

LCMS launches 'Free to Be Faithful' awareness campaign

By Vicki J. Biggs

In response to increasing intrusions by government into the realm of the church, this month the LCMS is launching "Religious Liberty: Free to Be Faithful," an education and awareness campaign aimed at inspiring LCMS rostered members and laity to take informed action to protect the freedom of religion.

"We are committed to working to ensure that we remain free to practice the teachings of our faith and that we retain our rights of conscience," said LCMS President Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison. "Freedom of religion extends beyond the practice of our faith in houses of worship. We must be free to put our faith into action in the public square and, in response to Christ's call, demonstrate His mercy through our love and compassion for all people."

The goals of the campaign are to provide clarity about the church's role in matters of Christian citizenship and impress upon elected representatives the vital nature of protecting First Amendment rights for all religious organizations — not just houses of worship — so that

their religious beliefs.

Harrison said that "the immediate focus of the campaign is to provide educational materials prepared from an LCMS perspective that our members can use and share so they are equipped to participate in the electoral process and make informed decisions at the polls in November."

Beginning later in September, educational resources available online will include a Bible study and bulletin insert, articles and commentaries, a sample advocacy letter and additional materials.

The LCMS "Religious Liberty:

was conceived following the June 28 U.S. Supreme Court decision upholding the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA), because the law includes a provision requiring certain religious employers to cover abortion-inducing contraceptives in their health plans. The so-called "birth-control mandate" became effective Aug. 1.

"Although the LCMS has no official position on the PPACA in its entirety, we regard the requirement to comply with the birth-control mandate, a provision of the law, as an infringement on religious liberties," Harrison said. "The birth-

the biblical truth of the sanctity of human life and creates a conflict of conscience for religious employers and insurers, who face steep penalties for non-compliance based upon their religious convictions."

Harrison spoke in defense of religious liberty and conscience before the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee in a Capitol Hill hearing in Washington, D.C., Feb. 16. (See stories at reporter.lcms.org/?19664 and reporter.lcms.org/?19660.)

On Feb. 21, the LCMS Council of Presidents adopted without dissenting voice a resolution asserting that it "stands with" and "commends" the LCMS president for his statements regarding the HHS mandate and his appearance before Congress.

In a statement prepared with that resolution, the COP reiterated that it stands united "in full support" of Harrison's testimony as well as with "all citizens of the United States — Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, other Christians, as well as members of other faiths — in defense of religious liberty and freedom of conscience for individu-



als and institutions.” (For a full story about this, go to reporter.lcms.org/?19694.)

Numerous LCMS district conventions this year adopted resolutions supporting Harrison’s and others’ (including the Roman Catholics’) stance on the issue.

Also, Harrison authored “Free Exercise of Religion: Putting Beliefs into Practice,” an open letter issued June 21 to all Americans, voicing opposition to the birth-control mandate. Twenty-four religious leaders joined Harrison in signing the letter, which is on the LCMS president’s office Web page at lcms.org/president.

To learn more about the “Religious Liberty: Free to Be Faithful” campaign and to download resources, call 888-843-5267 or visit lcms.org/freetobefaitful after Sept. 1.

New LHM documentary

In a related action, Lutheran Hour Ministries has produced “The Intersection of Church & State,” an hourlong documentary that explores the meaning and significance of “the separation of church and state.” (See ad on Page 6.) Hosted by “The Lutheran Hour” Speaker Rev.

Gregory Seltz, the program features commentary from Harrison, LCMS Chief Mission Officer Rev. Gregory K. Williamson and other religious leaders, politicians and historians.

Promotional materials state that the documentary “will show how a sound biblical understanding of Scripture underscores the powerful benefits available to church, state and citizenry when a healthy and cooperative relationship exists between church and state.”

The program will debut Sept. 30 on Fox Business Network, as paid programming at 5 p.m. Eastern Time. Check listings for local times. Also, information about future airings on other networks and local stations as it becomes available will be posted at intersectionofchurchandstate.com.

Vicki J. Biggs is director, Integrated Communications, for the Synod.

Reprinted, with permission, from the September 2012 issue of the Reporter, the national newspaper of the LCMS.