

**Bishop Thomas G. Wenski, Bishop of Orlando and Chairman, USCCB Committee
on**

International Policy

Bishop William S. Skylstad, Bishop of Spokane and President, USCCB

Cc: Cardinal Roger Mahony of Los Angeles

Cc: Bishop Robert J. Baker, Bishop of Charleston

Cc: Bishop Thomas J. Gumbleton, formerly of Detroit

Cc: Archbishop Alexander J. Brunett of Seattle

**Cc: Dr. Stephen Colecchi, Director, USCCB Office of International Justice and
Peace**

Cc: Pax Christi USA

Cc: Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good

Cc: NETWORK, A national Catholic social justice lobby

Cc: Center of Concern

Cc: Interfaith Network Of Concern for the People of Iraq (INOC), Seattle

Cc: Intercommunity Peace and Justice Center, Seattle WA

**Justice and Peace
Committee
Our Lady of the Lake
Parish
8900 35th Ave NE
Seattle, WA 98115
April 15, 2007**

Dear Bishop Wenski and Bishop Skylstad,

Four years after the U.S. invasion of Iraq, the immense suffering and deaths of our Iraqi brothers and sisters continue as war and violence escalate. Our U.S. soldiers and their families also bear the heavy burden of ever increasing casualties and the overwhelming demands of extended service with even greater risk of severe injury and death. It is apparent now more than ever that military action will never bring peace to Iraq and an escalation of U.S. troops will only result in increased violence and deaths for both Iraqi civilians and U.S. soldiers. We remember the words of Pope John Paul II prior to the 2003 invasion, that “war is the ultimate failure of humanity” and know that we are seeing this failure borne out daily. It is deeply challenging for a small parish-based justice and peace group like ours to take on this issue in the light of Catholic Social Teaching and to feel that we can accomplish even a small step towards bringing about peace. We know, however, that we must not turn away in frustration and despair from the daily litany of horrors we hear from Iraq but take on our responsibility as Catholic Christians to pray and work for justice and peace. And so, once again, we turn to you our bishops for leadership and guidance.

One and a half years ago we sent our first letter to you, dated October 4th 2005, addressing all the Bishops of the United States and asking for a public

response from the USCCB to the worsening situation in Iraq. We welcomed your statement of January 12th 2006 entitled “Toward a Responsible Transition in Iraq” which recognized the moral responsibility of our intervention there and the follow-up statements “Call for Dialogue and Action on Responsible Transition in Iraq” of November 2006, and “Evaluating Plans for a Responsible Transition in Iraq” of January 2007. Our second letter to you of February 11th 2006 requested further exploration by the USCCB on two primary U.S. obligations essential to the establishment of a just and responsible transition in Iraq; the renouncement of hegemony by the U.S. in terms of its long-term relationship with Iraq, and the U.S. obligation to provide just reparations to the people of Iraq. Our committee continues to reflect and deliberate on all these issues and statements and we value greatly the moral reflections of the USCCB in this regard. One of our concerns, however, remains that the statements of the USCCB are not disseminated broadly among the Catholic laity and so the call for dialogue and action can remain largely unheeded, inhibiting a broad-based collective Catholic response to the urgent need for justice and peace in Iraq.

Nevertheless, we are encouraged and inspired by the scholarship and action of several national Catholic social justice groups (listed as cc recipients of this letter) that continue to call on our nation’s leaders to chart a new direction for our country, with policies rooted in nonviolence, the pursuit of justice and peace, and a commitment to the well-being and dignity of all God’s people. In particular, we fully support and respectfully urge your response to the recent “Pax Christi USA Sign-On Statement on the 4th Anniversary of the invasion of Iraq”, published in the National Catholic Reporter of March 16, 2007. In addition we would value public commentary from the USCCB on the January 12th statement of NETWORK (A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby) entitled “Response to the President’s Proposal For a Change of Course in Iraq” that was endorsed and signed by the heads of 13 Catholic organizations. Perhaps it is time for all of our various Catholic justice and peace groups to come together as a single, powerful (but always non-partisan) lobby for peace. We invite your discernment on this idea and urge you to consider preparing a USCCB statement in this respect that will address all the Catholic faithful in the US. We cling fervently to the hope that our nation may yet use its position as the world’s sole superpower to foster peace, and to show that violence is not the inevitable response to political conflict.

With much appreciation for your wisdom and leadership,

Sincerely yours,

Our Lady of the Lake Catholic Parish Justice and Peace Committee
Seattle, Washington