

**REMARKS  
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FORT STREET PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
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My fellow Religious Leaders and Friends All:

As believers in one same God and Father of our human family, we gather in prayer to find new strength, hope, and solidarity for the rebuilding of our nation and our world. As the very recently created freeway billboard now proclaims, we are here to assert: *"In God we trust. United we stand."*

As we sort through the spiritual and psychological rubble left behind in the aftermath of September 11, there are many lessons we can learn. First of all, we need to remember that God does not cause or will these tragedies. Out of a deep respect for our freedom, he allows these things to happen. The root causes of much of our suffering and this tragedy in particular, can be traced to our own human prejudice and fear. Rather than asking where God is in all of this, we should be asking what are we going to do about it? Instead of pointing fingers or criticizing individuals or groups, each of us needs to look in the mirror, to examine our own conscience and ask the hard question: Is there any way that I myself act out of prejudice toward other people because they are of a different racial, ethnic, or religious background?

Here in Metro Detroit we are blessed to have one hundred different ethnic and racial groups living together in relative harmony, a beautiful mosaic of communion in diversity. Having just celebrated our 300th birthday, we know full well that each of our different ethnic and racial groups and every one of our religions has played a significant role in shaping our common heritage. Thanks be to God for the wonderful respect we have for one another and the way we can join hands in prayer together today. Yet we also know that we still have miles to go in building a more just society where all people have access to justice and basic human rights. The first step of the journey begins with a deep reverence for the dignity of every human life!

As we sort through our many emotions and struggle for a national response, we hear voices on all sides of the issue – some holding out for the dream of peace through negotiation and dialogue while some are at the other extreme, calling for strong retaliation, even war. Obviously, as believers, we recognize the necessity of some type of response but we also see the wisdom of a response that is measured and limited. Justice, yes. Vindictive retaliation, no. In a special way, we pray for God's guidance and wisdom for our nation's President and the leaders of all nations; may they always work for justice and peace. And of course, we lift up our brothers and sisters who serve in the military; may God protect them and bring them home to their families – quickly and in good health.

In houses of worship around our country and in our community, people have been singing, *"Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me..."* The simple lyrics of that song are very appropriate for our prayer today. The response we ultimately need will not come simply through governmental negotiation or military intervention. Rather, it must begin right *here*, on the local level, as people of different races, ethnic backgrounds, and religions listen and speak, pray together, and share common experiences with a firm resolve to respect the dignity of one another.

Let us also remember the consoling conviction of Gabriel Richard, congressman, educator, and pastor during Detroit's siege of cholera. His words from 170 years ago apply for our own city and, indeed, for every city and dwelling all around the world: *"We hope for better things; it will rise from the ashes!"* In dark hours, Gabriel Richard's vision and hope gave strength to fellow citizens and helped them face the challenges of life and death with serenity and hope. Thanks to that shared vision, healing and rebuilding began and we can be here today almost two centuries later.

As we gather today, we also rejoice in the heroic courage, stamina, and selfless generosity of all the rescue workers in New York City; as Gabriel Richard was a beacon of hope here in Detroit, they are signs of resurrection and new life for all of us, a consoling reminder of the resilience of the goodness of the human spirit and also a challenge for us to be large-hearted in whatever way we can to share in the rebuilding of our nation and our world.

Yes, let there be peace on earth and let it begin within our hearts and among us! As Detroit has risen out of the ashes in the past, may we be a symbol and sign of hope for our whole nation, indeed, our entire world. *"In God we trust. United we stand."* **Amen.**