

Justice and Peace Committee
Our Lady of the Lake Church
8900 35th Ave. NE
Seattle, WA 98115
October 4, 2005

Your Excellency,

It is with great hope and conviction that we, members of the Justice and Peace Committee of Our Lady of the Lake Parish in Seattle, Washington, write to each Catholic bishop in our country. From the foundational perspective of Catholic Social Teaching, we have been struggling as Catholic Christians to discern a way to be active peacemakers, especially in relation to the ongoing conflict in Iraq. We embrace totally the words Pope John Paul II proclaimed emphatically prior to the invasion of Iraq: "War is not always inevitable. It is always a defeat for humanity." And so we write to ask you to lead and inspire United States Catholics in what we believe to be a faithful citizenship position of total and active opposition to this occupation of Iraq. We pray the Christ of agape bless and encourage you in your peacemaking.

The injustice of this war you laid out in your *Statement on Iraq: "Would this be a 'just war'?"* issued on November 13, 2002: <http://www.usccb.org/bishops/iraq.shtml>. Where is your voice now? As you wrote in *The Challenge of Peace* (1983, #80), "The moral theory of the 'just war' or 'limited war' doctrine begins with the presumption which binds all Christians: we should do no harm to our neighbors; how we treat our enemy is the key test of whether we love our neighbor; and the possibility of taking even one human life is a prospect we should consider in fear and trembling." Tragically, the cycle of retributive violence and death in Iraq continues. We are deeply concerned that our Church's timid response to the ongoing conflict implies approval of the U.S. military action and its underlying policy.

In your 2002 *Statement*, you wrote: "We invite others, particularly Catholic lay people - who have the principal responsibility to transform the social order in light of the Gospel - to continue to discern how best to live out their vocation to be 'witnesses and agents of peace and justice'... (*Catechism*, #2442). Trying to live as agents of peace and justice has led three of our group to help draft "*Disengaging Responsibly from Iraq*," a position paper by the Interfaith Network of Concern for the People of Iraq (INOC), a task force of the Church Council of Greater Seattle (<http://www.scn.org/ccpi/INOCshortPosition9Sep04.html>). As the attached document states: "An American exit with dignity will require acknowledgement of, and compensation for, the disastrous effects of the last decade and a half of US policy on ordinary Iraqis and their society." Ending the current military occupation of Iraq is an essential step towards justice for the Iraqi people. If peace is to prevail, however, the U.S. must humbly take moral responsibility, and make amends, for years of debilitating sanctions and the death and destruction brought about by two U.S.-led wars. Respectfully,

we suggest that the INOC position reflects Catholic Social Teaching. We urge you to carefully consider this INOC document and respond openly to its essential elements.

We would also like to bring to your attention a speech by one who has come face to face with war and the love of Christ, Joshua Casteel, an eight-year Army veteran who served in Iraq as an Interrogator at Abu Ghraib Prison and is now a conscientious objector. Delivered at St. Therese Church in Seattle on July 24, 2005, *A Soldier's Magnificat* (<http://www.catholicpeacefellowship.org/nextpage.asp?m=2356>) is a powerful spiritual testimonial of struggle with the contradictory challenges of military orders and an informed Christian conscience: "But a time came when I could no longer withstand the contradiction between the prayers of my solitude and the duties of my hours spent with the enemy.... Before I even thanked God for my own safety, I thanked him for keeping me from taking life. There has to be something beyond this. Christ came to set the captives free. How can I talk of the freedom of Christ, while playing the role of captor and inquisitor? How can I talk of faith when I only move from place to place by means of guns pointed in all directions - even at eight-year-old shepherd boys." This testimony of Joshua Casteel has been a profound inspiration to us as ordinary citizens pursuing the call to be peacemakers.

Despite these and much other instructive and inspirational material we have found from a diversity of sources, The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has not directly addressed Catholics on the issue of the war in Iraq since the conflict began. We are dismayed at your silence. We need to hear from you, from our priests, and from each other! A strong, united, unrelenting Catholic resistance to the conflict will surely bring God's miracle-creating grace to Iraq and to our own hurting country. We hope you will engage the faithful and our civil leaders in active peacemaking, both in their hearts and in society. We ask you for the courage to galvanize a national Christian campaign for peace. We feel this letter to be a call of the soul for God's help to end this war. You have a singular opportunity to lead this country toward the fulfillment of God's plan, with its promised restoration of right relationships, and to model for us Christ's complete trust that this plan will be fulfilled. Help us believe our country can be transformed by grace if we each do our part. Teach us the principles of Catholic Social Teaching, and shepherd us as the faithful to change the world and the communities in which we find ourselves.

With respect, hope and prayer for your wise and courageous leadership as peacemakers,

Sincerely yours,

Our Lady of the Lake Catholic Church Justice and Peace Committee Members: 23 people signed this