



St. Columba Catholic Church

6401 San Pablo Avenue
Oakland, CA 94608

His Holiness, Pope Francis

Apostolic Palace

00120 Vatican City

5/1/20

Most Holy Father Francis,

We, the Roman Catholic community of Saint Columba in the Diocese of Oakland, California, United States of America filled with **Easter Joy** heartily embrace you with much love, prayer, and fraternal support.

This is our fifth letter of request inviting you to apologize to African Americans and all people of color for the way our Church Family, the Roman Catholic Church, has contributed to the sickness of racism within our church and in society at large. We understand and appreciate your awareness that, sociologically and culturally, there is more than a Eurocentric way of being church. Originally, we wrote our first letter on 1 September 2015 while anticipating your joyful Pastoral Visit to the United States for the World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia. Twenty of our parishioners went to the City of Brotherly Love and Sisterly Affection to greet you and participate in PICO, a Social Justice forum which was celebrated alongside the World Meeting of Families. (Cardinals Turkson and Tobin addressed us along with over 500 other PICO affiliates.) As you may know, PICO had its birth in Oakland California with two of your Jesuit brothers. PICO, now known as Faith in Action, is a national organization that seeks change and promotes the building of the Beloved Community.

Our original reasons for making this request were and remain as follows: First: It is well documented, especially by the late Fr. Cyprian Davis, OSB, in his award-winning book, *The History of Black Catholics in the United States*, that European-American Roman Catholics -- including bishops, religious congregations, and laity -- both owned and sold African slaves. Second: History also shows the bishops of the United States resisted calls for the abolition of slavery. Third: African Americans, Catholic and non-Catholic, are often troubled and even scandalized after reading such histories of the Church. Fourth: many African Americans continue to feel estranged in the Church that does little to actively and forcefully speak out against racism or acknowledge their history, experience, culture, pain and most of all their joyful and spirit-filled contribution to the life of the Church. To this date, the Bishops of the United States have seldom, if ever, acknowledged or apologized for this tragic history and continuing complicity in racial injustice.

In light of the pain in the Black Catholic family in the United States, there is need for an acknowledgement of the sin of race-based enslavement and structural injustice that was practiced and is still tolerated by all too many members of our beloved Church, both lay and ordained.

In addition to the above reasons, the current global pandemic makes our request more urgent than ever. While all humanity is vulnerable to this disease, the tragic reality is that all are not **equally** vulnerable. In this

country, people of color – and especially African Americans – are disproportionately affected. In many places, they are the vast majority of those who have been infected with and who have perished from COVID-19. This is the result of long-standing structural barriers that have compromised their access to healthcare or limited their employment to jobs where social distancing is impossible and social benefits are limited. The pandemic both exposes and magnifies the race-based injustices that exist in our nation. Your words and witness would give our country and our church the challenge and hope we need in this desperate time.

It is our belief, as a multicultural parish family which celebrates African American spirituality, that an apology in light of the Gospel would place the Church in the path of righting the wrong. It would be a powerful demonstration of our faith's conviction that we are all made in the image and likeness of God and, therefore, people of every race and culture are equal in dignity and valued in God's sight. In the end, an official apology would launch the racial healing that is long overdue in U.S. Catholicism and the world we all live and share.

We love you and respect your prayerful decision on this request. We pray that God strengthens your ministry as Chief Shepherd of our Church.

Yours in the "Joy of the Gospel"

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Fr. Aidan J. McAleenan". The signature is written in black ink and is enclosed within a thin, hand-drawn oval border.

Fr. Aidan J. McAleenan, Pastor

CC: Parish Family of St. Columba

His Excellency Archbishop Christophe Pierre, Papal Nuncio USA

His Excellency Cardinal Óscar Andrés Rodríguez Maradiaga

California Bishops Conference

Michael Barber, S.J. Bishop of Oakland

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

African American Catholic Bishops of the United States

Black Catholic Clergy Caucus

National Black Sisters Conference

Institute of Black Catholic Studies.

Libby Scaff. Mayor of Oakland

Gavin Newsom, Governor of California

Faith In Action California