

**SUMMIT COUNTY EXECUTIVE JAMES B. MCCARTHY'S
REMARKS TO ECUMENICAL GROUP
FEBRUARY 2001**

GOOD EVENING:

I APPRECIATE THE OPPORTUNITY TO SPEAK TO YOU TODAY. I HOPE YOU'LL EXCUSE ME IF I AM JUST A LITTLE APPREHENSIVE. MOST OF THE TIME WHEN I HAVE THE CHANCE TO SPEAK TO A MEMBER OF THE CLERGY, THERE'S A SCREEN SEPARATING US AND I'M WHISPERING. AND THERE MAY BE OTHERS WHO ARE APPREHENSIVE ABOUT MY APPEARANCE HERE TONIGHT. AFTER ALL, I AM THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE ADDRESSING MEMBERS OF THE CLOTH. THERE IS SUPPOSED TO BE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE. IN FACT, THERE ARE SOME PEOPLE IN GOVERNMENT WHO TAKE THAT SEPARATION WAY TOO LITERALLY.

I DON'T KNOW IF MANY OF YOU SAW COLUMNIST GEORGE WILL'S COMMENTARY A FEW WEEKS AGO DISCUSSING THIS VERY TOPIC. IT SEEMS HUD—THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT—WROTE TO THE ARCHBISHOP OF LOS ANGELES. THE LETTER CONCERNED THE FEDERAL AID RECEIVED BY THE DIOCESE'S "ST. VINCENT DE PAUL SHELTER FOR THE HOMELESS." HUD WONDERED IF THE DIOCESE COULD RENAME IT THE "MISTER VINCENT DE PAUL SHELTER." AND YET, WHILE THAT STORY IS FUNNY AND ABSURD, IT SHEDS LIGHT ON THE FEELING SOME PEOPLE HAVE ABOUT GOVERNMENTS AND FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS WORKING TOGETHER.

GOVERNMENTS ARE SUPPOSED TO BE SECULAR. IT IS A DELICATE LINE TO TREAD. SOME PEOPLE THINK PRESIDENT BUSH STEPPED OVER THAT LINE WHEN HE CREATED THE WHITE HOUSE OFFICE OF FAITH-BASED AND COMMUNITY INITIATIVES. YOU CAN'T BLUR THOSE LINES OF SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE ANY MORE THAN THAT. BUT PERHAPS IT'S A CONCEPT WHOSE TIME HAS COME.

FRANKLY, IT'S NOT THAT OUR FEDERAL GOVERNMENT HAS ADHERED TO THE STRICT EDICT OF SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE. ONE CAN'T DENY THAT THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT PRACTICES A TYPE OF "CIVIL RELIGION". OUR NATIONAL TREASURY INVOKES "IN GOD WE TRUST" ON OUR COINS AND CURRENCY. GOD IS MENTIONED IN OUR PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE AND EVEN ON THE FOUNDING DOCUMENTS THAT HELPED CREATE THIS NATION. AND YET, FOR ALL THE WISDOM OUR FOREFATHERS DISPLAYED WHEN THEY INTRODUCED THAT CONCEPT, IT BEGS TO BE CHALLENGED AT CERTAIN LEVELS IN TODAY'S SOCIETAL CIRCUMSTANCES.

I AM NOT SAYING THAT WE HOLD A GENERAL ELECTION TO NAME A NEW POPE. ON THE CONTRARY, AT THE VERY CORE OF A GOVERNMENT'S DECISION-MAKING PROCESS, THERE NEEDS TO BE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE. HOWEVER, TODAY, I FAVOR COOPERATION BETWEEN CHURCH AND STATE. THERE ARE SIMILARITIES.

ALL OF US IN THIS ROOM HAVE, I BELIEVE, CHOSEN OUR CAREER PATHS BECAUSE WE ANSWERED THE CALL TO SERVICE. WE WANTED TO MAKE A POSITIVE DIFFERENCE IN PEOPLE'S LIVES. WE WANTED TO IMPROVE THEIR LOT. OUR METHODS CONTRAST, BUT OUR AIM IS THE SAME. THERE IS A COMMON PURPOSE IN OUR DESIRE TO SERVE. IT HAS BEEN THE GOAL OF MY ADMINISTRATION FROM DAY ONE TO DEVELOP PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN SUMMIT COUNTY GOVERNMENT AND AGENCIES AND ORGANIZATIONS WITHIN OUR COMMUNITY, FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS AMONG THEM. I INTEND TO PURSUE THAT GOAL.

WITH FEDERAL MANDATES INCREASING AND FEDERAL FUNDING SHRINKING, LOCAL GOVERNMENTS MUST SOMETIMES LOOK OUTSIDE THEIR REALM TO ASSURE THAT THE CITIZENS THEY SERVE GET WHAT THEY NEED. I BELIEVE IT IS MY ROLE, AS COUNTY EXECUTIVE, TO INVESTIGATE EVERY OPTION TO ACHIEVE THAT. I BELIEVE IT IS MY ROLE AS COUNTY EXECUTIVE TO CULTIVATE PARTNERSHIPS IN THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTORS. WORKING TOGETHER, POOLING OUR RESOURCES, GIVING ALL OF US THE BEST CHANCE TO DO THE RIGHT THING FOR OUR PEOPLE.

I REALIZE THAT TO SOME DEGREE I AM PREACHING TO THE CHOIR—OR EVEN THE CHOIRMASTERS. IT IS BECOMING MORE AND MORE APPARENT THAT WE MUST WORK TOGETHER, NETWORK WITH ONE ANOTHER, TO BLEND OUR SYSTEMS TO HELP OUR AT-RISK POPULATION. I'M NOT TALKING ABOUT AGREEMENTS MADE IN CONFERENCE ROOMS AMONG THE LEADERS OF EACH GROUP. I'M TALKING ABOUT ACHIEVING THE MORE CHALLENGING OBJECTIVE OF DEVELOPING REAL WORKING PARTNERSHIPS AT THE FRONT LINE OF SERVICE, WHETHER IT BE IN THE AREAS OF HOUSING, SUBSTANCE ABUSE TREATMENT, FEEDING OUR FAMILIES, FINDING PEOPLE JOBS, KEEPING THE FAMILY UNIT INTACT, PRODUCING BETTER PARENTS AND ON AND ON. I BELIEVE EACH OF YOU HAS CONFRONTED THESE ISSUES AT ONE TIME OR ANOTHER IN YOUR MINISTRY. SO DO THOSE OF US IN GOVERNMENT. IT DEMONSTRATES THAT THESE ISSUES HAVE NO PREJUDICES. THEY EFFECT EVERY SOCIO-ECONOMIC LEVEL, THEY ARE COLOR-BLIND AND AREN'T RESTRICTED TO ONE DEMONINATION OR ANOTHER. EACH OF YOU IN THIS ROOM KNOWS THE CAUSE AND THE EFFECTS. THE PROBLEM AT TIMES, HAS BEEN FINDING A SOLUTION.

WHAT DO I BELIEVE IT WOULD TAKE FOR THE FAITH COMMUNITY AND THE COUNTY GOVERNMENT TO ENTER INTO AN EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIP? COMMUNICATION. IT IS CRITICAL THAT WE COMMUNICATE WITH EACH OTHER, TO LOOK INSIDE AND VIEW WHAT EACH SIDE HAS TO OFFER AND COME TO A REAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE OTHER'S RESOURCES. THROUGH COMMUNICATION WILL COME ENHANCED MUTUAL TRUST AND RESPECT.

I KNOW ALREADY THAT THE FAITH COMMUNITY CAN MOTIVATE AND MOBILIZE PEOPLE TO WORK FOR POSITIVE RESULTS AND GOVERNMENTS SHOULD BE READY TO ACCEPT THE RESPONSIBILITY TO UTILIZE OUR RESOURCES TO THE HIGHEST DEGREE. MANY OF YOU IN THIS ROOM HAVE SPENT A PORTION OF YOUR TIME LINKING PEOPLE WITH SUCH RESOURCES. THE CHURCH HAS THE TRUST OF THOSE PEOPLE; WE HAVE THE EXPERTISE TO HELP THEM. AND WE MUST SEEK TO ASSURE THAT THESE RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE TO ALL OF OUR CITIZENS.

WITH THE WELFARE REFORM EFFORT HITTING STRIDE IN OUR COMMUNITY, WE MUST BE CAREFUL TO MONITOR THE INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE IN TRANSITION FROM WELFARE TO WORK. BOTH OF US, THE CHURCH AND THE GOVERNMENT, CAN HOLD THE SAFETY NET IN CASE SOME OF OUR CITIZENS FALL THROUGH THE CRACKS. DETECTION FROM YOUR SIDE CAN RESULT IN PREVENTION AND ASSISTANCE FROM OUR SIDES. THAT IS THE CORE OF OUR PARTNERSHIP. WE MUST AVAIL OUR RESOURCES TO ALL OF OUR CITIZENS. IT IS NO SECRET THAT COMMON HEALTH PROBLEMS OCCUR MORE FREQUENTLY AMONG THE UNDERPRIVILEGED. THE POOR HAVE HIGHER DEATH RATES FOR ALMOST EVERY CONDITION THAN THE WELL-TO-DO. WE CAN WORK TOGETHER TO IDENTIFY AND SOLVE HEALTH PROBLEMS THAT STRIKE SOME OF OUR AT-RISK POPULATION.

WE, IN GOVERNMENT, CAN LEARN FROM THE FAITH COMMUNITY'S OUTREACH PRACTICES BY ENHANCING OUR OUTREACH CAPABILITIES. WE NEED TO MAKE OUR GOVERNMENT MORE ACCESSIBLE BY PROMOTING THE PROGRAMS WE HAVE IN PLACE TO HELP OUR CITIZENS. YOU CAN HELP SPREAD THE WORD THAT SUMMIT COUNTY GOVERNMENT HAS THESE PROGRAMS. WE ARE UPGRADING OUR NETWORKING WITH SUPPORT AGENCIES THROUGHOUT THE COUNTY AND I BELIEVE IT IS ESSENTIAL TO DO THE SAME WITH THE FAITH COMMUNITY AS WELL. WE CAN DISCUSS DEEP INTO THE NIGHT THE MERITS OF SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE. BUT I THINK WE CAN AGREE THAT THERE HAS TO BE REAL INTERACTION BETWEEN THE EACH GROUP TO ACHIEVE WHAT IS THE COMMON GROUND WE SHARE: AND THAT IS TO DO WHAT'S RIGHT AND WHAT'S BEST FOR THE PEOPLE WE SERVE.

THE 41ST PSALM WAS WRITTEN BEFORE THE CONSTITUTION. IT READS: "BLESSED IS THAT MAN WHO TAKES THOUGHT FOR THE POOR AND THE DESTITUTE. THE LORD WILL KEEP HIM SAFE IN TIMES OF TROUBLE. THE LORD WILL WATCH OVER HIM AND GIVE HIM LONG LIFE AND HAPPINESS ON EARTH AND BALK HIS ENEMIES OF THEIR ILL WILL." OR WE CAN LEARN FROM THE WORDS OF WILLIAM PENN—A MAN OF THE GOVERNMENT—WHO SAID: "TO HELP MEND THIS WORLD IS TRUE RELIGION."

THANK YOU AGAIN FOR INVITING ME TO SPEAK WITH YOU AND I INVITE YOU TO ASK ANY QUESTIONS YOU MIGHT HAVE FOR ME.