

Fortnight for Freedom concludes with July 4 Mass

WASHINGTON—Nearly 5,000 people filled Washington’s Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception on July 4 for a Mass that celebrated the closing liturgy of the nationwide June 21-July 4 “Fortnight for Freedom” campaign.

Cardinal Donald Wuerl of Washington celebrated the Mass with 180 priest concelebrants. The Fortnight opened last month with an overflow Mass at Baltimore’s historic Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which was celebrated by Archbishop William E. Lori of Baltimore.

During the Fortnight, dioceses nationwide held events such as prayer services, processions, educational forums and picnics to underline the cause of religious freedom. Parishes throughout the Archdiocese of Newark, as directed by Archbishop John J. Myers, rang their church bells at the start and end of the Fortnight to show support for the national effort.

Archbishop Charles J. Chaput of Philadelphia preached the homily during the July 4 Mass at the National Shrine and stressed that freedom comes from God. “Real freedom isn’t something ‘Caesar’ can give or take away,” Archbishop Chaput said. “He can interfere with it, but when he does, he steals from his own legitimacy. The purpose of religious liberty is to create the context for true freedom. Religious liberty is a foundational right. It’s necessary for a good society. We defend religious liberty in order to live the deeper freedom that is discipleship in Jesus Christ. What good is religious freedom, consecrated in the law, if we don’t then use that freedom to seek God with our whole mind and soul and strength?”

At the start of the celebration, Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò, Apostolic Nuncio to the United States, read a message from Pope Benedict XVI, which was sent through the Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone. “The Holy Father encourages the American Catholic community, and young people in particular, to continue to bring the wisdom and insight born of their faith to the task of building a society worthy of America’s highest moral and constitutional principles,” the message stated.

Earlier this year the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ (USCCB) Ad Hoc Committee on Religious Liberty issued a call for the Fortnight as the signature spiritual and educational event to highlight threats to religious liberty both in the United States and abroad. Specific threats to religious liberty, cited by the USCCB, include the recent “preventive services regulations” issued by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (see *The Catholic Advocate*, March 7 and Feb. 22). In addition, U.S. Bishops say the Affordable Healthcare Act is flawed because it compels religious institutions to pay for services it opposes morally, such as female sterilization and contraception (see related story on page 18).

Other issues, according to the USCCB, include threats to Catholic foster care and adoption services; unjust state immigration laws; and forcing religious groups to host same-sex marriage and civil-union ceremonies. Recent threats to religious freedom abroad include assaults in churches in Iraq, Nigeria and Kenya.