

**THE MICHIGAN CATHOLIC**  
**Article by Adam Cardinal Maida**  
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My Brothers and Sisters in the Lord:

As we observe the first anniversary of the tragic events of September 11, 2001, our hearts continue to be filled with sorrow and grief that will not go away; we continue to pray for all those whose lives were so tragically cut short, even as we pray with and for their families and friends who mourn their loss. While this remembrance brings renewed sorrow, we also find peace and consolation as we recall the generous and self-sacrificing rescue workers in New York City and throughout our land, and the countless individuals who have given time and resources, even their own blood.

Our lives have been greatly changed since September 11, 2001 – in ways that even now we still cannot completely grasp. For all of us, the ease and comfort of travel has suddenly taken a new and very challenging turn. Our nation's cultural naivety and sense of comfortable isolation has been shattered as we have been forced to recognize – regrettably too late – the great injustice and inequity of which we are all somehow part whenever we are prejudiced against people of other races, ethnic origin, or religious background.

Out of the experience of September 11, we have drawn closer as a nation and have come to a deeper appreciation of the freedom that we enjoy here in the United States, but at the same time, we also know that freedom brings with it a responsibility. We must use our freedom well, not just for our own comfort and advantage but to ensure justice and peace for people everywhere. Even as we are engaged in a so-called “war on terrorism,” we know the importance of continuing to pursue all diplomatic and peaceful means of dialogue rather than open and direct conflict.

The events surrounding September 11 have challenged us to look at religion with fresh objectivity and to confess the sad reality that religion, instead of uniting, sometimes is a source of separation and division – something clearly evident in the Middle East, Northern Ireland, and many of the countries of Africa.

As Catholics, we are challenged to consider how we are truly working for peace and justice in the name of the Lord – with other Christians, Jews, and Muslims, and with people of other religious backgrounds and faith perspectives. On the Archdiocesan level, we have gathered in two very beautiful and powerful interfaith prayer services in response to terrorism and violence, and many of our parishes have had special programs and prayer gatherings as well. But yet, we all know that such gatherings are not enough; we have a responsibility to *continue* to pray, study, and dialogue about these things so that we will grow in respect for, and understanding of, all cultures and religious traditions.

September 11, 2001, unleashed several months wherein we all experienced some kind of loss – loss of lives and loss of innocence, along with a certain disillusionment and restless anxiety about the future. Quickly following upon the September 11 experience has been our suffering as a Church over the last six months or so as we have recognized the problem of clergy sexual abuse of minors and how we in leadership positions have often failed to respond adequately. In some ways, these *two* experiences of loss – September 11 and the “scandal” in the Church – fit together because they both call us to face the truth about our sinfulness and our need to change – individually, as communities of faith, and as a nation.

At the same time, during the last few months we have experienced the scandal of businesses and corporations which have mishandled funds and resources, bringing about tremendous economic suffering for many innocent parties. Obviously, all these things call to mind the importance of repentance, a change of mind and heart, setting aside our own viewpoints, prejudices, and fears, trying instead to see things more as God sees them.

We pursue repentance not for *God's* sake but for our *own*. If we keep our sins hidden and refuse to admit them, they will consume us and even destroy us, but if we are willing to confess them, we can experience healing and a new beginning. Later this year, we will be having a special opportunity for reconciliation and healing for those who have suffered from the pain of clergy sexual abuse and mismanagement of some of the cases by bishops. For now, as we observe September 11, it will also be important for us to kneel in the Lord's presence and ask for His pardon and peace, His renewing Spirit for our Church and our world that we might grow closer together as one world family under one same God and Father of us all.

I would like to conclude by making my own the simple but eloquent words of our Holy Father to the youth of our world in Toronto: *“We are not the sum of our weaknesses and failures; we are the sum of the Father's love for us and our real capacity to become the image of His Son.”*

With that prayer in my heart, I remain

Sincerely yours in the Lord,

Adam Cardinal Maida