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CONSECRATED LIFE - For the first time, the chairperson of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom is a Catholic priest. On June 21, Jesuit Father Thomas Reese was elected as chair of the USCIRF, which serves as an advisory panel to the federal government on protecting religious freedom abroad.

“World events underscore the importance of this fundamental right: A key factor in many of the United States’ foreign policy challenges, religious freedom is under serious and sustained attack across much of the globe,” Fr. Reese said.

Established in 1998, the commission is an independent, bipartisan federal body that reviews facts and circumstances of global violations of religious freedom. The USCIRF is composed of nine commissioners who make policy recommendations to the president, the Secretary of State and Congress.

Fr. Reese was [initially appointed to the commission](#) for a two-year term in May 2014 and was reappointed by President Obama on May 12, 2016.

In his new role as chair of the commission, Fr. Reese replaces Princeton law professor Dr. Robert George.

After joining the Society of Jesus in 1962, Fr. Reese was ordained a priest in 1974. He received a bachelor’s and a master’s from Saint Louis University, a Master of Divinity from the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley and a Ph.D. in political science from the University of California, Berkeley.

Since 2014, he has held the position of senior analyst for the National Catholic Reporter. He was previously a senior fellow at Woodstock Theological Center from 1988 to 1989, and again from 2006 to 2013. He served as editor-in-chief of America magazine from 1998 to 2005 and was an associate editor from 1978 to 1985. He is the author of "Inside the Vatican: The Politics and Organization of the Catholic Church."

"I am honored to serve as USCIRF's Chair and work with my fellow commissioners in support of freedom of religion or belief," Fr. Reese said.

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