

**Annual Diocesan Red Mass**  
**Comments by Bishop Felipe J. Estévez**  
**Coordinated by the Catholic Lawyers Guild**  
**The Basilica of Immaculate Conception**  
**October 22, 2013**

1. Catholics have always believed that the church and state are both part of God's plan. Church is not a mere creature of the state but retains its own integrity. The American tradition of religious liberty respects this principle.
  
2. As the Affordable Healthcare Act, with its provisions that would require the church to provide services it judges contrary to its moral teaching, illustrates, there are many in our political culture today that disregard our consciences. There are other examples of this such as efforts of local governments in some jurisdictions to limit tax exemptions for churches or disputes over hiring practices in religious organizations. Behind all of this, there is a current of secularism which marginalizes religion in society and yet religion has such a favorable impact on public morality.
  
3. Yet, as real as those tensions are, our Catholic tradition teaches that we have a responsibility to cooperate with the state in the service of the common good. And, of course, the Diocese of St. Augustine does that in many ways with our social services, our schools and our hospitals. We stand with all persons of good will in our community and we are happy to cooperate with them in building a just, charitable and peaceful society.
  
4. As lawyers and judges, you are called to exercise your skills and wisdom in enabling this cooperation. The church and society needs you.
  
5. You know that it is not always easy. But today we ask for God's grace to enable us to respond to Christ's call of service. As St. Paul exhorted to Timothy, "Fight the good fight of faith and lay hold of eternal life to which you are called." (1Tim.6:12)