International Prayer for Peace
April 26–27, 2006
“This is a moment that demands the very best of each one of us. It is our hope that you will leave here renewed in your hope, moved by the lives of those who have traveled so far to be here, and inspired by the example of this community.”

Georgetown University President John J. DeGioia

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The 20th Annual International Prayer for Peace took place at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., on April 26–27, 2006. The theme of the gathering, the first on United States soil, was “Religions and Cultures: the Courage of Dialogue.”

The Prayer for Peace, organized by the Rome-based Community of Sant’Egidio, has taken place every year since it was first convened by Pope John Paul II in Assisi in 1986. One of the largest regular interreligious gatherings in the world, the Prayer for Peace brings together representatives of multiple faith traditions for prayer and dialogue.

At the conclusion of the first meeting, Pope John Paul II had offered an invitation to the world: “Let’s keep spreading the message of peace and living the spirit of Assisi.”

The 2006 International Prayer for Peace was convened in this spirit as a collaboration between the Community of Sant’Egidio, the Archdiocese of Washington, Georgetown University, and the Catholic University of America. Some 2000 participants from multiple traditions—including Islam, Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, and Shintoism—engaged in interreligious dialogue and shared faith perspectives on crucial global issues.
The International Prayer for Peace Meetings were started as an initiative of the Community of Sant’Egidio, with the aim of promoting mutual understanding and dialogue among religions, within a horizon of peace. The two first meetings, in Rome in 1987 and 1988, were followed by meetings in cities throughout Europe, including Warsaw, Malta, Brussels, Milan, and Florence. The 1995 meeting was a milestone; it took place in Jerusalem, in the heart of the Holy City. The theme was “Together in Jerusalem: Jews, Christians and Muslims.”

Community of Sant’Egidio

The Community of Sant’Egidio, a lay Catholic movement, founded in Rome in 1968 by students concerned by the problems of poor citizens, took its spirit from the Second Vatican Council. Today it has more than 50,000 members in more than 70 countries throughout the world. Its hallmark is its philosophy of community and friendship and its deep commitment to working with the poor, serving as peacemakers and as leading advocates on global issues, like HIV/AIDS.

The different communities of Sant’Egidio, spread throughout the world, share the same spirituality and principles which characterize the way of Sant’Egidio:

*Prayer*, which is an essential part of the life of the community in Rome and communities throughout the world.
Communicating the Gospel, the heart of the life of the Community, which extends to all those who seek and ask for meaning in their life.

Solidarity with the poor, lived through voluntary and free service, in the evangelical spirit of a Church that is the “Church for all and particularly the poor.”

Ecumenism, lived through friendship, prayer, and search for unity among Christians of the whole world.

Dialogue, recommended by the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican, as a way of peace and cooperation among the religions, and also a way of life and as a means of resolving conflicts.

The Community has as its center the Roman Church of Sant’Egidio, from which the Community takes its name. From its inception, the Community has maintained a continuous presence of prayer and welcome for the poor and for pilgrims in the area of Trastevere and throughout Rome.

Georgetown University

Under the leadership of President John J. DeGioia, Georgetown University has emerged as a global leader in efforts to deepen our understanding of religion and world affairs and promote greater interreligious understanding. The task is an urgent one in a world where religion is both a source of conflict and a basis for cooperation—a task that Georgetown is uniquely positioned to address. The University’s academic excellence, Catholic and Jesuit identity, Washington, D.C. location, and global reach are foundations for a lasting contribution in this crucial area.

Georgetown is a pioneer in religion-related scholarship. In addition to the historical strengths of its Department of Theology, the University hosts a number of leading interdisciplinary centers and programs that collaboratively lead inquiry into religion’s engagement with the world.

• Through research, teaching, and outreach activities, the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs explores the intersection of religion with four global challenges: diplomacy and transnational relations, democracy and human rights, global development, and interreligious dialogue.

• The Prince Alwaleed bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, housed within the Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service, is the only academic institution in the US dedicated to exploring fourteen centuries of political, cultural and theological interactions between Christians and Muslims.

• An interdisciplinary program housed in Georgetown College, the Catholic Studies program develops an approach to Catholicism which does justice to its full human reality and integrity as a culture.

• The Program for Jewish Civilization, housed within the Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service, is an interdisciplinary research and teaching center, unique in its emphasis on the global dimension of Judaism, its ethical aspects, and its interactions with other cultures and faith traditions.

Anthony Moore, special assistant to the President on Catholic and Jesuit Affairs, and international conference coordinator Sara Rose Kushnick led Georgetown’s organizational effort for the Prayer for Peace.
Andrea Riccardi, founder of the Community of Sant’Egidio, opened the 2006 International Prayer for Peace by reminding an audience of several hundred in historic Gaston Hall that building common understanding across religious traditions is a foundation for peace. He argued that the bridge to peace is built not by ignoring religious differences, but rather by seeking to understand various faiths. “Our dream is that every true believer may discover his faith and learn how to respect others’ traditions.”


Also speaking were three individuals, from France, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and El Salvador, who shared personal stories of how interreligious understanding has affected their lives.

The second half of the opening event featured Jewish, Muslim, and Christian religious leaders who engaged in a panel discussion, People of Faith and the Courage of Dialogue, moderated by Washington Post columnist and Georgetown Professor E.J. Dionne Jr.

Opening Ceremony
Wednesday evening, April 26, 2006

Interview and Discussion:
People of Faith and the Courage of Dialogue

Chairperson
E.J. Dionne Jr.
Georgetown Professor and Senior Fellow, The Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C.

Shear-Yashuv Cohen
Chief Rabbi of Haifa, President of Ariel United Israel Institutes, Israel

Diarmuid Martin
Archbishop of Dublin, Ireland

Warith D. Mohammed
Muslim American Society

Opening Ceremony Speakers

Chairperson
Jane G. Belford
Chancellor, Archdiocese of Washington

Jeaninna Angelica Carcamo Carranza
El Salvador

Jean-Arnold de Clermont
President of the Conference of European Churches

John J. DeGioia
President, Georgetown University

Karen Hughes
Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs

Cardinal Theodore McCarrick
Archbishop of Washington

Busime Mudekereza
Democratic Republic of Congo

Andrea Riccardi
Founder of the Community of Sant’Egidio
Highlights

Andrea Riccardi
Founder of the Community of Sant’Egidio

For twenty years we have been pilgrims of dialogue among people of different religions. We started back in 1986. It was then, that Pope John Paul II invited the leaders of the different religions to pray, one next to the other, for peace in Assisi. The Cold War was still going on. The pope had understood that religions could be either the gasoline for the flame of conflict or the water that extinguishes the fire of war. At the end of that memorable day, on the hill of Assisi, full of olive branches and swept by wind, next to the tomb of Saint Francis, a prophet of peace, John Paul II said: “Let us continue to spread the message of peace. Let us continue to live the spirit of Assisi”.

We in Sant’Egidio took this seriously. We thought this was a great intuition! The Community of Sant’Egidio, born in Rome in 1968, is today spread in seventy countries of the world (twenty-five of them are African countries, and it is also present in the United States). The Community felt it had to take the spirit of Assisi seriously, because it is a great resource for peace.

Jeaninna Angelica Cárcamo Carranza
El Salvador

The recent history of El Salvador well represents the situation of many Latin American countries that live in profound contradiction...There are still many injustices in El Salvador, we need to keep working for the poor in order to construct a society and a world in which coexistence is possible. Today’s meeting encourages us, the young people of Latin America, on this path.
International Prayer for Peace participants took part in a broad range of panel discussions throughout the day on Thursday. The panelists came from across the United States, Europe, Asia, and Africa to engage each other in a spirit of exchange and cooperation.

Leaders of the world’s major faith traditions and charitable groups joined prominent scholars and civic leaders for discussions ranging from religious freedom, terrorism, and the role of religion in the media, to issues about solving the AIDS crisis, poverty, and genocide.

Panelists included Diarmuid Martin, Archbishop of Dublin, Ireland; Israel Singer, Secretary General of World Jewish Congress; Sayed Hassan Al-Qazwini, Imam of the Islamic Center of America, USA; Celestino Migliore, Apostolic Nuncio to the United Nations, Vatican; Raj Srivastava, Center for the Study of Developing Societies, India; David Rosen, Grand Rabbi, American Jewish Committee, Israel; and Archbishop Demetrios, Primate of the Greek Orthodox Church in America, USA.

A common theme developed throughout the panels was the need for engaging in the exchange of ideas while pursuing solutions to common global problems. Participants stressed the need to develop a rich understanding of their own traditions while nurturing openness to the traditions of others.
Panel 1.1: Religions and Pluralism in Democracy

Chairperson
Katherine Marshall
The World Bank

Thomas Banchoff
Director, The Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs

C. Welton Gaddy
The Interfaith Alliance

Sona Kahn
Supreme Court, New Delhi, India

Daniel Pipes
Founder and director of the Middle East Forum

I am not a spokesperson of religion. But I am a scholar of Islam and I have an optimistic message to bring about pluralism and religion... There is, of course, the poor treatment of non-Muslims in Muslim countries around the world, [but] I disagree with the notion that Islam and pluralism might not be compatible.

Panel 1.2: To Make Poverty History: A Challenge for the World

Chairperson
Christian Tumi
Cardinal, Archbishop of Douala, Cameroon

Giuliano Amato
Senator of the Italian Republic, Italy

Carl Anderson
Knights of Columbus

David Beckmann
Bread For The World & Bread For The World Institute

El Hadj Kone Idriss Koudouss
President of the National Islamic Council, Cote d’Ivoire

Carol Lancaster
Mortara Center for International Studies

Mark Pelavin
Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism

Paola Piscitelli
Community of Sant’Egidio, USA

Since the very beginning of our experience the poor have been companions of our adventure, not merely “clients” but interlocutors and friends of our very lives. It is a relationship not mediated by structure or organizations but a personal one, which slowly but surely will change our heart and will affect the life of the other person and change the balances of society.
God imposes no duty of hatred and violence upon us. Our new Pope Benedict XVI has said it this way in his first encyclical, Deus Caritas Est:

"Since God has first loved us, love is now no longer a mere ‘command’; it is the response to the gift of love with which God draws near to us. In a world where the name of God is sometimes associated with vengeance or even a duty of hatred and violence, this message is both timely and significant."

These are the words that the churches and religious leaders must speak to our secular cultures in order for us to become cultures of life.

Their voices must be constant, consistent, and unequivocal.

Panel 1.3: Religious Freedom: An Often Denied Right

Chairperson
Douglas Johnston
International Center for Religion and Diplomacy

Pietro Sambi
Apostolic Nuncio to The United States of America, Vatican

Arthur Schneier
Rabbi, Appeal of Conscience Foundation

Kevin Hasson
Becket Fund for Religious Liberty

Raj Srivastava
Center for the Study of Developing Societies, India

Pierbattista Pizzaballa
Custodian of the Holy Land, Jerusalem
Panel 1.4: Religions and the Culture of Life

Chairperson
Francis Stafford
Cardinal, Apostolic Penitentiary, Vatican

Paul Alexander
Southwestern Assemblies of God University

Barry Freundel
Rabbi, Kesher Israel Synagogue

Sayed Hassan Al-Qazwini
Imam of the Islamic Center of America

Nancy R. Heisley
Mennonite World Conference

Lauree Hersch Meyer
Church of Brethren

Dale Recinella
Catholic Lay Chaplaincy, Florida’s Death Row and Solitary Confinement

Panel 1.5: Religious Contribution to Genocide Prevention

Chairperson
Andrea Bartoli
Community of Sant’Egidio

Monica Anderson
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sweden

Vicken Aykazian
Bishop of the Armenian Church in America

Qamar-ul Huda
United States Institute of Peace

Tokio Kanakogi
Oomoto Foundation, Japan

Sunday Mbang
World Methodist Council

Oded Wiener
Great Rabbinate of Israel
**Panel 2.1: Religions Facing Terrorism**

**Chairperson**
**David Smock**
United States Institute of Peace

**Maryann Cusimano Love**
Catholic University of America

**Ahmed Iravani**
Ayatollah, Professor of Islamic Law, The Catholic University of America

**Rabbi David Rosen**
American Jewish Committee

Abraham, the father of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, embodied a special quality, a quality of hospitality to everyone. If we can show that spirit of real hospitality, give a person that sense of welcome, we can provide not, perhaps, a whole answer, but a substantial answer to the bitterness and alienation that leads to the violence of which we are victims today.

**Ayatollah Ahmed Iravani**
Director of Islamic Studies, The Catholic University of America, USA

Terrorism is clearly an aberration. It destroys the lives of everyone it touches, victims and perpetrators. Essentially, terrorism is a means, and hence, for its elimination, we must ask, ‘Whence does it come and to what end is it directed?’ ... To attempt to suppress religion is to provoke rather than suppress terrorism.

**Panel 2.2: Mass Media: Religions, Peace, and War**

**Chairperson**
**Mary Ann Walsh, R.S.M.**
US Conference of Catholic Bishops

**John Allen**
National Catholic Reporter, Rome, Italy

**Drew Christiansen, S.J.**
America Magazine

**Robert Edgar**
National Council of Churches

**Mario Marazziti**
Community of Sant’Egidio, Italy

**Peggy Noonan**
Wall Street Journal
Panel 2.3: Bible, Spirituality, & Humanism

Chairperson
William H. Keeler
Cardinal, Archbishop of Baltimore

Shear-Yashuv Cohen
Chief Rabbi of Haifa, President of Ariel United Israel Institutes, Israel

Jurgen Johannesdotter
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany

Mar Aprim Khamis
Bishop of the Apostolic Catholic Assyrian Church

Nicolae
Archbishop of Romanian Orthodox Church

Ann Riggs
National Council of Churches of Christ

Ambrogio Spreafico
Community of Sant'Egidio, Italy

Panel 2.4: Spiritualizing Politics Without Politicizing Religion

Chairperson
Timothy Shriver
Special Olympics International

Sara Cobb
George Mason University

Marc Gopin
Center for Religion, Diplomacy and Conflict Resolution

James Price
Sargent Shriver Peace Institute

Richard Rubenstein
George Mason University

Panel 2.5: Religious Contributions to Genocide Prevention

Chairperson
Andrea Bartoli
Community of Sant'Egidio

Tokio Kanakogi
Oomoto Foundation, Japan

Qamar-ul Huda
United States Institute of Peace

Sunday Mbang
World Methodist Council

Oded Wiener
Great Rabbinate of Israel

Ambrogio Spreafico
Community of Sant'Egidio, Italy

The absence of dialogue creates a violent relationship with the other, the same thing that happens to Joseph’s brothers, who were no longer able to speak with their brother as a friend (Genesis 37:4). The refusal of the other comes from the inability to dialogue. The other is not considered an interlocutor, but an enemy to eliminate. In front of this reality of hostility and contraposition, we could read the whole book of Genesis as the story of God’s dream to rebuild brotherhood, making possible the encounter and dialogue between brothers.
Panel 3.1: Dialogue Between Religions and Cultures: Is It Still Relevant?

Chairperson
Chester Gillis
Georgetown University

Alvin Berkun
Rabbi, Tree of Life Congregation, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Jean-Dominique Durand
University of Lyon, France

Vincenzo Paglia
Bishop of Terni, Italy

Lisa Palmieri-Billig
American Jewish Committee, Italy

Arunima Sinha
Religions for Peace

Tsunekiyô Tanaka
Association of Shinto Shrines, Japan

Judy Zimmerman Herr
Mennonite Central Committee

Jean-Dominique Durand
University of Lyon, France

The issue of dialogue between religions and cultures is more relevant than ever, at a time when ordinary tensions between the people who live in welcoming countries and the ones who arrive may be inflamed by the rising of terrorism, which exploits religions and tends to destroy any sense of hospitality, solidarity, and friendship, which are the basis of coexistence.

Panel 3.2: Prayer as a Source of Peace

Chairperson
Philip Boroughs, S.J.
Georgetown University

Archbishop Demetrios
Primat of the Greek Orthodox Church in America, USA

Mary Margaret Funk, O.S.B.
Our Lady of Grace Monastery

Yahya Hendi
Imam, Georgetown University

Gensho Hozumi
Rinzai Zen Buddhism, Japan

Ayse Kadayifci
American University

David Rosen
Grand Rabbi, American Jewish Committee, Israel

Vincenzo Paglia
Bishop of Terni, Italy

Dialogue is the only way to stop the drift toward the clash of civilizations, because it is the only way of really understanding of one another. We must therefore not let ourselves be overwhelmed by these waves of pessimism that generate distrust, closure, and narrow-mindedness. Religions, which are back in the spotlight today, are decisive in establishing a bond of brotherhood among peoples. It is true, they may be involved in feeding the fire of conflicts, in consecrating borders, in blessing atavistic and new distrusts. Indeed, we must admit that religions are subject to the ambiguous pressure of party factions or nationalistic interests...This, however, is not the attitude that religions have toward humankind, though their spirituality and paths of faith may be different. In their diversity, religions reach out to men and women they consider weak and sinners, pointing out to them the path to perfection. Religions communicate to all people the hope that they can be better human beings by means of the spiritual arms of faith.
The AIDS pandemic presents a very specific challenge to our time. Defeating it calls for the participation of all: international agencies, governments, non-governmental organizations, the worlds of science and economy, pharmaceutical companies, and the communication media. Above all, AIDS highlights the role of religion: believers are called to be the chain that links this solidarity, the binding hope that encourages and gathers the energies of all men of goodwill around the sick man of our time, the leper of the third millennium. This battle needs to be infused with a spirit, a spirit to give a heart of courage and faith to all the diverse efforts to weaken the disease. This is what we believers can be; this is our debt to our time and our world.
On the evening of April 27, 2006, the closing ceremony of the International Prayer for Peace convened on the lawn outside historic Healy Hall. Leaders from the world’s major faith traditions rejoined one another after taking part in separate prayer sessions. Dressed in formal robes, traditional suits, and colorful headdresses, they gathered at a nearby street in Georgetown and began their slow procession to Georgetown’s main campus for the closing ceremonies.

Catholic Cardinal Theodore McCarrick of Washington, D.C. walked arm-in-arm with Chief Rabbi Shear-Yashuv Cohen of Haifa. They were surrounded by Sikhs, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Shintoists, Jews, and Christians of numerous denominations.

The closing ceremonies capped off a day of prayer sessions and panel discussions on topics such as religious pluralism and religious freedom and the role of the faithful in combating poverty, genocide, HIV/AIDS, and war.

After speeches by President John J. DeGioia of Georgetown University and Andrea Riccardi, founder of the Community of Sant’Egidio, religious leaders and representatives signed an appeal for peace. The Rev. Constance Wheeler, protestant chaplain at Georgetown University, read the proclamation to the audience.

Andrea Riccardi
Founder of the Community of Sant’Egidio

Representatives of the Christian Churches and world religions, dear friends:

Two days of dialogue are few, but these days have been very rich. They are a sign before a difficult world, a complex world, sometimes an inhuman world.

When we face these scenarios it is easy to be overcome by pessimism, it is easy to give in to the idea that our tomorrow is a tragic future and full of misunderstanding. It is easy to give in to the idea that the only thing we can do is use force and be resigned to not understanding each other. Pessimism and fear walk hand in hand. And fear is often an evil counselor. The dominion of fear is a victory for those who want to terrorize people. And they do it with all possible means, sometimes the most barbaric ones.

During these days men and women of different religions have shown their will not to be dominated by fear. Dialogue, in fact, chases away fear, because it overcomes ignorance of the other. We have been trying to look at reality with compassion. We have looked at reality enlightened by faith. The faith of those who drank at the wells of ancient religions. These wells, as different as they are, are a resource for the many people who are thirsty for hope, for the many who are oppressed by sorrow, for the many who are searching for peace.

From faith came a profound hope, that hope made clear by the appeal we read this evening: an appeal of peace and dialogue. These are not words thrown into the wind! They come from the depths and have ripened in prayer. Before converging together in one procession to reach this place, we gathered in different places for prayer.
We prayed not one against the other but one next to the other. The word “peace” comes from the depth of prayer. The word “peace” is sacred: it is the precious distillation of religious wisdom, of the many invocations of believers, of the hopes of many men and women. Is it a dream? Is it one of many naiveties? We do not think so because peace is foremost a gift of God, more than the result of human efforts. Peace is the greatest concrete aspiration of millions of men and women. Let us search for peace with the participation of each and every one and with dialogue!

Differences—of language, of history, of religion or of ethnic belonging—are not destined to clash. How many clashes there are in this world! The demon of clash looks for reasons and justification in difference, in religions, in the arguments that come from the memory of the wrongs that have been received. The meeting of these days between people of different religions strengthened the way of dialogue. Being among people of different belongings, surely not always in agreement on everything, being among different people, shows the civilization of coexistence our world needs, the civilization that has deeply marked American democracy, that civilization that religious traditions can continue to feed.

Our path of dialogue continues. It is not interrupted. It is not scared by the explosion of violence and terrorism. It is not frightened by the prophets of the clash. The human tissue of this world, torn in many of its parts, needs the patience of dialogue and encounter. Washington has been an important step. We want to keep this dialogue alive. We do it because we are aware that it is easier to make war than to build peace. But the meeting between believers is an important network that could make this world of ours, fragmented and marked by conflict, share in one common destiny. The message of dialogue coming from these days is a precious distillation of much suffering and of much hope.

John J. DeGioia
President of Georgetown University

In the tradition upon which this university is built, we believe the Spirit is present here, in all that we do.

Present in our work, in our interactions with one another, in our classrooms and in our libraries, on our athletic fields, in our volunteer work, in our friendships, in the music that we make, in the beauty that we create, in our conversations, in our dialogue—the Spirit is here, right here, right now.

We gather together in moments like this, to feel the presence of the Spirit, and to bear witness, to be witnesses to one another, to be present to each other.

And we know, in the deepest part of our beings, that while we may come from many different parts of the world, with so many different ways of engaging the Spirit, that we are united in our humanity and in our yearning to respond to the call of our Creator.

It is appropriate that we gather together this evening, brought together by this unique and extraordinary Community of Sant’Egidio, on the campus of this nation’s oldest Catholic university.

Universities are places of hope.

Our hope is built on a set of beliefs that shape a university.

- We believe in the young, in their promise and in their potential.
- We believe in the transformative power of education.
- We believe that the future can be better than the past.
We believe that wise and thoughtful scholars, filled with a generosity of spirit, can share their knowledge, and participate in the formation of the intellect and character of our young.

We believe in the power of ideas, that scholarship can unlock puzzles and open up new frontiers of knowledge.

We believe in the promise of community—that together we can do things, know things, be things that no one could ever hope to do, or know, or be, alone.

And we believe in the power of prayer, the presence of the Spirit, and the transcendent love of God.

This is an appropriate place. And this is an appropriate time—April—for such a significant inter-religious gathering.

On the 6th, Hindus celebrated the birth of Lord Rama.

On the 11th, Muslims celebrated the birth of the Prophet Mohammed.

On the 13th was the beginning of the Buddhist New Year.

The 13th through the 20th was the Jewish Passover.

The 16th was Easter Sunday for Roman Catholics and Protestants, the 23rd was Easter for Orthodox Christians.

This gathering here this week comes at the end of our academic season. Our classes have been taught, exams are being prepared, papers written, theses defended. Seniors are preparing for graduation.

We look back on the year and we hope we have done our job—that we have done our best in preparing our students for lives of responsible citizenship.

Tonight we offer one last lesson of this academic season—the witness, the presence of all of you, leaders of our faiths from throughout the world.

And we offer the example of the Community of Sant’Egidio—as a way of responding to the challenge of being alive at this difficult and demanding moment in history.

Have you been inspired by the work of the Community of Sant’Egidio?

• By their clothing of Afghan refugees?
• By their support of schools and pediatric health clinics in Albania and Kosovo?
• By their bringing food, medicine, and blankets to the victims of drought, flood, and earthquakes—in Guatemala, Kenya, El Salvador, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo?
• By their taking over a failing hospital in Guinea-Bissau?
• By their brokering a peace in Mozambique?
• By their DREAM Programme, that combats HIV/AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa?

This is a moment that demands the very best of each one of us, and by all of us. It is our hope that you will leave here this evening: renewed in your hope, moved by the lives of those who have traveled so far to be here, and inspired by the example of this community.
Men and women of different religions, from the different continents of this world, we have gathered in America for the first time, guided by the spiritual energy of the “Spirit of Assisi.” Here in Washington, D.C., we have prayed, we have dialogued, and we have invoked God for the great gift of peace.

We have also listened to the prayers of the many who ask for the globalization of solidarity; we have heard their cry that asks for the scourge of poverty to be defeated. Through the testimony of many people, an invocation has reached us. It comes from the victims of violence, and from the victims of terrorism and war; it rises from those who lack even the most basic human rights, the right to medical care, to water and food, and to religious freedom. We have felt that a world in which billions of human beings struggle to survive is unacceptable, at a time when humanity has more resources available than all previous generations.

We have come here, men and women, as pilgrims in search of peace. Our world seems to have forgotten that human life is sacred. God has compassion for those who suffer, those affected by war, and the victims of blind terrorism. The world is tired of living in fear. Fear humiliates the best part of us. Fear and pessimism sometimes seem to be the only way, but they lead down a dark road. Religions do not want violence, war, or terrorism; do not believe those who say otherwise!

To all our fellow religious people, to every man and every woman, we want to say that those who use violence discredit their own cause. Those who believe that greater violence is the response to the wrong they have suffered do not see the mountains of hatred they help create. Peace is the name of God. God never wants the elimination of the other; the sons and daughters of our adversaries are never our enemies: they are children to love and protect all of them.

Humanity is not made better by violence and terror, but by faith and love. Fundamentalism is the childhood disease of all religions and cultures, for it imprisons people in a culture of enmity. This is why, in front of you young people, we say to those who kill, to those who sow terror and make war in God’s name, “Stop! Do not kill! With violence everyone loses! Let us talk together and God will shine on us! Only peace is holy! Let us have and advocate serious, honest dialogue.”

Dialogue is an art. It is not the choice of the fearful, of those who give way to evil without fighting. Dialogue challenges all men and women to see the best in others and to be rooted in the best of themselves. Dialogue is a medicine that heals wounds and helps make this world more livable for present and future generations.

Once again, today, we solemnly ask ourselves and all men and women, believers and people of good will, to have the courage to live the art of dialogue. We ask this for ourselves and for the generations to come, that the world may open to the hope of a new era of peace and justice.

Proclaimed and Signed in Washington, D.C.
Georgetown University on April 27th, 2006
by Prayer for Peace Participants