



Thomas More College to host “Religious Liberty at a Crossroads: Legal Perspectives” on Jan. 24

January 20, 2018

Thomas More College, through its Institute for Religious Liberty, will host a program called “Religious Liberty at a Crossroads: Legal Perspectives” on January 24 at 7 p.m. in the Saints Center’s Steigerwald Hall.

Three national legal experts will discuss the recent religious liberty cases of significance, including the Hobby Lobby case, Little Sisters of the Poor case and the Masterpiece Cake case. Some have viewed these through the eyes of the “first freedom” being under assault, while others see the issues as fairness to all.

Keynote speaker will be Kevin Walsh of the University of Richmond School of Law. His expertise is constitutional law and religious liberty. After graduating from Harvard Law School and clerking for Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, Walsh was on the legal team representing the Little Sisters of the Poor in their religious freedom challenge of the Obama Administration’s contraceptives mandate.

The second speaker is Frederick Gedicks, who holds the Guy Anderson Endowed Chair of Law at the Reuben Clark Law School of Brigham Young University. He has published widely on the nature and role of religion in contemporary public life. Gedicks has concluded that Religious Freedom Restoration Act exemptions for Hobby Lobby and companies like them could open the door to state religious exemptions being excused for for-profit businesses.

The third speaker will be Ilya Shapiro, a senior fellow in constitutional studies for the Cato Institute. He edits their Supreme Court Review and regularly represents Cato Institute on television and radio, and he also testifies before congress. Shapiro has filed more than 200 “friend of the court” briefs in the Supreme Court, many of them on religious liberty cases.

On Oct. 6, 2017, Attorney General Jeff Sessions issued a memorandum to all executive departments and agencies, putting forth concise principles concerning religious freedom and providing guidance for how they would be applied in federal policy regulations.

Several key questions will be addressed on Jan. 24. For example, how do we define equality when it comes to religious affiliation or personal lifestyle? In relation to those concepts, should businesses be required to serve all costumers regardless of those even if they disagree with their

views? Should health care organizations led by religious orders be required to meet health care needs for all of its employees, regardless of beliefs and practices?

Businesses, religious organizations, and the government have different interpretations on these issues and related ones. Are they church-state issues, free speech, or democracy issues, business ethics issues or in some cases, all of the above?

Thomas More invites the public to attend this event and participate in the dialogue about our “first freedom” and the legal cases it has generated in the recent past.