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Men and a hijabi woman sit and stand around the rubble of a destroyed building

Palestinians watch the civil defense team as they search for victims trapped under the rubble of a house destroyed during Israeli strikes, in Khan Younis, in the southern Gaza Strip, October 8, 2023. (OSV News photo/Ibraheem Abu Mustafa, Reuters)

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Several U.S. bishops called for prayers for peace following Hamas' Oct. 7 attack on Israel.

Bishop David J. Malloy of Rockford, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on International Justice and Peace, called for prayers for peace in the Holy Land and decried the "continued tensions and violence that erupted into warfare between Gaza and Israel."

"The world is once again shocked and horrified by the outbreak of ferocious violence in the Holy Land. Reports have surfaced indicating large numbers of wounded and dead, including many civilians," Malloy said in an Oct. 8 statement.

On Oct. 7, Hamas militants launched a surprise attack in southern Israel with missiles and a ground invasion during which an estimated 700 Israeli soldiers and citizens were killed, while dozens others were taken hostage and brought to Gaza. Thousands of people in Palestinian territories were injured and an estimated 400 others dead from Israel's retaliation, including airstrikes that began hours following the Hamas attack.

"As we pray urgently for peace, we recall especially all the families and individuals suffering from these events," Malloy’s statement said, adding calls for respect for civilian populations and the release of hostages. "Almost 50 years to the day of the launch of the 1973 Arab–Israeli War, once again war is spilling out in the Holy Land. With it brings the mounting casualties and hostilities unfolding on all sides, and increased threats to the Status Quo of the Holy Places among Jews, Muslims, and Christians further dimming any hope for peace."

Other bishops, including the Catholic bishop of Arlington, Virginia, joined the calls for peace for those affected by the violence.

"Our hearts are shocked and saddened by the death of hundreds of people, and thousands more who are wounded or dispersed already," said Bishop Michael F. Burbidge in an Oct. 8 statement. "It is my hope and prayer that the international community will work together to help ensure a peaceful and just resolution for the good of all.

"At this time, we also pray that the victims and their families find strength and support," he continued. "May we join with one voice in asking God to grant eternal rest to the deceased, console those who grieve, and guide political leaders to bring an end to the war without further violence."

His message came hours after Israel formally declared war on Hamas, a Islamist militant group.

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According to the World Jewish Congress, the United States is home to at least 5.7 million Jews, and its Jewish population is second only to Israel, which has more than 6.3 million Jews. With about 1.9 million Jews, New York City is home to the largest Jewish population in the U.S.

New York Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan, issued an Oct. 8 statement from Rome, where he is a delegate to the Synod on Synodality. Noting the contrasting peacefulness of Rome, he wrote, "From here in Rome, my heart goes out to the assaulted people of Israel, and to our Jewish community we cherish as friends and neighbors back home in New York, realizing with tears that their sabbath yesterday was anything but peaceful.

"A secure and safe home, surely intended by God for all His Children, wherever they may be. To have that home attacked is a sacrilege; to defend that home is righteous," he wrote. "To the urgent appeals of Pope Francis this Sunday; to the pleas of my brother bishops back home in the United States; to the concerns and condolences of those brothers and sisters gathered here in Rome for the synod of bishops, I sure add my own."

Following the public Angelus prayer Sunday, Pope Francis said he is following "with apprehension and sorrow," the situation in Israel, "where violence has erupted even more ferociously, causing hundreds of deaths and injuries."

"Please stop the attacks and the weapons, and understand that terrorism and war do not lead to any solution, but only to the death and suffering of so many innocent people," he said. "War is always a defeat! Every war is a defeat!"

Detroit Archbishop Allen H. Vigneron posted on X, formerly Twitter, that he joined his prayers for a resolution to the conflict.

"It was with great sadness that I learned news of the violence in Israel. We have a number of citizens in southeast Michigan who have familial and cultural ties to Israel and Palestine; as Catholics, we stand in solidarity with them, praying for the safety of their loved ones," Vigneron posted. "I encourage all people of good will to pray for a swift resolution to this conflict, and lasting peace for all."

Malloy's statement concluded with urgent prayers for peace and solidarity with those suffering from these events. "We call on the faithful, and all people of good will to not grow weary and to continue to pray for peace in the land Our Lord, the Prince of Peace, called home," he said.