

Tragedy can be endured through community, El Salvador Bishop says

PHILADELPHIA □ "Even out of a tragedy like September 11, you can find yourself in the midst of a gift," Bishop Medardo Gomez of the Lutheran Church of El Salvador said during a November 4 interview here. "That gift is the unity that comes from being part of a consoling community of Jesus Christ." Gomez added that the terror of September 11 presented a tremendous challenge to the church and its people in North America to renew their perspective on the world scene.



Bishop Medardo Gomez

Jersey.

Bishop Gomez said he had been in Milwaukee, WI, September 11, taking part in an ecumenical meeting when the terror news broke.

"I could see face-to-face how the American people got hold both of God and the nation," he said. "I was impressed with how people held themselves to the flag." He said he was struck too by the cosmopolitan nature of the tragedy, how the deaths at the World Trade Center reflected "the many migrations that are part of America. This was not just an attack on America but upon the entire western world." He said he believes there is "no true safety or security except that which is based on the love and true fear of God. Those who fear and love God have a respect for life and can never be a terrorist."

No stranger to terror himself, Gomez has had his life threatened in years past on many occasions in El Salvador due to his outspoken pleas for justice. He was on the campus of The Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia during the time he spoke to a "Living Waters" evangelism event in New



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Bishop Medardo Gomez, left, displays a wall-hanging reflecting the spirit of Christians in El Salvador. He presented the wall-hanging to President Philip D. W. Krey and Krey's spouse, Rene Diemer, shown at right in the photo appreciating the new gift.

Gomez said he is praying hard that "the spirit of vengeance will not rise in America. I'm praying for wisdom that those in power will not respond to terror with terror, that they will not repay evil with evil. The Bible teaches us not to respond that way. War is so terrible that no one wins in the end." He said the only way to counteract a spirit of vengeance is through prayer. "We all need to look to Scripture for the counsel of God to lead us to look for alternatives that will exclude more terror and violence."

In times of crisis, suffering and pain, he urged Americans to consider that their consolation will be found in "the community of faith, a sacramental community of consolation and comforting that that can only be found among brothers and sisters of the Christian faith." He said the "spirit of God who dwells in us knows that we need these things. In moments of crisis God summons us together and that is how God explains the difficulties of life to us." Gomez said it is important to remember that such mutual consolation is not just limited to America in the aftermath of the tragedy, but is happening in places like El Salvador and Bavaria, where he has personally witnessed believers praying for America and its people.

Gomez said the church in El Salvador is there now for Americans the way the church in America has been there in the past for him and the people of El Salvador in the midst of life-threatening injustice and misery. He said the evidence of increasing attendance in worship in America since September 11 is a sure sign people are turning to God and each other for consolation in a troubling time.