



THE 250TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE IS OCCASION TO DEFEND ITS TRUTHS, SAYS JUSTICE THOMAS

The second paragraph of the Declaration proclaims: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights ...” Throughout my youth, these truths were articles of faith that were impervious to bigotry or discrimination. The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language defines “self-evident” as “obviously true, and requiring no proof, argument or explanation.” Whether they had a divine source, or a worldly one, they were never questioned. They were the Holy Grail, the North Star, the rock — immovable and unquestioned.

Despite the multiplicity of laws and customs that reeked of bigotry, it was universally believed among those blacks with whom I lived and who had very little or no formal education, that “in God’s eyes and under our Constitution we are equal.” This was also the case



SCREENSHOT YOUTUBE

with my nuns, most of whom were Irish immigrants. At home, at school, and at Church, we were taught that we are inherently equal; that equality came from God; and that it could not be diminished by man. We were made in the image and likeness of God. That proposition was not debatable and was beyond the power of man

to alter. Others, with power and animus, could treat us as unequal but they lacked the divine power to make us so. ...

At the beginning of the 20th century, a new set of first principles

of government was introduced into the American mainstream. ... Progressivism was the first mainstream American political movement — with the possible exception of the pro-slavery reactionaries on the eve of the Civil War — to openly oppose the principles of the Declaration.

It will, of course, not be easy. ... You will need to rely on your faith to guide and sustain you through it.

Truths continued on pg. 2

We Are Free to be Faithful In response to increasing intrusions by the government into the realm of the church, the LCMS launched the *Free to be Faithful*® campaign in September 2012 to educate and move people to take informed action to protect religious freedom and all the cultural issues that pertain to it: confessing the faith in the public square, marriage, defending the sanctity of human life and related issues affecting religious liberty. In 2016, the Synod in convention adopted Resolution 14-01 to encourage education and leadership in matters of religious freedom.

For *Free to be Faithful* resources and news, visit lcms.org/socialissues/freetobefaitful.



ENCOURAGE, EDUCATE, ADVOCATE

Keep up to date on what’s happening with the Lutheran Center for Religious Liberty (LCRL) at LCRLFreedom.org, or visit the “Lutheran Center for Religious Liberty” Facebook page.

The LCRL’s mission is to ignite and fuel a uniquely Lutheran response to increasing intrusions, limitations and challenges by the government in the life of the church, while educating, encouraging and equipping LCMS members and organizations to take informed action in support of marriage, life and religious freedom.

Receive regular updates by subscribing. “Word from the Center—Mondays” will give you a devotional reflection. “Word from the Center—Fridays” will send you a two-kingdom reflection from the LCRL about a topic, issue or court case that concerns the issues of liberty, life, marriage and, occasionally, education. When you receive the “Word from the Center,” you will be blessed by God’s Word as well as become better informed as to how to be a more useful citizen in His Hands for the sake of the proclamation of the Gospel for all.

TO SUBSCRIBE visit LCRLFreedom.org, email info@lcrfrees.org or text “LCRL” to 833-821-5329.

FOR MORE INFORMATION about the LCRL, including ways to support it, visit lcms.org/lutheran-center-for-religious-liberty.

DOWNLOAD a popular booklet titled: “Mom and Pop Two-Kingdom Papers: A Christian Public Philosophy for the Average Joe and Josephine” at LCRLFreedom.org.

Progressives strove to undo the Declaration's commitment to equality and natural rights, both of which they denied were self-evident.

To [President Woodrow] Wilson, the inalienable rights of the individual were "a lot of nonsense." Wilson redefined "liberty" not as a natural right antecedent to the government, but as "the right of those who are governed to adjust government to their own needs and interests." In other words, liberty no longer preceded the government as a gift from God, but was to be enjoyed at the grace of the government. The government, as Wilson reconceived of it, would be "beneficent and indispensable."

Progressives such as John Dewey attacked the Framers for believing that "their ideas [were] immutable truth good at all times and places," when instead they were "historically conditioned, and relevant only to their own time." Now, Dewey and the progressives argued, those ideas were to be repealed.

Progressivism seeks to replace the basic premises of the Declaration of Independence, and hence our form of government. It holds that our rights and our dignities come not from God, but from the Government. It requires of the people a subservience and weakness incompatible with a Constitution premised on the transcendent origin of our rights.

You will not be surprised to learn that the progressives had a great deal of contempt for us, the American people. Before he entered politics, Wilson would describe the American people as "selfish, ignorant, timid, stubborn," and "foolish." He lamented that we "do too much by vote" and too little by expert rule. He proposed that the people be ruled by administrators who use them as "tools." He once again aspired to be like Germany, where the people, he said admiringly, were "docile and acquiescent."

The century of progressivism did not go well. The European system that Wilson and the progressives scolded Americans for not adopting, which

he called nearly perfect, led to the governments that caused the most awful century that the world has ever seen. Stalin, Hitler, Mussolini, and Mao all were intertwined with the rise of progressivism, and all were opposed to the natural rights on which our Declaration was based. Many progressives expressed admiration for each of them shortly before their governments killed tens of millions of people.

It was a terrible mistake to adopt Progressivism's rejection of the Declaration's vision of universal, inalienable natural rights. ...

When Abraham Lincoln addressed the assembled crowd at Gettysburg, they had gathered to memorialize the past. But Lincoln's address urged them to not do so with complacency. Instead, Lincoln said, they would look to the past as inspiration to take them to greater heights in the future. "It is rather for us," Lincoln said, "to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us, that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave their last full measure of devotion. That we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain, that this nation shall have a new birth of freedom, and that this government, of the people, by the people, and for the people, shall not perish from the earth." ...

What we must turn our attention to today is finding in ourselves the same level of courage that the signers of the Declaration had, so that we can do for our future what they did for theirs. Each of you will have opportunities to be courageous every day, whether your calling in life is as a day laborer, a stay-at-home mom, a small business owner, an educator, an office worker, a judge, or a Senator. It may mean speaking up in class tomorrow when everyone around you expects you to live by lies. It may mean confronting today's fashionable bigotries such as anti-semitism. It may mean standing up for your religion when it is mocked and disparaged by your professors. It may mean not budging on your principles when it will mean losing

friends or being ostracized. It may mean running for your school board when you see that they are teaching your children to hate your values and our country. It may mean turning down a job offer that requires you to make moral compromises. One thing I know to be true: It will mean waking up every day with the resolve to withstand unfair criticism and attacks.

These are the choices that will confront you, and you must decide whether to respond with timidity or with courage, as the signers of the Declaration did. It will, of course, not be easy. It never is. But, if, like me, you need a greater source of strength than yourselves, you will need to rely on your faith to guide and sustain you through it. You will disappoint people you thought were friends and endure personal attacks as well as attacks on those you care about.

But, if you stand, you will find that courage, like cowardice, can be habit forming — a part of your life and who you are. And, I may dare say, it is liberating. You will also be a living example for others to emulate.

So by all means, celebrate the Declaration of Independence. It is the most important act in American history, the foundation of our Constitution and, as Lincoln said, "the sheet anchor" of our republic. But, I implore you to celebrate it by standing up for it, by defending it, and by recommitting yourselves to living up to its ideals. Channel the courage of the men who faced down a king and signed it, or of a President who led the nation in a Civil War rather than permit this house to be divided by the great contradiction of slavery. Take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave their last full measure of devotion.

And, "...with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence ... [let us] mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor."

Thank you, and may God continue to bless this great nation.

Excerpted from a [speech](#) delivered by Clarence Thomas, Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court, at the University of Texas at Austin on April 15, 2026.

New Report Thaws the Chill of Bias Against Christians

By Tony Perkins, May 1, 2026, *The Washington Stand*



OFFICIAL PHOTO: FIRST MEETING OF THE TASK FORCE TO ERADICATE ANTI-CHRISTIAN BIAS IN THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

The new report released this week by the Department of Justice's Task Force to Eradicate Anti-Christian Bias is a wake-up call.

The task force, led by Acting Attorney General Todd Blanche, has produced one of the most, if not the most, substantive works of this administration. *The report*, entitled "Eradicating Anti-Christian Bias within the Federal Government," lays bare what is at the heart of the Left's disdain for religious freedom: it is a clash of "worldviews" over abortion, gender ideology, and sexual orientation.

Before detailing abuses across the federal government, the 550+ page report lays the foundation for why the anti-Christian bias, pervasive in the Biden administration, is a threat to our nation.

Beginning with an extensive quote from the farewell address of America's first president, George Washington, the report provides the historical context for why vibrant Christian faith should be embraced, not suppressed.

"Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of patriotism who should labor to subvert these great pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of the duties of men and citizens." Washington went on to write, "let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion."

If morality rests on transcendent truth, then to suppress the Christian faith, as the Biden administration did, is to weaken the moral foundation that sustains our political freedoms.

The report goes on to acknowledge that "The Nation's origin and system of government bear the imprint of a

Christian worldview and ethic, even as its laws strive to protect religious pluralism."

Following the Left's truncated view of religious freedom, the report highlights how the Biden administration "tolerated religious beliefs that were privately held but zealously pursued actions to limit Christians' ability to live out their faith." This is the essence of religious freedom: not merely belief, but the freedom to act on those biblical beliefs and convictions.

The report provides insight into how the Biden administration used government power against those who opposed its agenda — pressuring, penalizing, and, in some cases, prosecuting individuals unwilling to abandon their convictions, including the use of the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act, or the FACE Act, against pro-life advocates.

Aligned with organizations like the Southern Poverty Law Center and Planned Parenthood, this whole-of-government approach marginalized dissent and created a chilling effect for Christians in the public square.

What many suspected is now documented: an intentional effort to extend hostility toward Bible-believing Christians beyond the federal government by pressuring states and the private sector.

States were pressed into denying or revoking licenses for Christian foster care families and agencies. Educational institutions were forced into compliance with the administration's view of human sexuality. At the same time, efforts targeted certain forms of Christian counseling, limiting the ability to help

those struggling with gender dysphoria.

So what must be done with this report? The federal government is already using it to identify policies that must change. But the stakes are higher than policy alone.

Now is the time to establish safeguards at the federal, state, and local levels to prevent future administrations from hollowing out the First Amendment, and to preserve the truth that sustains both our freedom and our future. And it is also a time for boldness, boldness in proclaiming the gospel that transforms hearts and minds. Because that transformation does not remain private; it shapes how we live, how we act... and yes, how we vote.

Tony Perkins is president of *Family Research Council* and executive editor of *The Washington Stand*.

Editor's note: The lead article of the Spring 2026 *Free To Be Faithful Newsletter* reported on the conviction and fining of Bishop Juhana Pohjola of the Evangelical Lutheran Mission Diocese of Finland (ELMDF) and Finnish Member of Parliament Päivi Räsänen for quoting the Bible. On May 7, 2026, both publicly announced they are appealing their conviction to the European Court of Human Rights. The full article from International Lutheran Council reporter Matthew Block may be read [here](#). Pray that God would vindicate these faithful Lutheran confessors.

Pardons Aren't Enough. The FACE Act Must Go.

Andrew Bath, April 30, 2026



PHOTO BY BRET KAVANAUGH ON *Unsplash*

The House Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution and Limited Government held a hearing this week on how the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act, the “FACE Act,” became a weapon against peaceful pro-life Americans under the Biden administration. The Thomas More Society, which defended many of those unjustly prosecuted under the law, testified in favor of full repeal. The hearing is long overdue.

Paul Vaughn was up early, preparing for the day with his wife and their 11 children, when shouting and pounding shattered the quiet of a Tennessee morning. Before he understood what was happening, federal agents stormed his home, handcuffed him in front of his family, and took him away. His crime? Attending a peaceful pro-life gathering at an abortion facility, marked by prayer, hymn-singing, and cooperation with local police.

The Biden Department of Justice charged Vaughn with a misdemeanor violation of the FACE Act and stacked on the felony offense of “conspiracy against rights,” exposing him to ten years in federal prison, for praying.

He was not alone. In Pennsylvania, Mark Houck, a Catholic father of seven, was charged under the FACE Act after a confrontation with a clinic escort while counseling with his 12-year-old son. Our attorneys at Thomas More Society offered to bring Houck in voluntarily — which the DOJ refused — precisely to avoid what happened next. Sixteen agents in seven vehicles descended on the Houck home at dawn and arrested him in front of his wife and children. He was put through the

ordeal of a trial, but the jury acquitted him of every charge.

The process was the punishment. And that was the point.

On April 14, the Department of Justice’s Weaponization Working Group confirmed what these families had lived through: prosecutorial decisions driven not by victims or law enforcement, but by outside abortion advocacy organizations.

The nearly 900-page report — drawn from more than 700,000 internal records — documents selective prosecution, coordination with abortion industry groups, and prosecutorial misconduct throughout Biden-era FACE Act enforcement. Among the findings was a 137-page dossier on pro-life individuals, including photographs of spouses and minor children, compiled by the National Abortion Federation and handed directly to government officials.

The disparities are stark: Biden’s DOJ sought sentences averaging 26.8 months for pro-life defendants, versus just 12.3 months for the handful of pro-abortion defendants charged — and despite widespread arson and vandalism targeting pregnancy centers

and churches after *Dobbs*, brought not a single FACE Act case involving a house of worship, even though the law was written to protect them too.

Prosecutors even searched for ways to screen out Christian jurors and called pro-life beliefs “cult.” When one of my Thomas More Society colleagues spoke publicly about the government’s misconduct, prosecutors fumed about it. The report now vindicates every word.

The FACE Act made this possible. And it could happen again.

The FACE Act was enacted in 1994 in part to prohibit the use “of force, threat of force, or physical obstruction” that is intended to “injure, intimidate, or interfere with” persons seeking to obtain or provide “reproductive health services.”

The Act serves only to federalize local conduct, inviting the abuse of centralized federal government power. It is unconstitutional, both on its face and as enforced by the Biden DOJ.

Our Constitution leaves the “police powers” to the states. Although the Constitution grants the federal government no general police power, Congress claimed authority to pass the FACE Act under the Commerce Clause and under the Fourteenth Amendment, relying on *Roe v. Wade* and *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*.

In *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*, however, the Supreme Court decisively overruled *Roe* and *Casey*, holding that abortion is not a right “protected by any constitutional provision, including the Due Process Clause of the

Face Act continued on pg. 5

Fourteenth Amendment.” That leaves the FACE Act hanging by the thinnest of threads: the Commerce Clause. Since the FACE Act was enacted, the Supreme Court has significantly refined its Commerce Clause jurisprudence.

It is now clear that Congress may not criminalize non-economic, intrastate conduct simply by invoking “interstate commerce.” The court has repeatedly held that Congress may regulate intrastate activity only when it is economic in nature and substantially affects interstate commerce. Peaceful

sidewalk counseling, prayer, and nonviolent protest are not economic activity, nor do they substantially affect interstate commerce.

The FACE Act becomes even more dangerous when prosecutors combine a FACE Act misdemeanor charge with the felony offense of “conspiracy against rights,” as they did in Paul Vaughn’s case, openly disregarding the will of Congress. When Congress enacted FACE, it made an explicit and deliberate choice: a

first-time offense involving exclusively nonviolent physical obstruction would be punished as a misdemeanor carrying a maximum sentence of “not more than six months.” That reflects Congress’s considered judgment about the seriousness of such conduct and draws a clear line between violent criminal behavior and peaceful, if controversial, protest.

By layering a felony conspiracy charge on top of the same conduct, prosecutors erase that line entirely. Nothing about the conduct changed; only the prosecutor’s charging decision to pursue crippling

penalties. That maneuver is an end-run around Congress, and a statute that permits such punishment inflation at the discretion of prosecutors is far too dangerous to remain on the books.

This is not a hypothetical danger. Local law enforcement found that Paul Vaughn had committed no crime, but the federal government turned on him. Paul and his family endured years of investigation, prosecution, and relentless fear that a husband and father of 11 would be taken from them for a decade. He was convicted of a federal felony. Only a presidential pardon spared him.

President Trump thankfully pardoned

Paul and 22 others convicted by Biden under the FACE Act, freeing most of them from federal prisons. Trump’s DOJ also dismissed pending cases, fired the prosecutors most responsible for the injustice, and restricted future enforcement to extraordinary circumstances. But pardons and firings, welcome as they are, cannot solve this permanently. A future administration could re-

weaponize the FACE Act on day one. And even if it is enforced evenhandedly, it remains unconstitutional. Personnel changes don’t fix structural problems.

That is why we are encouraged that Congress is once again taking up the effort to repeal the FACE Act entirely. The families who lived through this abuse deserve accountability, not just the hope of a pardon from the next sympathetic president.

If our constitutional system of separation of powers is to be preserved, the FACE Act must be repealed.

Let Us Pray

Almighty God, for two-and-a-half centuries, You have given us this good land as our heritage. Grant that we remember Your generosity and constantly do Your will. Bless our land with honest industry, truthful education and an honorable way of life. Save us from violence, discord and confusion; from pride and arrogance; and from every evil course of action. Make us who came from many nations with many different languages a united people. Defend our liberties and give those whom we have entrusted with the authority of government the spirit of wisdom, that there may be justice and peace in our land. When times are prosperous, let our hearts be thankful; and in troubled times do not let our trust in You fail; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**

The nearly 900-page report — drawn from more than 700,000 internal records — documents selective prosecution, coordination with abortion industry groups, and prosecutorial misconduct throughout Biden-era FACE Act enforcement. Among the findings was a 137-page dossier on pro-life individuals, including photographs of spouses and minor children, compiled by the National Abortion Federation and handed directly to government officials.

Editor's note: A new book from friend and fellow Lutheran Timothy Goeglein has come to our desk at Free to Be Faithful. We reprint its jacket commendation and Mr. Goeglein's introduction here.

For three decades, Tim Goeglein has served in the highest echelons of United States government and Christian ministries. From those positions, he has obtained a unique perspective on numerous issues that presently confront our nation: the breakdown of marriage and family, the decline of American education, attacks on faith, increased political polarization, and how all these factors have placed our nation in the peril we currently find ourselves. Over the past several years, Tim has been sharing this perspective in numerous media outlets such as *The Federalist*, *Daily Signal*, *Epoch Times*, *The Washington Times*, and *The Daily Citizen*, among others. This book is a compendium of those columns. — Cover jacket

Introduction

Over the past several years, I have had the honor to write a series of columns on issues dear to my heart: the importance of marriage, families, male leadership, a well-ordered society, faith, and history. Each of these issues affects what we are experiencing today as we conclude the first quarter of the 21st century.

This book is a collection of these columns calling on Americans to return to these core values. I believe we are trapped in our current cultural and political morass because we, as a nation, have abandoned these values and have chosen to live for ourselves — aka, the cultural mantra of “you do you.”

Instead of focusing on ourselves, we need to be focusing on others — to be Christ to our friends, family, and neighbors — while boldly and unapologetically speaking truth in love to a culture in need of both. This book seeks to do just that — to be a source leading us out of our present darkness and back into the light.

At the beginning of each column, I have included a short introduction explaining my reasoning behind writing it at the time, so you, the reader, have the context giving meaning to the words.

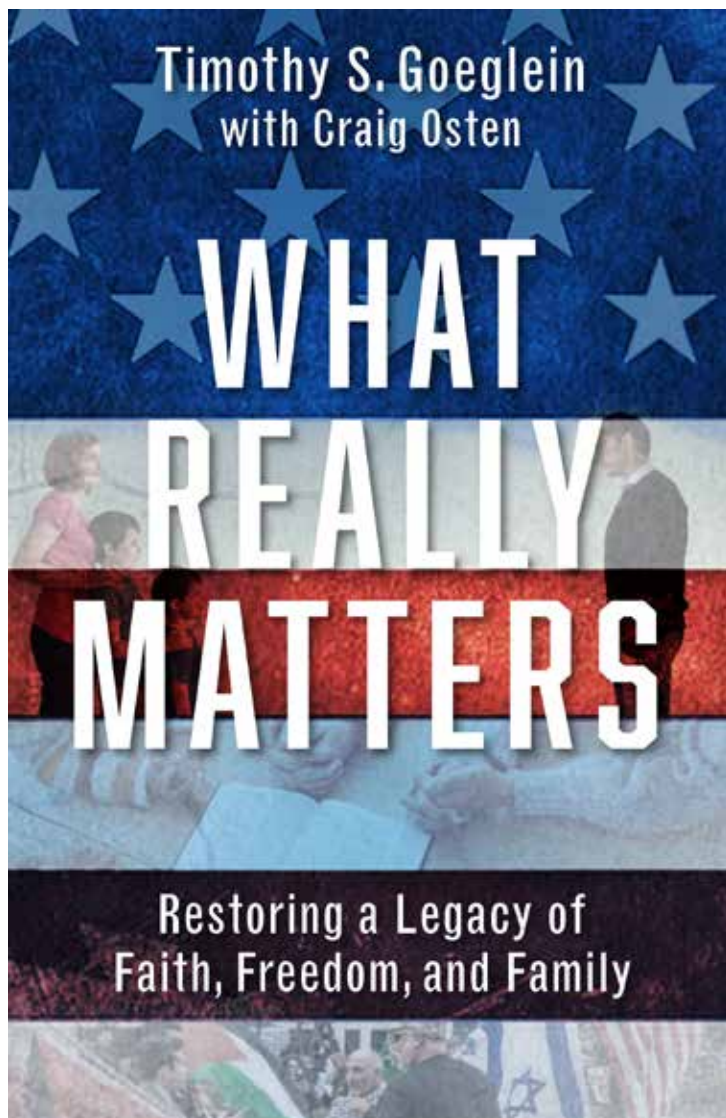
What motivated me to write these columns? The answer is my love for this nation — the freest and greatest nation ever devised. Because I love my nation so much, it grieves me when we have seemingly lost our way — particularly

What motivated me to write these columns? The answer is my love for this nation — the freest and greatest nation ever devised. Because I love my nation so much, it grieves me when we have seemingly lost our way — particularly when it comes to marriage, family, faith, and education.

when it comes to marriage, family, faith, and education. Each day, I pray we, as a nation, will realize the error of our current ways and return to the values that made us the “shining city on a hill” — as President Reagan used to say — for the world to follow and emulate.

It is my hope that this collection of columns will be a blueprint to encourage my fellow citizens to step back, reevaluate the road we currently travel, and return to the original roadmap of faith, freedom, and family upon which our nation was built.

Timothy S. Goeglein
Washington, DC
July 2024



Supreme Court Rules Against Schools Keeping Secrets From Parents

by Corey DeAngelis, *The Heritage Foundation*, March 11, 2026

In a crucial decision emphasizing the role of families in education, the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled in favor of parental notification regarding students' "gender" identity expressions in public schools.

The case, *Mirabelli v. Bonta*, originated from a 2023 lawsuit filed by two California teachers, Elizabeth Mirabelli and Lori Ann West, against the Escondido Union School District and state officials, including Attorney General Rob Bonta.

The teachers challenged district policies that required educators to use students' preferred names and pronouns while prohibiting disclosure to parents without the student's consent. They argued these rules violated their religious freedoms under the First Amendment and parental due process rights under the Fourteenth Amendment.

The policies stemmed from California state laws, such as AB 1955, which generally barred schools from requiring notification to parents about a child's gender identity or expression without consent, unless mandated by other legal requirements.

In December 2025, U.S. District Judge Roger Benitez granted a class-wide permanent injunction. The injunction blocked enforcement of these policies statewide and declared them unconstitutional for interfering with parents' fundamental rights to direct their children's upbringing and education. The state appealed, and the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals issued a stay pausing the injunction.

On March 2, the Supreme Court, in a 6-3 decision,

reinstated the district court's injunction, which allowed educators to notify parents when a child tells a teacher they are confused about their sex.

Justices Clarence Thomas and Samuel Alito indicated they would grant the application in full, while Justice Amy Coney Barrett, joined by Chief Justice John Roberts and Justice Brett Kavanaugh wrote a concurring opinion. Justices Elena Kagan, Sonia Sotomayor, and Ketanji Brown Jackson dissented.

The majority rationale centered on the Fourteenth Amendment's protection of parental rights. The justices stated that withholding information about a child's gender identity from parents undermines their ability to safe-

guard their children's well-being. Parents would be unable to make informed decisions about education and mental health.

The Court emphasized that such policies cut parents out of critical family matters, asserting that fit parents hold primary responsibility for their children's best interests. This ruling reinforces the principle that government should not supplant parental authority in public schools without compelling justification.



PHOTO BY BRET NOTE THANUN ON *Unsplash*

The majority rationale centered on the Fourteenth Amendment's protection of parental rights. The justices stated that withholding information about a child's gender identity from parents undermines their ability to safeguard their children's well-being. Parents would be unable to make informed decisions about education and mental health.

Among the many ways that The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod works to protect the free exercise of religion for her members, her Board of Directors regularly joins amicus briefs on various topics relating to religious liberty. You can see all of these legal filings in the [LCMS Amicus Brief Directory](https://lcms.org/about/leadership/board-of-directors/amicus-briefs) at lcms.org/about/leadership/board-of-directors/amicus-briefs.

Contacting the President and other elected officials:

usa.gov/elected-officials
senate.gov/senators/contact/
house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative



Free to be Faithful **Update** | lcms.org/socialissues/freetobeforthful

Free to be Faithful is an LCMS newsletter published by The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
1333 S. Kirkwood Road, St. Louis, MO 63122-7295

TO REPRINT: Permission is granted to reprint articles from this newsletter with the credit line "Reprinted with permission of the LCMS." ©2026 LCMS