Be a Living Sign of Hope In a Time of War

“...it is a duty of believers, regardless of the religion to which they belong, to proclaim that we will never be able to be happy if we are against one another; the future of humanity will never be able to be assured by terrorism and the logic of war.”

Pope John Paul II, February 23, 2003

People of faith are called to be signs of hope and peace-makers, especially if bombs begin to fall on Iraq. The following suggestions, made by churches of all faiths around the globe, are ways of keeping the hope of God’s peace before us:

1) Keep the churches and places of worship open
2) Pray together every day
3) Continue to say “no” to war as a faith community
4) Donate aid to the victims of war
5) Share experiences and encourage others to be hopeful

1) Keep the churches and places of worship open.
Churches have always been places of welcome, care and refuge in times of danger and fear. Plan now for what your church can do in a time of war. Keep open the doors of your church. Offer a space for quiet prayer and hold prayer services and liturgies. Be prepared to rapidly spread the word about services for peace in your community and inform the local media so they can help inform others. Make links with other churches and cooperate on an interfaith basis to hold prayer services with community members of different faiths.

2) Pray together every day.
Religious leaders of all traditions have issued calls to pray for peace. During Lent, the World Council of Churches and Pope John Paul II are making strong pleas that all Christians pray for peace. Millions are praying and are called to continue in prayer.

• The Vatican has created a new section on their web site that is dedicated to peace. It includes prayers, statements and resources for peace from the Catechism: http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/special_features/peace/prayer-peace_index.html.

• The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops offers a collection of resources called “Iraq: The Way to Peace” that includes prayer and liturgy materials, educational resources, suggested activities and actions: http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/peace/index.htm.

• The World Council of Churches has collected prayers and has suggested some resources in different languages to be included in prayer services for peace: http://wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/international/iraqprayers-e.html.

• The Peace and Justice Support Network of the Mennonite Church USA offers a sample candlelight prayer vigil to be used on the eve of war; prayers and liturgies; and other resources for action (including a “work sabbath” to emphasize the seriousness of an event by stopping everyday activities to take time for special prayer and action): http://peace.mennolink.org/.
3) Continue to say “no” to war as a faith community.
Join efforts around the world to say “no” to war, resist violence, and build peace, especially as part of a community of
faith (a parish group, a school community, etc.). In addition to a vigil, a prayer service, etc., you can:

a) Express your views to a wider audience through the media in an op-ed or letter to the editor.
(For sample themes for op-eds or letters to the editor from religious leaders, see http://wcc-coe.org/wcc/
behindthenews/bulletin21-annex.html.)

b) Prepare a simple petition or a book with space for individual messages/comments to be placed in your church or school
so that people can sign it and express their views about peace. Then arrange to deliver these to governmental decision-
makers in your area.

c) Take part in or lead non-violent public demonstrations that call for peace. Ensure that the faith community is present
and visible at these events.

d) Lift up powerful images and symbols for peace. The cross is the most powerful and unifying image among Christians--
across centuries, borders, language and tradition. Consider and utilize symbols and images, in your own experience and
context, that stand against war, symbolize hope, demand justice, and build peace. These might include: the cross; the
ashes of Ash Wednesday along with the ashes that coat streets and homes after bombing; the sounds of church bells set
against the sound of falling bombs; the hope and light of candles and the darkness of mourning; torn fabric that recalls the
tearing of Christ’s garments and the brokenness of our present world.

e) Preach and teach about peace, and share with others the Pope’s and Bishops’ calls for peace.

4. Donate to organizations providing humanitarian aid to war victims.
Contribute to emergency and disaster relief funds such as those of Catholic Relief Services, www.catholicrelief.org.

5. Keep praying for hope and encourage others to be hopeful.
The power of our prayers, our words and our actions grow as we share together. Consider taking some of these actions
together with your family: talk with children about what is happening in the world and listen to their fears and their ideas
for peace. Invite and engage classmates, neighbors and colleagues at work in reflection and action for peace. Share ideas
and plans for praying and working for peace with local schools, churches, ecumenical, interfaith and inter-religious struc-
tures. All people and all communities who take the difficult step of witnessing and working for peace need to be sup-
ported, encouraged and reassured that they are not alone.

Share your prayers and descriptions of your witnesses for peace with the Education for Justice Web Site (efj@coc.org),
so we can share them with others as Signs of Hope.

“The events of recent days show that doubts still persist about the moral legitimacy as well as the
unpredictable humanitarian consequences of a war with Iraq. We recognize that the moral alternative
to military action cannot be inaction, passivity, appeasement or indifference. It is vital therefore that all
sides in this crisis engage through the United Nations fully and urgently in a process, including continued
weapons inspections, that could and should render the trauma and tragedy of war unnecessary.”

Joint statement by Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury, and Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O’Connor, Roman Catholic
Church in England and Wales, February 20, 2003.