

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM MATTERS

We must raise our voices in defense of religious freedom or we risk losing it.

Freedom to choose. That's what the War in Heaven was all about. We couldn't afford to lose agency then, and we can't afford to lose it now. And that includes the freedom to "worship how, where, or what [we] may" (Articles of Faith 1:11). That's why the Prophet Joseph Smith said, "I am bold to declare before Heaven that I am just as ready to die in defending the rights of a Presbyterian, a Baptist, or a good man of any other denomination [as for a Mormon]; for the same principle which would trample upon the rights of the Latter-day Saints would trample upon the rights of the Roman Catholics, or of any other denomination who may be unpopular and too weak to defend themselves" (*Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* [2007], 345).

In addition to maintaining religious freedom as an eternal principle (even God will not remove the agency of any of His children), there are some potentially severe consequences if we lose the freedom to worship, speak, and live according to our beliefs.

LEARN MORE

To learn more about religious freedom and what you can do to protect it, visit ReligiousFreedom.lds.org. See also "Religious Freedom," *Gospel Topics*, topics.lds.org.



WHAT'S AT RISK

- **You could lose your job or leadership positions for expressing religious beliefs—even outside of work.** For instance, CEOs, newscasters, judges, teachers, doctors, professors, firefighters, Olympians, graduate students, and many others have been fired, pressured to resign, or intimidated for donating money or simply saying that they support the traditional view of marriage.
- **You might be required to hide your religion or perform tasks at work that go against your beliefs.** Does it seem fair, for example, that a doctor who opposes abortion on a religious or moral basis be required to perform one even though numerous other doctors nearby are willing? Should you be forced to wear an immodest uniform when it's not necessary for your job function?
- **You may be required to work on the Sabbath or religious holidays** even when others are willing to take your shift and your employer accommodates other nonreligious interests.
- **Your children in public schools may be required to learn about sexual and gender theories that contradict basic Church teachings.** Many public schools already teach sex education in a way that's fundamentally contrary to Church teachings, and some have required reading lists with explicit content.
- **You may not be able to adopt children or become a foster parent** because of your religious beliefs or views on the family.
- **As a business owner or professional, you might lose your license or be fined if you refuse to perform services that are contrary to your religious beliefs.** You might even lose professional credentials if you don't participate in certain activities, even if other co-workers are willing to perform them in your place.
- **You might not be able to create faith-based clubs on college campuses** without being required to let people become club members—or even officers—who oppose the club's religious beliefs.
- **Churches may be forced to employ people who disagree with or refuse to live core values of their faith,** threatening their ability to carry out their religious missions.
- **Churches could lose their tax-exempt status** by maintaining doctrines, policies, and standards that conflict with secular beliefs regarding marriage, family, gender, and sexuality, resulting in a huge increase in costs to build houses of worship or to purchase and provide goods for humanitarian aid.
- **You might lose tax exemptions for charitable donations like tithes and offerings** if the Church loses its status as a tax-exempt, nonprofit organization.
- **Churches may not be able to access government lands for camps on equal terms with other groups,** limiting youth conferences and camps.
- **Housing units, such as dorms, at religious colleges could be forced to abandon moral standards that protect privacy, modesty, and morality,** denying people the right to room with those who uphold the same standards.
- **Religious schools that maintain honor codes may lose their accreditation and be denied research funds and even federal student loans and grants,** diminishing the value of their degrees, undermining the quality of their education, and making it financially impossible for many students to attend.

There's a lot at stake, and this is just a sampling. As society continues to move away from eternal truths and God-given commandments, we can't predict all the consequences that may result if religious freedom and the right to act on our beliefs are taken away.

So we need to raise our voices to defend religious freedom. If we don't raise them for the protection of religion now, vital religious freedoms will be lost.

When we join the cause together, we can make a difference that will protect religious freedom not just for Latter-day Saints but also for followers of all religions. ■

From the Church website ReligiousFreedom.Ilds.org.

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