

# The Next 250 Years

*Religious freedom of the people, for the people, by the people*

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Two hundred fifty years ago, America declared that human rights do not come from governments but from a Creator. That conviction has never belonged to one faith. It made room for conscience, worship, doubt, dissent, and change.

From serving as academic coordinator at the UAE Military Academy on September 11, when a Muslim general offered comfort and invited me to pray, to helping employers create workplaces where people can bring their whole selves, even their whole souls, to work and show dignity, respect, and compassion across differences of faith and belief, I have come to see religious freedom as something larger than protection from persecution. It is the freedom to live with integrity, contribute without hiding, and treat neighbors with dignity across deep differences. It also gave me freedom to follow conscience until I found my spiritual home in the Catholic Church.

As we celebrate America's first 250 years, we should ask not only what religious freedom meant in 1776, but what we hope it will mean when descendants gather for America's 500th birthday in 2276.

That is why the Religious Liberty Commission's draft report matters. Whether one agrees with its conclusions or not, the Commission has invited public comment. We should accept that invitation.

And because the American experiment has inspired people abroad, it is fitting and proper that all who share these ideals make their voices heard.

**The next chapter should not be written for the people. It should be written by the people. It should remain of the people, recognizing every person's freedom to seek truth, follow conscience, and contribute to human flourishing.**

