



# CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF LEXINGTON

THE CATHOLIC CENTER  
OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

4 June 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The Official Statement on the Murder of George Floyd by the Knights of Peter Claver and Ladies Auxiliaries says it best, “The ink has run dry on writing statements, and it is now time to write laws, to write policies, to write sentences.”

There are many thoughtful and provocative statements being made these days in the aftermath of the killing of George Floyd by police in Minneapolis and, much closer to home, the killing of Breonna Taylor by police in Louisville. Tragically there is a much longer litany of names of many other African Americans that have died at the hands of the forces sworn to uphold the law and protect all of us- and who rarely face appropriate consequences for their abuse of power. Statements are better than silence, but actions speak louder than words. We may not be in a position to write laws, policies or sentences; but we are able to work to create a more just society.

Each of us, as members of the Body of Christ, needs to make a thorough examination of conscience when it comes to the sin of racism, we must confess that sin not only sacramentally but to the very populations that have suffered its consequences. Our act of contrition must truly involve steps toward the restoration of right relationships among the races and our firm purpose to amend must include a commitment to personally work to overcome and dismantle the benefits of White privilege.

Rather than adding carefully worded statements to the words amassing around us, the voices on our streets are crying, “say his name.... say their names.” That is, recognize their dignity as human beings, as sons and daughters of God and precious in God’s eyes. To say and to act as if Black lives matter. Let us as a local Church do our best to say their names, to learn their stories, to see their struggle in the brothers and sisters around us, to recognize our common humanity and to resist the temptation to go back to normal simply because we think we can afford to. The gospel in its fullness calls us to conversion as individuals and to the transformation of society.

As Pope Francis said yesterday to the people of our nation, “we cannot tolerate or turn a blind eye to racism and exclusion in any form and yet claim to defend the sacredness of every human life.” Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia of the Vatican’s Academy for Life compared racism to a virus in peoples’ hearts that must be controlled and not allowed to spread. Both the Pope and the archbishop insist that violence is not the answer, “evil is overcome with good, not with another evil.”

Some will inevitably ask how they could be guilty of racism because our understanding of what racism means has been quite limited. The definition provided by Father Bryan Massengale, an

African-American priest of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee and Professor of Theology at Fordham University is particularly challenging to those of us who are part of the dominant culture:

“Racism has never been solely about insults, slurs, or mere exclusion, as demeaning and harmful as these are. These are but the symptoms of a deeper malady. Racism entails more than conscious ill will, more than deliberate acts of avoidance, malice, and violence perpetrated by individuals....

Racism at its core is a set of meanings and values that inform the American way of life. It is a way of understanding and interpreting skin color differences so that white Americans enjoy a privileged social status with access to advantages and benefits to the detriment, disadvantage and burden of persons of color.” (Massengale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2010, 41-2.)

In the midst of the prolonged protests we are witnessing, I am so grateful that in Lexington we have seen genuine mutual respect from police and from those calling for justice. Let us pray that the demonstrations continue to be peaceful and to bear the fruit of lasting change. It is so encouraging to see people of different races marching together for justice, the essential ingredient for lasting peace.

As Catholics we are richly blessed with a tradition of social doctrine to guide how we understand and how we respond to the demands of justice in our times. Yet our social teaching remains the least known component of our tradition although it has so much to say in our present circumstances. I am happy to announce that as of July 1, we will once again have an Office of Peace and Justice in the diocese. It will be coordinated by Joshua Van Cleef as he continues to serve as Parish Life Director at Holy Cross in Jackson. Josh will be bringing together those who are already working in the various areas of peace and justice to form a diocesan peace and justice commission as we strive to make an impact in our society. We recognize that our post-pandemic lives will be different; as people of faith we should see this moment as an opportunity to bring the perspective of the Gospel to create a more just society.

Pentecost marked the first anniversary of our diocesan pastoral plan. At the very heart of that plan is the promotion of a culture that fosters unity and strives to mirror the communion within the Holy Trinity at a moment of deep division. This requires creating opportunities for dialogue and encounter among the rich diversity of people in our local Church and beyond. May this Sunday’s Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity inspire us to recognize the Father who makes us all one family, the Son who walks with us and invites us to communion and the Holy Spirit who empowers us to overcome barriers and differences with the gift of unity.

Peace and all good,

  
+ John Stowe, OFM Conv., Bishop of Lexington