June 21 — the vigil of the Feasts of St. John Fisher and St. Thomas More — and ending on July 4, Independence Day.

— Carrie Handy, Respect Life Coordinator for the Diocese of Burlington

For daily updates during the Fortnight for Freedom, like "Respect Life: Roman Catholic Diocese of Burlington" on Facebook.


“Religious freedom is not only that of private thought or worship. It is the liberty to live, both privately and publicly, according to the ethical principles resulting from found truth.”

— Pope Francis, Conference on International Religious Freedom and the Global Clash of Values, June 2014

Imagine being a high ranking public official with the respect of your peers and renown throughout the nation; your esteemed career has made you a trusted adviser to your country’s leaders. And then, imagine having these very people force you to choose between your principles and your alliances, at the cost of your life.

Thomas More, Lord Chancellor of England under King Henry VIII, faced just such a choice, and was duly beheaded for holding to his principles.

Fortunately, no one in this country today is at risk of execution for refusing to obey laws they consider immoral. Our Founding Fathers saw fit to protect religious freedom as a fundamental right — not only the right to practice religion according to one’s conscience, but also, to be protected from coercion into acting against conscience.

Unfortunately, this doesn’t mean conscience protections are without threats. Beliefs about the sanctity of life and the meaning of human sexuality are particularly vulnerable, as Catholic principles about these topics, once considered mainstream in American society, gradually are being marginalized. Abortion on demand, same sex marriage, and legal assisted suicide are the most prominent examples of this here in Vermont. But it’s no longer just about moral objections to these practices; in some instances, individuals and organizations face the possibility of having to choose between obeying the law or their consciences.

For example:

- Doctors in Vermont are legally required to supply patients with information on assisted suicide when asked, or refer them to another provider can be construed as legitimizing a practice deemed morally wrong.
- Last year the Vermont legislature refused to allow a conscience exemption clause in a law mandating employers to fund insurance coverage of contraception (some forms of which may act as abortifacients) and sterilization. As the law stands, Catholic Churches and schools in Vermont must fund these practices in their health care plans.
- In the neighboring State of New York, a nurse at Mt. Sinai Hospital in New York City, was forced to take part in the abortion of a 22-week-old unborn child in 2009, and saw no resolution of her complaint to the HHS Office of Civil Rights until 2013, despite the existence of a law intended to protect against this type of coercion. Hers is not an isolated case. Nurses have been told by Vanderbilt University and by a state-run medical center in New York that they must assist in abortions against their consciences. The Conscience Protection Act of 2017 was introduced in Congress in January in response to these and similar violations.

While we can expect the freedom to act according to conscience in 2017 without facing martyrdom as St. Thomas More did, it will likely take a sustained and united effort to ensure universal protections of conscience and religious liberty. In order to shine a light on the many issues related to religious liberty and conscience protections both here and abroad, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops again this year will sponsor Fortnight for Freedom, a prayer and public education initiative which takes place beginning on June 21 — the vigil of the Feasts of St. John Fisher and St. Thomas More — and ending on July 4, Independence Day.

Don’t Take Religious Liberty for Granted

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UPCOMING EVENTS

06|26
Wild Goose Film Series
Christ the King, Rutland
6:30 - 8 pm
Discover and develop a deeper relationship with the Holy Spirit. Presenting the film series, The Wild Goose with Fr. Dave Pivonka, T.O.R., which is awakening God’s love and transforming power in the hearts of all who participate. Learn about the attributes of the Holy Spirit, practical application on how to respond, and hear testimonies of people across the country whose lives have been impacted by the Spirit of God. Sponsored by the Knights of Columbus. This series meets on Mondays. The first four sessions were held on May 15, 22, and June 5, 12 and 19 with the last session on June 26.
FOR MORE INFO: Peggie Angstadt (802) 492-3703, fivestonesofgospa@gmail.com

06|28
Summer Reflection Series
St. Anne’s Shrine, Isle La Motte
11:15 am
Summer Reflection Series will begin on Wednesday, June 28th. Programming held every Wednesday through August 30th. Program begins with Mass at 11:15 am, followed by topic presentation and lunch. Join Diocesan and Edmundite Clergy for interesting and timely topics and discussion. Call the Shrine office for presenters and program topics.

07|01
Fatima Centennial Vermont Tour for Peace — the Sign of the Cross
St. Augustine, Montpelier
9 - 11 am
Event #3 for the reparation for Sin and Conversion of Sinners. With the coordination from the Diocese of Burlington and the WAF - Our Lady’s Blue Army Vermont, parishioners throughout Vermont will be able to take part in World’s celebration of the Centennial of Grace which will happen at 7 selected churches in Vermont from May through October.

07|08
Tag sale
Saint Edward, Williamstown
The Ladies of St. Anne will have a bake and rummage sale in conjunction with the town-wide sale on Saturday, July 8, on the church lawn in Williamstown. To donate items to the rummage sale, leave them in the St. Edward Church basement either before or after the 10:30 am Mass on Sundays between now and July 8, or call the rectory at (802) 485-8313 to arrange a drop off time.

07|09
Annual Family Day Mass
Saint Anne’s Shrine, Isle La Motte
12:15 pm
Mass at 12:15 pm followed by a picnic, swimming and fun on Lake Champlain. This was the largest Mass held at the Shrine last year with approximately 400 people in attendance.

07|14, 15, 16
ELEVATE Steubenville East Conference
Lowell, MA
Join YOUTH from the Diocese of Burlington as they travel to the 2017 ELEVATE Steubenville East Conference. Sign up now for this weekend filled with great presentations, music and spiritual enrichment with teens from around the NorthEast. Over 3,000 were in attendance during last year’s conference, 130 from our diocese!
FOR MORE INFO: Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministry (802) 658-6110 x1130

07|25 – 30
Totus Tuus
St. John the Evangelist, St. Johnsbury
9 am - 3 pm, 7:30 - 9:30 pm
Totus Tuus, a summer catechetical youth program, is for students entering grades one through twelve. The day program for grades 1–8 runs Mon–Fri and includes catechetical instruction, Mass, songs, games and recess. For high school youth, the evening program runs Sun-Thurs, and combines catechesis and fun. Registration is available through the Corpus Christi Parish office. Cost is $50 per child or $75 per family, including high school students. Cost is $25 per family for the high school program only.
FOR MORE INFO: Edie Aremburg (802) 748-5892, stjohnsk8edu@gmail.com

06|24
Ham and Strawberry Shortcake Supper
St. Rose of Lima, South Hero • 5 pm
FOR MORE INFO: Bette (802) 372-4092

06|24
Italian Night
St. Amadeus, Alburgh
5 - 7 pm
Italian dinner and a raffle. Proceeds will benefit the new flooring fund for the Parish Hall. The cost: $10 for adults, $5 for children 7-12, under 7 are free. Take out will be available.

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