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December, 2011

Catholic-Jewish Declaration on Sacred Places and Religious Freedom

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Catholic-Jewish Declaration on Sacred Places and Religious Freedom

In recent days religious institutions and persons, including Ambassador Christ Stevens and three colleagues in Libya, have suffered vicious attacks. It is time to recall some basic principles yet again.

More than a decade has passed since the New York City meeting of the International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee. Its statement "Protecting Religious Freedom and Holy Sites," issued on May 4, 2001, has not become widely known among Catholics and Jews; it should have circulated even to other religious communities as well. Attacks on persons and sanctuaries in many countries continue to be all too frequent. Representatives of the Holy See and the International Jewish Committee for Interfaith Consultations (IJCIC) crafted a declaration which should be presented again to educators because in places the younger generation in North America, Israel, Libya and elsewhere has not been guided to respect the inherent dignity of every human being and the nature of holy places.

"Holy places are as much a common feature of the religious tradition of humanity as are sacred times of prayer." The least that might be applied to sacred places of another faith is the Golden Rule. Anyone would be shocked if his sacred place were attacked! From an early age children should learn this principle.

"Freedom of religion and of conscience, including the rights of religious communities within society, derives from and is rooted in the liberty of persons before God." How often do educators and parents point to the basic rights of neighbors who are different in religion, culture or ethnic identity from themselves? Pride in one's own identity and appreciation of one's rights in society must not be accompanied by discrimination against another group or its members, let alone physical attacks.

"We ask all believers to work amicably across religious lines to resolve religious disputes and to follow the ways of peace together." Naturally people of no religious affiliation are to be included in those efforts to educate the younger generation. However, those who share the biblical heritage should be the first to set the tone for all in a given society to live and work together.

The entire text of the Declaration can be found at:
www.bc.edu/dam/files/research_sites/cjl/texts/cjrelations/resources/documents/interreligious/holysites.htm

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