

WHAT CAN I DO?

Gary B. Doxey

Associate Director

International Center for Law and Religion Studies, BYU Law

Religious Freedom Annual Review

Brigham Young University

July 6-8, 2015

A Foundational Principle of Our Nation



A Foundational Principle of Utah and for the LDS Church



Our Commitment to Religious Freedom Is Rooted in Basic Doctrine

Moral agency is central to God's plan for his children. Faith cannot be forced.

“We claim the privilege of worshiping Almighty God according to the dictates of our own conscience, and allow all men the same privilege, let them worship how, where, or what they may.”

--11th Article of Faith

So what can I do to support
religious freedom?

1. Become informed

“We need lawyers [and non-lawyers] who care enough about religious freedom and are well enough informed that they can recognize both existing threats and those that are likely to materialize in the future.”

– Elder D. Todd Christofferson

2. Join with others who share our commitment to religious freedom.

- Be part of a chorus, not a soloist.
- Building interfaith trust takes interaction, true listening, and a genuine desire to understand.
- Broaden the coalition. Religious groups are targeted from both the left and the right. Religious freedom is for all.

3. Engage in your profession and community

- Build credibility and expertise in your chosen field so that they listen to you.
- Network – If they know you and respect you, you will be more effective.
- Participate in government and legal institutions.
- Follow the “Ammon principle” of providing selfless service to others.

4. Be an example of what is highest and best in your belief

“Be thou and an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Timothy 4:12).

“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify you Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

5. Stand up with civility

- Stand firmly on principle. Do not retreat. Do not be negligent. Freedom has always required sacrifice.
- Effective advocacy requires civility. They won't listen to you otherwise. If you are shrill or pushy, you will only prove their suspicion that you are unreasonable or even bigoted.

Is there a possible agenda for future action?

- Seek targeted, workable legislative protections for religion on the local, state, and federal level.
- Do not acquiesce to the narrow view of religious freedom that makes religion a private affair unwelcome in the public square.
- Continue to assert the legitimacy of viewpoints informed by faith in civil and political dialogue.
- Select targeted, winnable law suits, and don't be afraid to go to the Supreme Court.

Personal Initiative

- Great good can be done by those willing to take the initiative, seeking to be wise and effective.

“Verily I say, men should be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness;

“For the power is in them, wherein they are agents unto themselves. And inasmuch as men do good they shall in nowise lose their reward” (D&C 58:27-28).

Caution

- Some things do not help and can even hurt, such as acting without civility.
- Distinguish carefully between what is vital and what is less critical.
- FOLLOW the prophet. Do not presume to speak for the Church or to enunciate what you think is the Church's position on an issue.

“The Church is keenly aware of political and social realities. In the public realm, the Church must make difficult, pragmatic decisions about how and when it expresses its views on marriage and which public policies it advocates or opposes, even as it upholds and defends the purity of its doctrine.”

-- Elder D. Todd Christofferson

Reason for Hope

Truth will prevail. At one of the darkest times of Joseph Smith's life, when he was in Liberty Jail as a result of bald-faced (and illegal) religious prejudice and the Latter-day Saints had been driven from Missouri on account of their beliefs, Joseph wrote to them:

“Therefore, dearly beloved brethren, let us cheerfully do all things that lie in our power; and then may we stand still, with the utmost assurance, to see the salvation of God, and for his arm to be revealed” (D&C 123:17).