

# ARCHDIOCESE OF CHICAGO

Office of the Archbishop



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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Where violence is a daily threat, children, their parents and catechists are asking for help. Gunshots and gang violence scar children, forcing them to live with fear and in a state of constant vigilance. They walk to school or the park focusing not on homework or games to play, but on how they might escape if they are threatened with violence. When communities are plagued by violence, as the United States Catholic Bishops emphasize in their 1994 pastoral letter, “we have an obligation to respond.”

Faith enables us to foster peaceful communities that protect the gift of life. Many are willing to help but the response is sometimes not well coordinated. Those who work where the threat of violence dominates children’s lives insist that trust and confidence can be restored through common efforts at reconciliation that emphasize accountability and stress the consequences of violence in word and action. They suggest four approaches:

- 1) Open gyms and school buildings to provide safe havens. Parishes not located in areas with at-risk youth can forge partnerships with parishes in embattled communities. Sharing parishes can enable professionals to volunteer to meet the medical, legal, financial and advocacy needs of at-risk young people.
- 2) Make at-risk youth a priority. Join concerned parents to assist those places that help youth. Visit a school, church, park or the juvenile probation department to establish relationships that nurture trust and engender peace.
- 3) Share your concerns about the safety of children with public officials. As the State budget is debated, emphasize the need for a social safety net. If you don’t know the name of your State Representative or Senator, you may find that information on the Catholic Conference website at [www.catholicconferenceofillinois.org](http://www.catholicconferenceofillinois.org).
- 4) Come to a deeper understanding of the causes of domestic and street violence: drug and alcohol addiction, broken homes, lack of jobs, and proper food or shelter.

Praying for those who suffer violence makes a big difference and when we work together to respond to violence, we give hope to a situation that can seem hopeless. God bless you!

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Francis Cardinal George".

Francis Cardinal George, O.M.I.  
Archbishop of Chicago