

Murry: U.S. cherishes religious liberty but need to protect it 'ongoing'

WASHINGTON (CNS) – A culture of religious freedom “consists of respect for the dignity of others as they seek to live in accordance with the truth about God,” said the chairman of the U.S. bishops’ Committee for Religious Liberty.

“All people can thrive in such a culture,” said Bishop George V. Murry of Youngstown, Ohio, but he also noted that “the establishment of a culture of religious freedom is always an ongoing task.”

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in Washington issued Bishop Murry’s statement late Jan. 15, ahead of National Religious Freedom Day Jan. 16, which celebrates the nation’s long-standing commitment to freedom of conscience and the freedom to profess one’s own faith.

The observance commemorates the day the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom was signed – on Jan. 16, 1786. Each year, by presidential proclamation, Jan. 16 is declared Religious Freedom Day.

“While the free exercise of religion has long been enshrined in our country’s laws, religious minorities have often experienced encroachments on their ability to practice their faith freely,” Bishop Murry said. “Even today, many Jewish, Muslim, Christian and other communities, all in different ways, face challenges to their religious freedom.”

“On this Religious Freedom Day, we are grateful that the right of religious liberty is cherished in this country,” the bishop said. “I appreciate concrete actions the administration has undertaken, such as recent steps to protect faith-based social

service providers.”

In November, the Trump administration issued a proposed rule change that will help ensure faith-based social service providers will not be excluded from certain federally-funded programs at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

“May we Catholics in America resolve to build on our inheritance for the good of all,” Bishop Murry added.

In his proclamation, issued a day ahead of the Jan. 16 observance, President Donald Trump said: “From its opening pages, the story of America has been rooted in the truth that all men and women are endowed with the right to follow their conscience, worship freely, and live in accordance with their convictions.

“On Religious Freedom Day, we honor the foundational link between freedom and faith in our country and reaffirm our commitment to safeguarding the religious liberty of all Americans,” he added.