

  
ARCHDIOCESE OF MILWAUKEE  
OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

October 4, 2002  
The Feast of St. Francis of Assisi

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

**“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”** (*Matthew 5:9*)

Many of you have asked about the Church’s teachings regarding the current conflict with Iraq. Today as Catholics in America, we face a moral challenge. Our government is seriously pursuing military action against Iraq to prevent the threat of further terrorism and yet, the teachings of our Church uphold the values of peace and the dignity of the human person. War can only be justified as a last resort.

Pope Paul VI stated: “if you want peace, you must work for justice.” The conditions that created the circumstances in Iraq and the Middle East are not new. Terrorism, tragically, is nothing new. We need to consider the root causes of terrorism: poverty, racism, inequality, hatred, violence and hopelessness are the seeds of despair that nurture terrorism. As Pope John Paul II stated on September 7, 2002: “history in fact shows that the recruitment of terrorists is more easily achieved in areas where human rights are trampled upon and where injustice is a part of daily life.”

On September 13, 2002, Bishop Wilton Gregory, president of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) wrote President Bush: “we conclude, based on the facts that are known to us, that a pre-emptive, unilateral use of force is difficult to justify at this time.” The letter refers to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and raises several issues including: “whether ‘just cause’ has been established, whether the United States has the authority to engage in unilateral action; whether a war in Iraq would produce evils and disorders greater than the evil to be eliminated; and whether an attack would have the possibility of establishing a more just society in Iraq?” This posture is supported by officials of the Holy See and by the Pope himself, who have expressed reservations about military action by the United States against Iraq at this time.

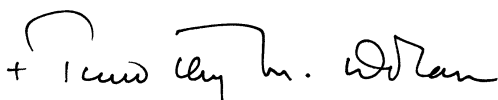
Bishop Gregory further stated in his letter: “the United States and the international community have two grave moral obligations: to protect the common good against any Iraqi threats to peace and to do so in a way that conforms with fundamental moral norms.”

As Catholics, we are guided by our Church’s social teaching. As the bishops of our country teach: “**In the Catholic social vision, the human person is central, the clearest reflection of God among us. Each person possesses a basic dignity that comes from God, not from any human quality or accomplishment, not from race, or gender, age or economic status. The test of every institution or policy is whether it enhances or threatens human life and human dignity. We believe people are more important than things.**” (*A Century of Social Teaching*, the United States Catholic Bishops, November 1990)

Our struggle with terrorism is not only political but also spiritual. Therefore, we encourage you to become more informed about the Church’s teaching in forming your own conscience, and to contact your senators and congressional representatives to express your concerns. As a sign of solidarity with others around the world who seek peace, we urge you to consider the power of prayer: praying the rosary, lighting candles, engaging in acts of fasting, and joining in prayer services with other people of faith and good will. Such acts are especially appropriate during October, Respect Life Month.

These are challenging times for people of faith. Let us demonstrate the depth of our Christian faith through the courageous pursuit of justice and peace.

Faithfully in Christ,



Most Reverend Timothy M. Dolan  
Archbishop



Most Reverend Richard J. Sklba  
Auxiliary Bishop