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June 19, 2020
Juneteenth

Dear Students, Parents, Faculty, Staff, Alumni, and Benefactors,

As a school community and as a country, we are living through an unprecedented time in our history. Structures, institutions, and patterns of life that we thought to be permanent and stable have been radically altered by the global COVID-19 pandemic. In the midst of the uncertainty that comes with sudden change, we have been reminded yet again that the “normal life” we all desire to return to is too often one of injustice and discrimination for many, especially our black brothers and sisters. The tragic deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery and others have awakened the conscience of our nation. Their deaths cry out for justice and call us to action.

As a Catholic school, Koinonia Academy is defined by its commitment to the Christian faith expressed in scripture and tradition. On this point our faith is unequivocal: racism is a sin. There is no gray area here.

“If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.” (1 Jn 4:20).

To denigrate, threaten, or harm another in thought, word, or deed because of the color of his or her skin or country of origin is a rejection of the Gospel and it places one at odds with God who created us equal in dignity before Him and who saved each and every one of us with the precious blood of his Son. Our Catholic faith teaches us that racism in its personal and structural forms is “incompatible with God’s design” and demands that it be “curbed and eradicated” (CCC§1935). The “sinful inequalities that affect millions of men and women...are in open contradiction of the Gospel.” (CCC§1938).

So, the question confronts us as individuals and as a school community, how shall we love in response to injustice? Our faith invites us to reflect and to act. We must undertake an examination of conscience: Where have our words and deeds given too much authority to stereotypes or racial animus? Where are we guilty of sins of omission? For failing to speak up or actively combat racism when we see it, hear it, or find it in ourselves? Where are our attitudes more influenced by our personal preferences or political commitments than by the Gospel of Jesus Christ? What can we do in response to this? We must “rend our hearts” (Joel 2:13), but we must act also.

The language of the Gospel is simple and straightforward, we are neighbors. God has given us to one another, and our faith places an obligation on us to serve the cause of justice. A patron saint of Koinonia,

Pope John Paul II, exhorted us to make the sufferings of others our own: “wherever people are suffering, where they are humiliated by poverty of injustice, and wherever a mockery is made of their rights, make it your task to serve them.” How can we do this better?

To defend the dignity of every human life always means defining the dignity of particular human lives when they are threatened. Many of us have participated in the March for Life in Washington D.C. to speak eloquently and specifically on behalf of the unborn. This moment, too, calls us to the specificity of love. We must discern ways to act with and on behalf of our black brothers and sisters—classmates, colleagues, neighbors, fellow Christians and citizens, each and every one sacred before God—to heal the sin and legacy of racism in our hearts and in our country.

In this effort we can draw strength and consolation from the great cloud of witnesses our faith affords us. May we take to heart the words of Pope Benedict who reminds us, “how important it is, especially in our time, that every Christian community increasingly deepens its awareness...in order to help civil society overcome every possible temptation to give into racism, intolerance and exclusion and to make decisions that respect the dignity of every human being!”

As an educational institution, Koinonia recommits itself to providing an environment where each student is respected and cared for as a child of God. This coming year in our classes and school-wide programming we will draw greater attention to Christianity’s legacy of defending the dignity of all men and women, especially those whom Rev. Martin Luther King Jr referred to as the “disinherited children of God” in our midst. Our principal, Allan Wright, welcomes suggestions and educational resources for enhancing our curriculum around issues of life, race, and human dignity.

Today is Juneteenth, the 155th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation taking effect in the last Confederate state. Now, as then, much work remains to be done. Today, let us recommit ourselves to the work of justice and, as a school community, seek ways to respond to our present situation. “Human progress,” Martin Luther King writes, “never rolls in on wheels of inevitability; it comes through the tireless efforts of men willing to be co-workers with God.”

Saint Martin de Porres, first black saint of the Americas, pray for us!

The Koinonia Academy Board of Trustees

“I used to believe that prayer changes things, but now I know that prayer changes us, and we change things”

ST. THERESA OF CALCUTTA