

## **Racism then healthcare then oversight**

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On my mind: three things

First, I am pretty typical of a U.S. Catholic bishop in terms of other parties overseeing my activity. We have a diocesan finance council of mainly lay people. There is an outside auditor annually examining our finances and pension obligations. There is a diocesan review board which is consulted about any allegation of abuse against a minor by a cleric, only after police have been notified. The last one of these happened in the early 1980's, I believe, though it was reported years later.

Second, before long these pages will describe a national third-party hotline to take accusations about any bishop who abuses a minor, coerces an adult, dabbles in pornography or fails to report another who does. These will be the narrow parameters for this hotline as received in 2019 from Pope Francis in his directive, *Vos estis lux mundi* (You are the light of the world). Lay investigators have been named for each of 32 U.S. regions. This effort, many months in the making, sustains its share of criticism but is a good effort that foresees some correction.

I like to point out to people that we already have a code of clerical ethics that I have signed. Our child protective policies and procedures have been enforced for almost twenty years. Our local diocesan employee handbook also has behavior standards and its own ethics hotline. For those who think that all this paperwork will not get them to where they need to be, I regularly counsel "call the police" if you think a crime is transpiring.

Until the end of November this year, I remain the chairperson of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops committee on the protection of children and youth. At an Anglophone conference this past summer, it was heartening to hear this work described as promoting right relationships. We cannot be limited to preventing bad behavior, we must exemplify life-affirming behavior toward everyone of any age.

Third, February is Black History Month. It was established in 1976 by President Gerald Ford as a successor to Negro History Week begun in 1926. The Spanish-American philosopher George Santayana (1863-1952) said that those who do not learn history are doomed to repeat it. In the fall of 2018, our Catholic bishops published an updated statement on racial issues entitled *Open Wide Our Hearts*. I recommend it to you. This is one of several statements issued by the U.S. Bishops Secretariat on Cultural Diversity. Knowing that Sunday Mass in our country is celebrated in dozens of languages can give us a hint about why such statements are developed.

In this past week, I have participated in several conversations about race and ethnic relations within our Catholic Church. It is distressing to know that blighting prejudice is still expressing itself in hurtful ways. This column is too short to list all the ways that this is still happening. I only want to repeat a slogan that the 1960's burned into my memory: If you are not part of the solution, you are part of the problem. Another way of reading this: it is not enough to be without sin in matters of race, we have to act graciously toward others when the opportunities present themselves. This means creating those

opportunities as needed. If we pray to be able to recognize when a door to healing opens, we will be surprised to learn how much our sight can improve, with God's brave graces.