Looks at Roe vs. Wade

The Supreme Court listened to arguments on Mississippi's new, stricter abortion law disallowing abortion after 15 weeks, and began discussion on December 1.

The adjustment or overturning of Roe vs. Wade could be at stake in the conservative majority court. Since the Catholic Church

began championing an anti-abortion stance in politics, numerous conservative Protestant faiths have joined them, deeming religious liberty implications.

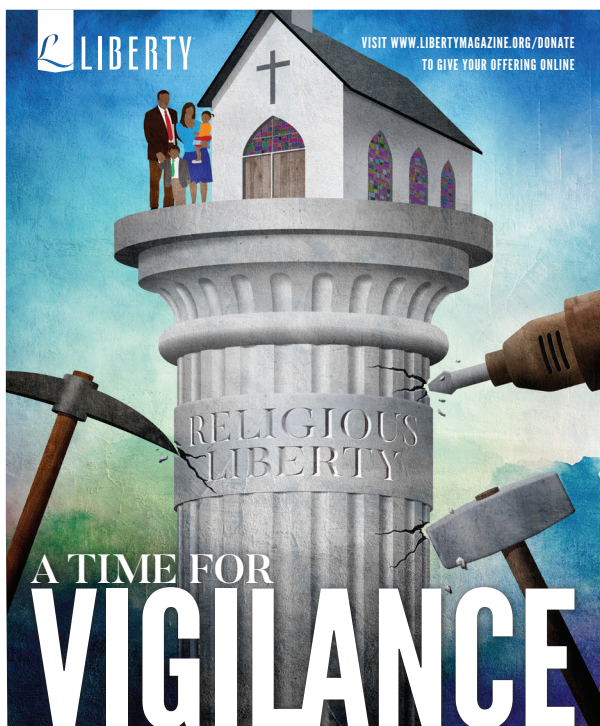
Conversely, "Bans on pre-viability abortion trample the religious liberty of those who believe that early term abortions are mor-

ally acceptable, according to a brief from the National Council of Jewish Women, Catholics for Choice, Muslim Advocates and more than 40 other faith-based groups. These people of faith also deserve to see their values reflected in abortion laws, the groups said," reports *Deseret News*.

- *The Supreme Court has twice declined to block Maine's requirement for health care workers to be vaccinated against the coronavirus. The mandate allows no religious exemptions. In related news, 19 states have sued to block the COVID-19 vaccination mandate that applies to federal contractors: Alabama, Alaska, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, North Dakota, South Carolina, South Dakota, Utah, West Virginia, and Wyoming.*
- *The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) is suspending enforcement of the Biden administration's COVID-19 vaccine mandate for large private businesses after a federal appeals court upheld a stay on it in November. The 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals said the mandate was "fatally flawed."*
- *Barronelle Stutzman, the florist who refused to serve a gay couple with their wedding eight years ago, has withdrawn her appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court. The Washington State Supreme Court had unanimously ruled against her, and she had appealed to SCOTUS. Recently retired, she withdrew her appeal and settled \$5,000 on the couple.*

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Religious Liberty Speaking Engagements Available

The Religious Liberty Department is taking speaking appointments for 2022. Speakers may be via Zoom or in person, depending on COVID-19 circumstances.

If your church wishes to request a sermon and/or religious liberty seminar, please call 770-408-1800, ext. 176.

Campaign material
for the Religious
Liberty Offering
can be found on
our website: open
camera, scan.



RELIGIOUS LIBERTY OFFERING **JANUARY 8, 2022**
WATCH OUR VIRTUAL RELIGIOUS LIBERTY SABBATH SERVICE AT LIBERTYMAGAZINE.ORG/LIVE

“While ...
contending
for our own
liberty, we
should be
very cautious
not to violate
[that] of
others.”

~George Washington