



## *Canterbury Medal Gala*

THURSDAY, JUNE 11, 2026  
PHILADELPHIA

*The following remarks were offered by Michael Mumma on behalf of his father, William P. Mumma, in Philadelphia upon receiving the 2026 Canterbury Medal from the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty on June 11, 2026.*

**M**y deepest gratitude to all of you. For your support of the Becket Fund... for your commitment to religious liberty... and for your friendship.

Before I could truly see the importance of religious freedom, I had to believe in God.

I was raised in a secular family whose belief was in America. My father left college to enlist after Pearl Harbor. He did the Band of Brothers tour through France and Germany, then finished his degree and re-joined the Army as an officer in the Corps of Engineers. My father deeply loved this country. By his quiet example, he taught me the importance of duty. It was his most important gift to me.

But he had no religious faith to give.

I came to my faith first by curiosity and then by love.

When I was young, I wanted to know the answers to the foundational questions. Who created the world? ... Why do we exist? ... Infinite Space and Infinite Time? ... These questions pointed towards religion. That was the wrong way for my youthful arrogance. So I spent my teen years mocking other teens who claimed belief.

I think God was annoyed - or maybe amused.

One day at the diner where I was washing dishes, he placed in my path a beautiful girl who quietly professed her Catholic Faith. I went into action! Mocking her belief and laying out all my skeptical arguments. ... She was unmoved.

Actually, she was moved. She just moved away from me. ...

But she didn't abandon me. I stayed curious and she stayed faithful.

After such a rocky start, it took 7 years to persuade her to marry me. Two years after I had joined the Catholic Church.

Love is the most powerful path to faith. ...

In my life I benefitted from an environment where religious believers could share their belief - in school and at work. A skeptic like me could talk freely to believers. Some of them were classmates or co-workers. Some were teachers or bosses. I was not offended that they were free to share their belief with me. I was free to reject it.

This was the gift my country gave to me. Religious freedom that allowed me to come to God freely. Without coercion either to accept or reject God's voice.

The years passed and Kathy and I had children. But along with our personal joy, I grew uneasy about our country. That open, free environment was closing. I still met believers, they just behaved like they had to keep their faith under a bushel. Despite being a convert, I was tempted to do the same. I was troubled.

I could see it was a legal problem more than a social problem. Not a lack of believers - It was a cascade of pressure that began with the courts and made its way through the public institutions and eventually even private organizations. Everywhere it was accepted wisdom that the law required that religious belief be kept quiet. Kept at home or church, but not in the public square.

My love of country and faith in God did not allow me to accept this ominous turn. My own personal experience made me see how central religious freedom was to the American promise.

Then I discovered the Becket Fund. Here was an organization that went to the heart of the problem. Becket was setting new legal precedents to dismantle the artificial wall keeping religion from the public square. It was going to the very heart of the problem. And it was fighting with exactly the right arguments.

When Becket called and asked me to serve as CEO, I was surprised but I did not hesitate. Neither did Kathy. We knew this was something that deserved our support.

We have never regretted that decision. It has been extremely satisfying to be with Becket as it won victory after victory. Extremely rewarding to work with the finest people I have known in my life. And extremely gratifying to see the generosity of Becket's donors - so many who are in this room tonight.

Every one of you in this room has a story like mine. Every one of you hopes to hear God's voice and answer his call. Every one of you wants this privilege for your children and grandchildren.

Religious freedom is the foundation of the American dream. It is the bedrock that gives us the conviction and courage to fight for all the other liberties that makes this country unique. The liberties that have kept America the shining city on the hill for 250 years.

Religious liberty has to be defended. The last 50 years have taught us not to take it for granted. We learned the high price of complacency. The Becket Fund was early to see the sinister risk our country faced, thanks to Seamus Hasson. From its small beginning the Becket Fund, thanks to all of you, has grown into a powerful force. Our victories have been sweet, but now is not the time for a return to complacency. I urge all of you to redouble your commitment to this noble cause.

I hope my father would be proud of the service I have tried to give my country, I pray that God is pleased with my efforts to keep the doors of faith open for my fellow citizens.

God bless all of you.