



Sister of Mercy, Mary Schmuck, serves with the Archdiocese of Louisville Catholic Charities Parish Social Ministry Department.

## We Have an “interesting” National Emergency Plan

I read a lot. One of my Mercy Academy teachers put me onto that decades (5!) ago. Dear Sister of Mercy Mary Aquinas Connaughton so frequently would tell us, “Always have something with you to read!” while wagging her arthritic finger at us in front of her beautiful brown and elderly eyes.

In my reading during the past year or so I have noticed various points in our evolving national/federal plan for responding to emergencies—be they weather, accident or attack. These points include:

- Provisions in our Patriot Act, Homeland Security Act of 2002
- Intelligence Reform + Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004
- A military officer leads as Deputy National Security Advisor for Iraq/Afghanistan, Director of National Intelligence
- Provisions in the John Warner Defense Authorization Act of 2007: the president declares a “public emergency,” can station troops anywhere in USA + control National Guard units
- **National Security Presidential Directive/NSPD 51 + 20, May 9, 2007:** President is entrusted with leading the entire federal government + has the responsibility for “ensuring constitutional government.” “Catastrophic emergency: any incident, regardless of location, that results in extraordinary levels of mass casualties, damage, or disruption severely affecting the US population, infrastructure, environment, economy, or government function.”

I have been pondering this overall plan. When I look at the whole set of points that have so far developed in it, my response is, “Whoa...!!”

Isn't this plan providing for a quick shift from a 3-branch representative democracy to rule by 1 branch and

even 1 person in that branch? Do we really want to do this, or allow it to be done?

A point of special concern: isn't one person in one branch of our government defining the emergency AND making all the decisions about how to address it? Who decides when/if the emergency ever gets over and we return to our 3-branch representative democracy? Our judicial system so far has safeguarded against any one person being judge, jury and executioner.

Doesn't this put an awful lot of unchecked confidence in the wisdom, prudence and skill of just one person leading a very big and multi-faceted country in a very interconnected world?

Granted in a major emergency we want quick and effective action, and we want everyone to be safe. But - aren't the safest places on the planet cemeteries? Are we setting up a potential big grave in one that is marked, “US 3-branch representative government: Rest in Peace”?

It all brings to mind an adage from someone who thought we sometimes need to “destroy a village in order to save it.”

Now in our currently operating 3-branch representative government we have learned the hard way that our emergency response systems need improvement and we need to take special care in our plans to help people who are economically poor - if Hurricane Katrina taught us anything. This is our hard work to do.

Please be encouraged to ponder this federal emergency plan. Share your wisdom points with our two US Senators and US Representative. (The Capitol switchboard number is 202-224-3121; a call costs much less than a stamp).

Please join in paying attention to what is going on, what we in effect are letting transpire in our names.

July 2007