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Religious Tolerance is Needed to Have Religious Freedom

Religious freedom is important because you need it because it is a basic human right that our country's founders recognized. People should feel like the government will let them practice their faith without fear of being harmed. Through history, many people have been comforted by an organized religion and by believing in a higher power. If religious freedom did not exist, our country would be very different because people could not practice their religion publicly or they would be persecuted. James Madison, the fourth American president, was known as the "Father of the Constitution" and was known for his strong beliefs on religious freedom. As Madison said early in his career, "The Religion then of every man must be left to the conviction and conscience of every...man to exercise it as these may dictate. This right is in its nature an inalienable right."

If there wasn't religious freedom, people wouldn't feel safe. Society needs religious freedom so at bad times people can look to God or their god in order for them to find peace again. In 1620, Pilgrims came to America so they could practice their religion without being persecuted. People of other religions like Catholics and Puritans followed them looking for a safe place to practice their religions as well. In 1790, President Washington wrote this specifically to the Jews, but the promise applies to other religions as well, "May the children of the Stock of Abraham, who dwell in this land, continue to merit, and enjoy the good will of the other

inhabitants, while everyone shall sit in safety under his own vine and fig tree, and there shall be none to make him afraid.”

Some people feel like they need to look up to someone greater than their human leader and are comforted by organized religion. Even with this religious freedom in the Constitution there have been disagreements. Roger Williams and Anne Hutchinson were banned from their community because of disagreements with the Puritans. A Catholic convent in Massachusetts was burned in 1834 because people didn't like Catholics. Joseph Smith founded a new religion, Mormons. He was tarred and feathered and was later killed with his brother.

If religious freedom didn't exist, our nation would be different today. Our people might be more violent towards people whose religions they disagree with. A lot of people would be secretive about their religion if religious freedom wasn't a right. People are murdered in countries that don't have religious freedom. It doesn't matter where they are or how they are killed, but they are killed because they don't have religious freedom in that country. Even in our country historically there has been violence and persecution against people who disagree with their religion even though it was protected under the law. Thomas Jefferson, when he was Virginia's governor, wrote a bill to guarantee legal equality for people of all religions because he said, “But it does me no injury for my neighbor to say there are 20 gods or no God. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg.”

We could continue Father Dujarie's legacy by supporting religious freedom by supporting officials who fight for religious freedom through legislation and through funding for groups that support religious freedom throughout the world. We need to keep the government out of religion because government leaders should not make laws about how people should practice their faith within the law. President James Madison said late in his life in a letter, “And I have no

doubt that every new example, will succeed as every past one has done in showing that religion and government will both exist in greater purity, the less they are mixed together.” What our early leaders said remains true today. Religious tolerance is essential to the fabric of our country. In 2010, for example, there was a controversy about an Islamic center going to be built by New York City’s Ground Zero memorial. Barack Obama said: “This is America. And our commitment our religious freedom must be unshakeable. The principle that people of all faiths are welcome in this country and that they will not be treated differently by their government is essential to who we are.”

Works Cited

"America's True History of Religious Tolerance." *Smithsonian.com*. Smithsonian Institution, 01

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