



## A Pastoral Letter at Christmastide

January 3, 2024

I write to the all faithful in the Christmas season—a time of light and joy—to speak to you about the opposite of Christmas—the hatred that infects our hearts. The Irish poet Pádraig Ó Tuama has written a prayer for times of violence that begins:

God of all humanity,  
In times of violence  
We see how inhuman we can be.<sup>i</sup>

I have bid your prayers for all the victims of violence in Israel and Gaza. We have shared resources to assist you in giving aid to the suffering. And our prayers for a just and lasting peace for all who call the Holy Land home, has not yet been realized. But I am not writing to you about the horrors of the war there. I am writing to address the ripples of hatred that we are feeling here in our nation, on our college campuses, and in our local communities. Antisemitism and Islamophobia are not just on the rise. Hate speech, bomb threats and acts of violence have been directed to Jewish synagogues right here in our diocese—three synagogues in the Berkshires and one in Florence. The news that three young Palestinian men were shot in Burlington, Vermont, confirms that the war over there has unleashed ancient hatreds here. We are witnesses to this. We cannot ignore what we are seeing or be silent as our Jewish and Muslim neighbors live in fear.

As follows of Jesus, we renounce acts of hatred against any child of God. We proclaim the innate dignity of every human being because we are all made in the image and likeness of the Creator. As your bishop, I encourage each of you to advocate for peace here, as well as in war-torn places. Clergy, especially, are encouraged to reach out to rabbis and imams alike. In the powerlessness of war, we can be witnesses. We can shine light in the darkest corners of the human soul and proclaim that love is the way.

As the twelve days of Christmas come to a close, be assured of my prayers for the Jesus movement in Western Massachusetts. Together, we can speak peace amid war, act justly amid the chaos, and love even those with whom we disagree. This is the power of the Word made flesh. This is Christ being born in us.

Faithfully in Christ,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Douglas Fisher", preceded by a small cross symbol.

The Right Reverend Douglas J. Fisher  
Bishop, Western Massachusetts

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<sup>i</sup> Pádraig Ó Tuama, *Daily Prayers with the Corrymeela Community*, Canterbury Press Norwich, 2017, 43.