



A Call to Address Racism in our Hearts and Community

May 29, 2020 - The Catholic bishops of the United States recently issued a pastoral letter against racism entitled *Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love*. In this instruction, we call for a conversion of hearts, minds and institutions to address the evils of racism that still exist in our country and communities. As we wrote in the letter:

Racism occurs because a person ignores the fundamental truth that, because all humans share a common origin, they are all brothers and sisters, all equally made in the image of God. When this truth is ignored, the consequence is prejudice and fear of the other, and – all too often – hatred.

The killing of George Floyd in Minnesota on Monday, May 25, was very traumatic and appalling. I wish to acknowledge the anger, pain and sadness this and other encounters between police officers and black men evoke not only in Minnesota, but throughout the country and in our own faith family as well.

These deaths are tragic, and they expose a symptomatic and deep-seated connection between institutional racism and the continued erosion of the sanctity of life. If we do not respond appropriately as a society, we will be tacitly acquiescing to the ongoing killing of unarmed black men.

The senseless taking of life defies the fundamental principles of justice, every notion of dignity and the fact that all of our lives are connected. As human beings, we are responsible for each other.

As Seattle Police Chief Carmen Best said in her May 27 statement to the SPD, “policing is an honorable profession filled with honorable public servants, committed to protecting life and serving the community.” Chief Best also told her officers that if they see a coworker doing something that is unsafe, out of policy, unacceptable and illegal, they need to act, and that if someone’s life is unnecessarily in danger, it is their responsibility to intervene.

As Catholics, we are called to the same standards of behavior. We cannot stand by and not respond to incidents of racism and inhuman treatment of our black brothers and sisters, or anyone else.

Whether citizens or officers of the law, we are all part of a community that is responsible to care for each other. Our time-honored Catholic social teaching about the common good demands no less of any of us.

The fact that we were created in the image of God teaches us that each person is a living expression of God who must be respected and preserved and never dishonored. Let us continue to pray and work together for the personal and societal conversions necessary to address the evils of racism.