



THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

The Diocese of Central Pennsylvania

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A Pastoral to the Episcopal Congregations of Central Pennsylvania on the Killing of Osama Bin Laden

From Bishop Nathan D. Baxter

For many the killing of Osama Bin Laden is a long overdue symbolic act of Justice and a time for celebration. While I understand such inclinations I caution the same, lest we lose sight of the most important work of peace and understanding in the politically named "War on Terrorism". This war and the search for Bin Laden first began with President Clinton and the Embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania. While Dean of the National Cathedral I prepared and led the 1998 National Memorial Service with President Clinton, as I later did for the National 9/11 Memorial Service with President George W. Bush. In the planning of both services I insisted to both Presidents that Muslim religious leaders participate with prayers and Quran readings. These services showed the world the best of both religious faiths and also the best of Americans' civic spirit---that fear of extremism cannot define either.

We must remember that Osama Bin Laden is only a symbol of evil as terrorism and ideological extremism. This is not a Muslim-Christian religious war. Rather this is an ideological war by powerful extremists who seek to manipulate the religious and cultural fears of both Muslims and Christians at home and abroad. The work of everyday Americans, especially Christians, is to live into the best of our faith teachings, resist extremists' abuse in any religion, and guard the dignity of our neighbor, especially Muslims.

The military efforts to win the war against terrorists and terrorism will continue, even with the killing of Osama Bin Laden. But the more important work of building cultural and religious peace must also continue. Only everyday Americans, especially Christians and Muslims, can "Win the Peace" at home and abroad. We do this by intentionally reaching out to one another; by understanding and respecting the best of one another's traditions; and by speaking out against extremist behavior and abuses by those of our own traditions. I am deeply grateful for the efforts of local congregations which have been reaching out to neighboring Muslim communities. Such efforts towards hospitality, learning and sharing of prayers must continue now more than ever. When our local communities and other nations see Americans demonstrating the best of our religious teachings and cultural ideals it will do more to "Win the Peace" and defeat terrorism than military actions. As Jesus taught, "Blessed are the peace makers (whatever their religion) for they shall be recognized as children of God."

Yours for the Peace of God,

The Rt. Rev. Nathan D. Baxter, D.Min., S.T.D., D.H.L., D.D.
Bishop, The Episcopal Diocese of Central Pennsylvania

MAILING ADDRESS
PO Box 11937
Harrisburg, PA 17108

DIOCESAN CENTER
101 Pine Street
Harrisburg, PA

TELEPHONE
(717) 236-5959
FAX
(717) 236-6448

TELEPHONE
(717) 236-5959
FAX
(717) 236-6448

EMAIL
officemailbox
@diocesecpa.org
WEBSITE
www.diocesecpa.org