

Animator Notes

Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Newsletter
~*~ Special Edition ~*~

*“Those people are truly peacemakers who, regardless of what they suffer in this world,
Preserve peace in spirit and body out of love of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

~ St. Francis of Assisi, Admonitions



Greetings of peace, my dear Franciscan Family!

It is with the heaviest of hearts that I write this. Once again, we are at a moment in time when yet another unarmed person of color is brutally and viciously murdered at the hands of those sworn to protect and serve. And yet, this time something is different. Here in the United States as well as abroad, people have taken to the streets to peacefully march and protest the senseless killing of an unarmed Black man. But the difference is we are still in the midst of a worldwide pandemic.

For weeks, many of us have been sheltering at home, isolated, quarantined to prevent further spread of the corona virus (COVID-19) that have taken the lives of nearly half a million people worldwide. And yet, people came out of their homes, out of their quarantined lives, many wearing face masks to take to the streets to protest and call out the evil of systemic racism.

From the Pastoral Letter Against Racism, **Open Wide Our Hearts**, by Committee on Cultural Diversity in the Church of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops:

Racism arises when – either consciously or unconsciously – a person holds that his or her own race or ethnicity is superior, and therefore judges persons of other races or ethnicities as inferior and unworthy of equal regard. When this conviction or attitude leads individuals or groups to exclude, ridicule, mistreat, or unjustly discriminate against persons on the basis of their race or ethnicity, it is sinful. Racist acts are sinful because they violate justice. They reveal a failure to acknowledge the human dignity of the persons offended, to recognize them as the neighbors Christ calls us to love (Mt 22:39).

As the National Animator of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation here in the U.S., I write to you with a particular point of view, as a woman of color. I am very sad to say, I could have at any time been in the place of George Floyd or Breonna Taylor. And as your National Animator who is also a storyteller, let me share with you a story:

It was a rainy Friday evening in New York City. I had just come home from working at the Church of St. Francis of Assisi in Manhattan – as Animator of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation. I was doing further work on the computer when there was a knock at the front door. At the time, I lived with my sister and two of her children, my nephew and niece. My nephew came into my room and said there were police at the door and they wanted to speak with me. Puzzled, I set down the laptop and went to the door. There stood two armed police officers asking if I knew anything about an assault that had taken place in our apartment building earlier that day. I said that I had not as I just got home from work. The officers left, seemingly satisfied with my response. I went back into my room and back to my work on my laptop.

Not more than five minutes later, there was another knock. This time on my bedroom door. I opened the door, thinking it was my nephew again. It was two more armed police officers, shining flashlights in my face. One of them grabbed me by the arm, slammed me up against the wall, and handcuffed me. I will never forget how tight those handcuffs were. In utter shock, I stammered, “Why? Why?” It was all I could say, I was in such a state of shock. They told me to shut up, I was to be taken to the police station where someone would explain there. My Miranda Rights were never read. (I had watched enough Law and Order

to know!) I was dressed in my bed clothes with slippers and it was pouring rain outside. As the officers pulled me out of the apartment, I kept asking "Why?" My nephew and sister were also arrested, cuffed and taken out of the apartment. I remember my nephew swearing and yelling at the officers and me telling him to keep quiet. Even back then, I knew they could have shot him on the spot and claimed it was self-defense.

At that moment, I cried out to the Holy Spirit to help me. I didn't know what else to do. There was no one else to turn to. My whole family was being arrested. Then, another officer, I believe a captain as he was wearing a white shirt and not blue, came up the stairs to our floor. His exact words were, "Let her go, she's not involved." The officer undid the cuffs and let me go back inside my apartment. But they took my sister and my nephew. Still shaking, I managed to call my mother and tell her what had happened. I reached out to another friend who was out of town and told him the story. I had keys to his apartment as I looked in on his cat when he traveled. He said to pack a bag and go stay at his apartment for a few days until this all cleared up.

Fast forward, I discovered that someone had been assaulted in my building and three people were involved; and the three people lived in my apartment. Well, since the officers saw me as the third person, then it had to be me. The third person turned out to be my niece, who was hiding somewhere in the apartment at the time. It was Labor Day weekend. Nothing was to happen until after Labor Day. So my sister and nephew sat in jail the entire weekend. I went to my friend's apartment, shaking and in tears and thanking God for hearing the pleading within my heart.

It brings to mind the Prophet Habakkuk, who pleaded:
"How long, LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen?
Or cry out to you, "Violence!" but you do not save?" (Hab. 1:2)

And then, the shepherd turned King, David who wrote:
"The LORD has heard my cry for mercy;
the LORD answered my prayer." (Ps 6:9)

The Lord did hear my cry for mercy and he answered me. As I write this, my hands are still shaking and the tears are flowing. It is still so visceral. Years of therapy and spiritual direction has not erased those memories of the utter terror I felt that rainy Friday evening. But the Lord is always with the broken-hearted. The Lord continues to comfort me; even now, as I write these difficult yet heartfelt words.

I do not tell you this story to illicit sympathy, but to say that it is very raw and very real for my people and other people of color. I was extremely fortunate. Breonna Taylor was not. I will forever serve the God who, I know, saved me, loves me and calls me his own.

*"I sing because I'm happy,
I sing because I'm free.
His eye is on the sparrow
And I know he watches me!"*



*"Racism is a sin; a sin that divides the human family, blots out the image of God among specific members of that family, and violates the fundamental human dignity of those called to be children of the same Father. Racism is the sin that says some human beings are inherently superior and others essentially inferior because of races. It is the sin that makes racial characteristics the determining factor for the exercise of human rights. It mocks the words of Jesus: 'Treat others the way you would have them treat you.'" ~ **Brothers and Sisters to Us**, U.S. Catholic Bishops Pastoral Letter on Racism, 1979*

Two Feet of Love in Action



One of our National Councilors, **Donna Hollis, OFS** attended a peaceful Vigil for George Floyd in her town of Las Cruces, New Mexico. Donna reflects:

This past Monday night, June 1st, the Las Cruces Community gathered in a park across from City Hall as we remembered and honored George Floyd. Participants brought candles/incense and prayers with them. We placed the gifts by a Statue of the first Black Mayor of Las Cruces, Mr. Johnston.

We empowered one another with the following words as we were instructed to look into the eyes of a person next to us. "I See You", "I Love You", "I will take Action for You".

*Our speakers spoke about a torn nation but also realize "We are the change we want to see". Tearing down hostility and racism and **REBUILDING** our nation with Goodness, Kindness, Acceptance, Love and Peace which only comes within from an open heart to all people of every Race, Culture and Religion. The cycle has to end with each of us supporting those who are persecuted and standing up for Justice for All.*



Donna in her beautiful multicolored face mask



Donna, with two of the speakers



This little pooch says it all!

Donna ends by saying, *"This was an Ecumenical Gathering of different faiths and our time was one of Unity, with a common cause of Justice for all. It was very peaceful with intent to walk with two feet and show that Black Life Matters!"*



Let's Define Some Terms...

Racism is defined as prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against someone of a different race based on the belief that one's own race is superior.

Institutional racism (also known as **systemic racism**) is a form of racism expressed in the practice of social and political institutions. It is reflected in disparities regarding wealth, income, criminal justice, employment, housing, health care, political power and education, among other factors.

White privilege or white skinned privilege are the inherent advantages possessed by a white person on the basis of their race in a society characterized by racial inequality and injustice. It also refers to societal privilege that benefits white people over non-white people in some societies, particularly if they are otherwise under the same social, political, or economic circumstances.

Black Lives Matter (BLM) is an international human rights movement, originating in the African-American community, that campaigns against violence and systemic racism towards black people.

And yes, all lives matter. However, all lives are not under attack or threatened on a daily basis.





Statement on Racism from the National Commission of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation of the U.S. Secular Franciscan Order

*How long, O LORD, must I cry for help and you do not listen?
Or cry out to you, "Violence!" and you do not intervene?
Why do you let me see iniquity?
Why do you simply gaze at evil?
Destruction and violence are before me;
there is strife and discord. (Habakkuk 1: 2-3)*

Once again, the wound of racism in our society has been exposed because of what appears to be careless and irresponsible behavior by persons whom we should trust to keep peace and encourage non-violence: law enforcement officers and public officials.

The National Commission of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation of the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States, hereby declares that racism is morally wrong. It does not love or respect life. Neither Scripture, our Rule of Life nor our faith justifies it, for any reason, or under any circumstance.

Our Catholic social teaching calls us to respect and honor the dignity of every human life, from the womb to natural death. It makes no exclusions on the basis of color or ethnicity and calls out no other distinction to be excluded. We are called to honor and respect the lives of people we love and people whom we may find it hard to love; people who are like us and people who are different from us.

The deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and so many others each have their tragic and brutal circumstances, but share a central question that cannot be ignored: If they had been white, and the circumstances were identical, would they be alive?

As Catholic Christians and Franciscans, we owe it to ourselves to do the following in response to racism:

- To identify and eradicate the structures in our societal institutions that perpetuate racism, and replace them with structures that are fair and just, and that value the lives and gifts of every person.
- To pray for an end to racism; indeed, to pray for interracial solidarity, for our laws and our faith practices to reflect our compassion and value for the dignity of every human life; and that we lovers and followers of Jesus and Francis of Assisi, be leaders in bringing about a rightly informed sense of racial equity and justice in our land and in our Church.
- Identify and confront our own unconscious racial biases. After a shared history of hundreds of years in this country, we all have them. They make their way into our lives and culture, often unnoticed. But we can become more just and open by discovering these unconscious biases and replace them with love and engagement.

And finally, we need to have safe and meaningful dialogue about those racial biases. We owe it to ourselves and to our brothers and sisters to develop a strong sense of community and fraternity through peaceful conversations. This is truly a conversion moment where dialogue and education are needed. Our Holy Rule calls us to be "bearers of peace" and we all must bear the burden of peace as we walk this journey towards holiness as brothers and sisters, with open hands and joyful hearts.

Come, Holy Spirit! Lord, make it so!

Statement from the U.S. Order of Friars Minor (US6)

At a time when the COVID-19 virus has disproportionately attacked people of color, we have witnessed the killing of Mr. George Floyd and the protests, sometimes violent, which have occurred in our cities in its aftermath. Our hearts go out to all affected.

Even though, following in the footsteps of St. Francis of Assisi, we decry violence and desire peace, we stand in solidarity with our outraged African American brothers and sisters who demand an end to the deadly violence of racism. We cannot be indifferent when their God-given dignity is violated.

As people of faith, we not only condemn the systemic racism that has led to these events, but we also re-dedicate ourselves to ending racial injustice in our Provinces, in our Church, and in our nation and creating that space where Dr. Martin Luther King's Beloved Community will flourish.

David Gaa, O.F.M. Provincial Minister
Saint Barbara Province of Franciscans

James Gannon, O.F.M. Provincial Minister
Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Province of Franciscans

Kevin Mullen, O.F.M. Provincial Minister
Holy Name Province of Franciscans

Thomas Nairn, O.F.M. Provincial Minister
Sacred Heart Province of Franciscans

Jack Clark Robinson, O.F.M. Provincial Minister
Our Lady of Guadalupe Province of Franciscans

Mark Soehner, O.F.M. Provincial Minister
Saint John the Baptist Province of Franciscans



An Brief Examination for personal discernment and dialogue

"We must examine our own attitudes and actions in order to seek conversion from sin and turn our hearts towards Christ in order to end personal and structural racism.... This moment calls us to be the Church of hope that Jesus Christ created us to be in a world full of pain and despair."

~ Archbishop Wilton Gregory, May 31, 2020

- What is the personal thinking that makes you disbelieve that people of color are made in the image and likeness of God?
 - If you do believe that people of color are made in the image and likeness of God, then how do you show it?
 - If you disbelieve that people of color are made in the image and likeness of God, then how do you show it? And what can you do to change that disbelief?
- Have you done enough to inform yourself about the sin of racism, its roots, and its historical and contemporary manifestations? What all have you done? What more could you do?



There are many resources that the Church has to assist you in your discernment towards having dialogues (don't just stop at one) about racism.

US Conference of Catholic Bishops Pastoral Letters/ Documents

All of these documents and more resources are available on the web or at the USCCB website: www.usccb.org

- *Racism: Confronting the Poison in Our Common Home*, USCCB: Dept. of Justice, Peace and Human Development, January, 2016
- *The Racial Divide in the United States: A Reflection for the World Day of Peace 2015*, A Pastoral Letter, Most Reverend Edward K. Braxton, Ph.D., S.T.D., Bishop of Belleville, IL, January 1, 2015
- Statement of Archbishop Joseph E. Kurtz, of Louisville, KY, President of the USCCB to the Spring General Assembly, June 10, 2015
- *25th Anniversary: U.S. Bishops' Pastoral Letter on Racism*, October, 2004
- *In God's Image: Pastoral Letter on Racism*, Most Reverend Harry J. Flynn, Archbishop of Saint Paul and Minneapolis, MN, September 12, 2003
- *Created in God's Image: A Pastoral Letter on the Sin of Racism and a Call to Conversion*, Most Rev. Dale J. Melczek, Bishop of the Diocese of Gary, IN, Aug. 6, 2003
- *Dwell in My Love: A Pastoral Letter on Racism*, Francis Cardinal George, O.M.I., Archbishop of Chicago, IL, April 4, 2001 (33rd Anniv. of the Assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr.)
- *On Racial Harmony*, A Statement Approved by the Administrative Board, National Catholic Welfare Conference, Aug. 23, 1963
- *Brothers and Sisters to US*, US Catholic Bishops Pastoral Letter on Racism, 1979
- *The Ghost of the Legacy of Racial Inequity Continues to Haunt Us*, Bishop Michael Pfeifer, O.M.J.
- *Diversity and Racial Justice Resources*, www.wearesaltandlight.org
- *Resources on Racism for Youth Ministry Leaders*, <http://www.nfcym.org/racism.htm>

~ Compiled by Noreen Ringlein, OFS,
JPIC Animator, St. Junipero Serra Region



Prayer to Overcome Racism

Mary, friend and mother to all, through your Son, God has found a way to unite himself to every human being, called to be one people, sisters and brothers to each other.

We ask for your help in calling on your Son, seeking forgiveness for the times when we have failed to love and respect one another. We ask for your help in obtaining from your Son the grace we need to overcome the evil of racism and to build a just society. We ask for your help in following your Son, so that prejudice and animosity will no longer infect our minds or hearts but will be replaced with a love that respects the dignity of each person.

Mother of the Church, the Spirit of your Son Jesus warms our hearts: pray for us.
Amen.