



## OFFICE OF THE BISHOP OF PENNSYLVANIA

*Thus says the Lord of hosts: Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another; do not oppress the widow, the orphan, the alien, or the poor; and do not devise evil in your hearts against one another. Zechariah 7:9-10*

Freedom of Religious Exercise is the first and most foundational principle upon which this nation was established. It is one's right to exercise one's religion freely and attend religious services without government interference.

The federal government has recently withdrawn the policy that once prohibited immigration enforcement from obstructing the free exercise of one's religion. Some of our friends and neighbors are now credibly concerned that they cannot safely attend religious services in fear of potential government scrutiny.

People seek religious community to nurture and sustain their lives. We are not aware of any compelling government interest in enforcing immigration laws that would require the denial of this basic freedom of worship.

We have a call to uphold the dignity of all people, and so we must challenge this decision. Philadelphia-based Quaker groups have taken legal action to protect our constitutional and historical rights, both those of individuals and those of the Church. I requested our Chancellor discover if we can partner with this effort regarding the unconstitutional intrusion of federal agencies in our churches. We have been told that adding new organizations to their lawsuit may delay their case. However, we will continue to support this effort in any way we can. At the right time, we are willing to file a friend of the court paper expressing our support for their position regarding the First Amendment issues raised.

As your bishop and a follower of Jesus Christ, I will stand with my church and God's people against any attempts to disrupt religious services or dissuade any Christians from participating or being present in our churches.

Together, we will protect every house of worship and everyone who humbly enters any sanctuary, promising that all those who seek hope, shelter, acceptance, and refuge in a house of faith will find safety and rest.

Finally, I ask that we be generous with one another as the Body of Christ. Jesus calls each of us, his flock, to protect God's beloved children. Let us prayerfully listen to one another, and create safe spaces for dialogue. We can faithfully enter the discomfort that promotes growth among us, and may we cast aside assumptions, accusations, and suspicions.

Let us not walk into this world divided, but together in Christ.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David G. Hunter XVI", with a large, stylized flourish extending from the end.