

ECUMENICAL ADVOCACY DAYS

Closing Sunday Evening, March 12, 2006

Comments by Bob Edgar

General Secretary

National Council of Churches USA

*“Spirit of the living God, fall fresh on me.
Spirit of the living God, fall fresh on me.
Melt me – Mold me – Fill me – Use me
Spirit of the living God, fall fresh on me.”*

OPENING STATEMENT:

- **A New York City cab driver** reflecting on what really matters said:
“One cannot survive 5 minutes under water without air.
But even more important, one cannot survive one second without HOPE!”
- **Pope John Paul II** once said:
“I dream of a world where none will be so poor that they have nothing to give and none will be so rich that they have nothing to receive.”
- **Dr. Martin Luther King** once said:
“We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people, but for the appalling silence of the good people.”
- **Margaret Mead** once said:
“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that has.”
- **Bobby Kennedy** once said:
“Let no one be discouraged by the belief that there is nothing one man or one woman can do against the enormous array of the world’s ills -- against misery and ignorance, injustice and violence... Few will have the greatness to bend history itself; but each of us can work to change a small portion of events, and in the total of all those acts will be written the history of this generation...
It is from the numberless diverse acts of courage and belief that human history is shaped. Each time a man (or a woman) stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he (or she) sends a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, those ripples build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.”
(Robert F. Kennedy, address on the Day of Affirmation, University of Capetown, South Africa, June 6, 1966)

- **Archbishop Desmond Tutu** once said:
“If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor.”
- **President John F. Kennedy** once said:
“...If by a liberal they mean someone who looks ahead and not behind, someone who welcomes new ideas without rigid reactions, someone who cares about the welfare of the people – their health, their housing, their schools, their jobs, their civil rights, their civil liberties... If that is what they mean by a ‘liberal’ then I am proud to be a liberal.”

CLOSING STATEMENT:

One year ago, **Ecumenical Advocacy Days**,

Caught our imagination,

Ignited a flame of hope,

And burned a vision deep within our souls.

A vision of peace...

A vision of compassion...

A vision of justice...

A vision of love...

A vision of hope for ourselves and for our children.

That vision sustained us through a troubling year –

A year of war...

A year of violence...

A year of prison abuse...

A year of political corruption...

A year of lies...

A year of scandals...

A year of death...

So what can we expect from this year’s **Ecumenical Advocacy Days**?

I’m an optimist!

I’m a futurist!

I’m a person of faith!

I’m a person of passion!

Here is what I expect –

I expect each of us will go home and remind our friends and family that **GOD’S KINGDOM** is much more important than any man-made **EMPIRE**:

- That **EMPIRES** use religion to exploit. **GOD** uses faith and hope to empower.

- **EMPIRES** seek to redefine war and foster a new militarism. **GOD** blesses the peacemakers and calls them God's children.
- **EMPIRES** talk of pre-emptive strikes and usable nuclear weapons. **GOD** builds on the axis of good and the axis of justice, the axis of love and the axis of hope.
- **EMPIRES** invade other countries and markets and cultures to destroy. **GOD** invades the heart, the mind and the soul to seek peace.
- **EMPIRES** fight wars on terrorism by labeling all who are different as terrorists. **GOD** shocks and awes us with words of forgiveness and reconciliation. **GOD** always avoids simplistic labeling.
- **EMPIRES** are built on greed and arrogance. **GOD'S KINGDOM** has always been built by average, ordinary people like us, called by **GOD** to be the leaders, the prophets, the disciples of this generation. We are the leaders, prophets and disciples we have been waiting for.

I expect each of us to work ecumenically to confront
FEAR, FUNDAMENTALISM AND FOX TELEVISION

With a renewed commitment to
 Seek **PEACE**,
 End **POVERTY** and
 Heal our fragile **PLANET EARTH**.

I expect that each of us will understand that we are fighting for the soul of America and the respect of the entire world.

- Our founding fathers and mothers died for our freedom and respect of religious liberty.
- Our founding fathers and mothers knew better than to make this a Christian nation. They fully respected all faith traditions.
- Our founding fathers and mothers would have never supported:
 - Prison camps at Guantanamo...
 - Torture at Abu Ghraib...
 - Genocide in Sudan...
 - HIV-Aids in Africa and rural Asia...
 - Pollution of our water supplies...
 - Over fishing our oceans...
 - Melting of the Arctic tundra or polar ice caps...
 - Proliferation of nuclear weapons...
 - Stockpiling of landmines...
 - Or paying anyone less than a living wage...

I expect that each of us is renewed, refreshed, retooled and ready to remake our nation and world to reflect God's call for us to be –

STEWARDS OF JUSTICE!
STEWARDS OF RESOURCES!
STEWARDS OF LOVE!
STEWARDS OF HOPE!

And **STEWARDS OF LIGHT** in the midst of so much darkness!

Finally, know that “in a dark time the eye begins to see.”

I fully expect that our eyes are now open to see what needs to be done in the world. God now calls us into action!

Stand with me now and place your hand on your neighbor's shoulders.

WE SHOULDER OUR BURDENS TOGETHER IN FAITH.

Listen to these words of a Franciscan Benediction as we are called to action:

May God bless you with **DISCOMFORT**...

At easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships.

So that you may live deep within your heart.

May God bless you with **ANGER**...

At injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people.

So that you may work for justice, freedom and peace.

May God bless you with **TEARS**...

To shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation and war.

So that you may reach out your hand to comfort them

And to turn their pain into JOY...

And may God bless you with enough **FOOLISHNESS**...

To believe that you can make a difference in this world.

So that you can DO what others claim cannot be done. Amen.