

Lord, Make Us Instruments of Your Peace

A Joint Statement and Commitment to Peace
by The Jewish, Muslim, and Catholic
Religious Leaders of Southeast Texas

As the Jewish, Islamic and Catholic religious leaders of Southeast Texas, we join together in praying for and promoting peace. We commit ourselves to being instruments of peace and we spiritually join this day with representatives of the world's religions who meet with Pope John Paul II in Assisi to pray for world-wide peace. With all who gather this day we unite our hearts by praying in the spirit of St. Francis, "Lord, Make Us Instruments of Your Peace."

We recognize and revere our spiritual commonalities. Our religious traditions find a common spiritual patrimony in the faith of Abraham. He submitted himself to the Divine plan of the one and only God, the living God, the God who creates and cares for every creature. As recipients of this spiritual patrimony we submit ourselves, without reserve, to one God and to God's revelation in our respective sacred texts. Through the ages our religious communities have believed in and asked for divine assistance, rooted ourselves in daily prayer, gathered for weekly worship, found fasting spiritually efficacious, embraced almsgiving, charity and justice as essential and revered sacred shrines as places of spiritual pilgrimage. Our common spiritual heritage as children of Abraham and our leadership of the three monotheistic faiths in Southeast Texas compel us to continue our common call to follow God's commands and serve the human community in its immense spiritual and material needs. Though we may follow diverse paths, we hope, with God's help, to reach the full implementation of God's plan for peace.

Through reciprocal respect and our common commitment to collaboration, we pledge ourselves to promote peace by preserving mutual understanding, social justice and moral welfare. We commit ourselves to be witnesses in the world to the roots of faith that respect the right of every member of the human family to a dignified life. Together we call all to foster justice, respect differences, avoid stereotypes and transmit the teaching of tolerance to our children. It is our belief that in a just society each person has the right to: a secure place of residence, the protection of one's personal possessions, the right to protect one's sacred covenants and to move freely. Such social and judicial autonomy insure the protection of religious freedom, spiritual centers and holy places.

While we are filled with hope for the future, the events of September 11 fill us with sadness. We mourn the tragic loss of innocent lives. We join in prayer for those who died and extend our collective support for those they leave behind. We are strengthened by the many heroic individuals who have reached out to save lives and selflessly offer comfort and solace. We note with sorrow that some have seized on these events to suggest the futility of inter-religious conversations. We, on the contrary, see in recent events a reminder of the urgency of dialogue in order to foster mutual understanding and respect.

All of humanity is living in a time of trouble and sadness. In this time of trouble and sadness, the human family is calling out to faith based communities to be peacefully, respectfully and meaningfully bound together on a sacred path of serving our universal need for peace, prosperity and justice. As people of faith we are reminded anew of the fragility of human life and of the terrible harm that can be caused when people turn our God-given talents to wicked and perverse ends. Moreover, as Jewish, Muslim and Catholic leaders we are reminded, that even religious faith and piety can be twisted to destructive ends when fanatics pervert religious teachings and

invoke them to justify barbaric acts.

No act of terrorism, which by definition targets civilians precisely because they are innocent, can be justified. Even a just end cannot justify evil means. Basic to the moral norms governing the use of force is the immunity of civilians. Every human life is precious, whether we be civilians working in the World Trade Center or eating in a restaurant in Israel or walking over the hills in Palestine. Terrorism intentionally directed against civilian populations, no matter what the cause, is always unjustifiable.

In the face of this massive tragedy, we are encouraged by Jewish, Muslim and Catholic communities around the world which have condemned terrorist actions against innocents everywhere. Our prayers and support are with them.

We are concerned about acts of prejudice directed against Muslim and Arab members of our society. We condemn these acts and call on all of our fellow citizens not to let our shared grief lead us to act in ways that dishonor the greatness of heart that has caused America to be a beacon to all the world. We join all those who have spoken clearly about the need to reject all prejudice and discrimination in viewing our fellow citizens.

It is with equal concern that we address what appears to be an alarming escalation in anti-Jewish rhetoric by some who have adopted the libelous language used by anti-Semites over the centuries. Such scurrilous attacks on a religious tradition and community are evil.

Often in the intensity of grief and rage, nations take actions that they later regret. As we enter our battle against the forces of terror, we raise the caution that a general expansion of law enforcement powers beyond those necessary to fight terrorism cannot be justified if such an expansion comes at the expense of core civil liberties, principles of privacy, due process, and freedom of association. Such a Faustian bargain compromises the very idea of freedom, the idea which our adversaries have attacked, and which we are pledged to defend.

Now our nation finds itself in conflict with the forces of terrorism and hatred. We hold in common the belief that justice, mercy and peace are of God. The theory of a just war -- which finds its roots in our religious traditions -- does not allow for limitless violence. Instead, just wars must be fought with concern for the safety and well being of noncombatants and their property. We call on our government to be guided by these constraints as it prosecutes perpetrators of terrorism.

As Jewish, Muslim and Catholic leaders of Southeast, Texas, we commit ourselves to the common cause of creating a climate of peace in our respective religious communities and civic communities. We commit ourselves to transmitting God's gifts of justice, reconciliation and peace to our children, their families and our respective faith communities. We rejoice at seeing fellow Jewish, Islamic, Catholic and other religious leaders build bridges of unity and seek common ground for cooperation and respect in promoting peace. Together we consecrate ourselves to continued creative collaboration, as we continue to cry out to our Creator: "Lord, Make Us Instruments of Your Peace."

Given in Beaumont, Texas, This Twenty-fourth Day of January 2002

A Day of International Prayer for Peace

Rabbi Barbara Metzinger, Temple Emanuel

Imam Fahmi AL-Uqdah, Islamic Society of the Triplex

Most Reverend Curtis J. Guillory, S.V.D., D.D., Catholic Diocese of Beaumont