

# Proud to be an American

**Compiled by Elizabeth Lowe**

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This Independence Day, five people from around the Archdiocese of Baltimore share what makes them most proud to be an American.

"I'm proud to be an American because of the desire for freedom that birthed our country. We are free to publicly exchange ideas in search of the truth. We are free to belong to any religion and free to share our faith with others. Our history records the struggle for equal freedom for the oppressed, and that continues today."

***Father Keith W. Boisvert, pastor of St. Katharine Drexel in Frederick***

"There are many reasons I am proud to be an American, but there are three things that I will never take for granted. First, our freedom to practice or not practice the religion of our choice. So many asylum seekers in the U.S. are here because they were tortured or persecuted because of their religious beliefs. Second, our freedom of speech. While I may not agree with everything our government does, I have the right to speak my mind and not fear imprisonment or torture because of it. Third, knowing that we have elections that are free from violence. We are able to cast our votes without fear and no matter the election's outcome, the country will not dissolve into violence."

***Molly Corbett, executive director of Asylee Women Enterprise, a Lutherville-based nonprofit that helps women seeking asylum, provides transitional housing and food, and a parishioner of St. Francis of Assisi in Baltimore***

"When I read about people being persecuted for beliefs or life choices, I'm reminded of Jefferson's words: '... All people are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, among them life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.' My country is not perfect, but I'm proud of these rights."

***Sister of Notre Dame de Namur Joan Kelly, former principal of St. Ursula School in Parkville***

"My pride as an American comes from two basic values: the value of life, freedom and then a powerful characteristic of all Americans - resiliency. This means we

Americans value each person as a child of God and respect and protect one's freedom. As a chaplain, I am called to serve those who serve. I have seen battle and have seen the best in people ready to sacrifice their lives for our country. I am often touched by the loyalty of my fellow Americans, determined to love our country and to support their brothers and sisters in pursuit of happiness. As a country, despite many struggles, I feel that we all stand strong and carry one another. I can see the works of individuals using their hands and feet, their hearts (as St. Teresa of Avila once explained) to serve the kingdom of God and making their lives all about Jesus. All of that shows an incredibly resilient spirit that makes our country unique and makes me a proud American, wearing the sacred cloth of our nation - U.S. Army uniform."

***Father Arkadiusz Ochalek, U.S. Military Chaplain***

"We are blessed to live in an amazing country and realize the fruits of our democracy. One aspect of our American life that most impresses me is how our country shows its respect and care for people with disabilities. Once sheltered away in institutions, people with disabilities are in our communities, schools, churches and are employed as full members of our society. Because of our Constitution and the commitment of Americans, people with disabilities are now able to realize their own American dreams."

***Dr. Thomas H. Powell, president of Mount St. Mary's University in Emmitsburg, the second oldest Catholic college in the U.S.***

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