

WHAT WOULD JESUS DO?



A petition is circulating calling on New York officials to take action to stop a mosque from being built on Ground Zero. The proposed 13-story mosque would sit two blocks away from Ground Zero.

The petition mentions the mosque, which is a Muslim temple or house of worship, as too close to the site "where thousands of Americans fell to an Islamic jihadist attack." The authors of the petition conclude that the mosque is intended to symbolize Islamic victory over America and her Western values.

I do not know the real reason why this mosque was proposed for a site this close to Ground Zero. Neither do the petitioners, at least their petition failed to mention any reason except for intended symbolism, for which they offer no inconclusive proof much less circumstantial evidence. Neither did the scores of commentary, which I read, on the proposed mosque offer any reasonable conclusion based on evidence.

(Oh, and it's not really a mosque that's proposed for the site, it's a Muslim community center with a prayer room).

It is this immediate and visceral reaction to the idea of a Muslim community center that offends me.

The petition calls for people to discriminate against a class of individuals, Muslims, who as a whole had nothing to do with 9/11 (a very small group of extremist Muslims had everything to do with it). Proscribing specific extremist Islamists from offensive behavior is one thing. Protesting Muslims from building near or far from Ground Zero merely because of their religious beliefs and the tenuous connection of religion to the Islamist extremists is discrimination.

The U.S. Bishops have consistently and fundamentally opposed discrimination (as of this writing the U.S. Bishops have not publicly commented on this issue). For example, any organization that practices a whiff of discrimination will not be considered for a Catholic Campaign for Human Development grant ("CCHD will not consider organizations which promote or support violence, racism, sexism, or other prejudices, in any form").

Yes, truths, facts and background information would support a rational argument favoring a Muslim community center. Logic and economics, however, must never take priority over Catholics' essential mission to know the truth (attain enlightenment).

The teaching of the Catholic Church calls us to be in relationship with each other, which puts us in relationship with Jesus Christ; Christ is not separate from us but part of us and we are all united in Christ. In Matthew 25 Jesus says "Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me."

And when we discriminate against of class of people merely because of their religious views (or gender, or skin color, or nationality), we are in turn discriminating against Jesus Christ. And that is not the teaching, the truth, of our faith.

