

LEADER'S MESSAGE – November 2006

— By Richard L. Kiniry

(These are the remarks I offered at the July 4th celebrations in Bala Cynwyd)

Good morning and thank you for the invitation.

We start this event by stopping to reflect on the greater meaning of the 4th of July. Yes, we declared independence from the English on July 4th but more importantly it was a revolution in the rights of human beings. The United States is the only nation in the world that was founded on ideas and values. It is not blood, nationality, or language that holds us together as a people; it is a commitment to certain values. Every religion that comes to the shores of America must change and come to terms with our foundational values: equality, freedom of conscience, liberty, justice, and democracy. It is the sacred American story — the story about all of us coming to America to be free from religious and economic persecution, the story about all of us being in this together and being free to make as much of life as we can.

Even in the beginning we did not do a great job of living up to our values. We slaughtered the Native Peoples and we wrote slavery into the Constitution, we have fought just and unjust wars, and economic and social equality is still a dream. But we are a people always in process, and though there have been many missteps our initial values still live. We are always trying to do better in living up to those ideals.

So, this morning let us remember who we are. We are the children of a moral experiment: can diverse people actually live together and build a society in which each person is respected as an individual? From atheists to true believers we are all called on as Americans to respect our common humanity no matter how different we are. We are all born equal. In America all should succeed. So, in the name of whatever you call sacred on this 4th of July, love life and love your fellow citizens. Amen.