

Do justice, love goodness, and walk humbly with God



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JUL 15, 2020 VOICES



Demonstrators in Atlanta march for racial justice June 11. More than 400 Catholics filled the street in front of the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception. (CNS photo/Michael Alexander, Georgia Bulletin)

“Y*ou have been told ... what the LORD requires of you: only to do justice and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8).*

Throughout history, this powerful line from Scripture has informed and inspired people of faith. It has particular significance this year in the wake of the killings of George Floyd, Rayshard Brooks, and others in the Black community who have sadly lost their lives. These tragic events have pushed society to consider how best to move forward through the anger, the grief and concern for the future.

Catholic teaching offers a path. It starts with acknowledging and treating every person with the dignity he or she deserves as a unique individual. All are made in the image and likeness of God: those of every race, age and circumstance. Our teaching has clear direction for the way Catholics should interact with one another; it means that the unborn, the immigrant, the elderly, the imprisoned, and those struggling with poverty, illness, or other challenges have inherent value. Everyone’s status as a child of God demands respect.

It is crucial in the current moment to reaffirm specifically the dignity of Black lives, especially those who have been lost to senseless acts of violence. To do so does not negate the fact that all lives have value. Instead, it speaks in a special way to the challenges that the Black community is facing and recognizes that threats to any one community undermine the value of life for others.

The ongoing conversations on race, injustice and police reform are important. They are opportunities for people with differences to better understand one another's experiences and to seek mutual understanding. The Church can assist in these conversations by providing safe spaces for people to come together, sharing the importance of loving one's neighbor, encouraging active listening over partisan bickering (from all political persuasions), calling out the evil and sin of racism, and advocating for policy changes that address unjust societal structures, especially those that disproportionately impact people of color.

Combating racism is a pro-life issue. "Any politics of human dignity must seriously address issues of racism" including racist acts, jokes, and insults; racial profiling; racial discrimination in hiring, housing, and educational opportunities; and higher rates of minority incarceration. The U.S. bishops call these personal and systemic incidences "[failures] to acknowledge another person as a brother or sister, created in the image of God" ([*Living the Gospel of Life*](#) and [*Open Wide Our Hearts*](#)).

With great sadness, the U.S. bishops have witnessed the destruction and looting that has accompanied the anger. Violent responses to needless violence have regrettably moved the spotlight off addressing injustice, have distracted from the listening that must take place, and have put more community members in harm's way. Similarly, conversations that belittle and dehumanize the police or that promote attacks against their person or occupation damage the cause for justice and healing ([*Open Wide Our Hearts*](#)). In the midst of a year beset by pandemic, anger and violence, the Church calls for peace.

To contribute to the dialogue, the U.S. bishops have participated in ongoing discussions about police reform and accountability, [providing members of the U.S. House and Senate](#) with insights from Church leaders and supporting policies such as de-escalation training, collection of use-of-force data, a chokehold ban, and efforts to end racial-profiling. The Michigan Catholic Conference has also supported state measures that would require law enforcement recruits and current officials to undergo training on de-escalation techniques, implicit bias, and mental health resources. These bills have received unanimous support from Michigan lawmakers.

The events taking place might feel paralyzing at times. Individuals may not feel equipped with the right words or actions to make a difference. However, Catholics of all races are called by their faith to move beyond the rhetoric, to listen to one another, and to engage in difficult conversations, including within the Church. America's ongoing quest to expunge the ignorance and intolerance of racism will not be successful unless individuals are willing to engage in a conversion of heart to reform the very causes of racism — namely ignorance, lack of love for the other, and an inability to forgive — and to shift toward potential solutions ([*Open Wide Our Hearts*](#)).

Taking steps to learn from one another and to reflect deeply on the root causes of racism will not be easy for everyone. Yet, let us not shy away from Jesus' teaching to love God and neighbor. These steps are a critical part of the Catholic call "to do justice, to love goodness, and to walk humbly with God." They are absolutely worth doing, for our communities and our souls.

The Word from Lansing is a regular column for Catholic news outlets and is written by Michigan Catholic Conference (MCC) President and CEO Paul A. Long. Michigan Catholic Conference is the official public policy voice of the Catholic Church in this state.

For resources on combating racism, visit www.usccb.org/racism and www.nbccongress.org/.
