

MEMORANDUM

May 30, 2020

TO: All Clergy, Religious, Diocesan Staff and Seminarians
FROM: Bishop Oscar A. Solis
WHAT: Bishop's Statement in the wake of the death of "George Floyd" and National Protests

Once again, our communities have been ripped apart by incidents of violence and the culture of death. The entire nation has watched on national television the recent death of George Floyd and few others the past weeks, that plunged our nation into deeper division and polarization. As we witness yet another egregious act of violence against the oppressed, the Feast of Pentecost this Sunday reminds all the people of God of our call to see Christ in every human being, to protect the dignity and sanctity of all life, and to give voice to the Gospel of Love and Life.

Pentecost speaks of passion for peace, for love, for unity. The gifts of the Holy Spirit empower us to be agents of change and transformation - to bring healing to the sick and suffering, peace in the midst of violence and hatred, and unity in our broken and divided world. It calls us to join as one human kind, with all of our different races, ethnicities, genders, languages and cultures, to raise up human dignity and to stand against injustice with those who face it on a daily basis.

As we strive hard to come together to stop the spread of pandemic, there are those among us who have the unfortunate and added burden of overcoming the staggering inequalities in our economic, political, legal and social structures every moment of their lives. For generations, Black Americans and other minorities have faced not just personal acts of animosity based in prejudice, but entire systems designed by and for the benefit of one race at the expense of another. Systems that keep the poorest among us in poverty, that assume individuals of certain colors are due less respect, have less dignity, are more inclined to bad acts. This Pentecost, we must listen to the voices of our discriminated brothers and sisters and raise the voices God has given each of us to challenge the culture of death evidenced in violence, inequality, and injustice not only against innocent lives of the unborn, the sick and the elderly, but also of our Black brothers and sisters and other people of color, race, faith affiliation, sexual orientation and economic status.

As my brother Bishops stated in the wake of the death of George Floyd, *"Racism is not a thing of the past or simply a throwaway political issue to be bandied about when convenient. It is a real and present danger that must be met head on. As members of the Church, we must stand for the more difficult right and just actions instead of the easy wrongs of callous indifference. We cannot turn a blind eye to these atrocities and yet still try to profess to respect every human life. We serve a God of love, mercy, compassion and justice."*

Our silence, our indifference is complicit in the death of George Floyd, Ahmed Arbery, Philando Castile, Eric Gardner, Breonna Taylor, the migrants dying at our borders and far too many others. It is abundantly clear that racism is a life issue. We as a church that professes the dignity and sanctity of every life simply cannot stand silent in the face of daily assaults on that dignity and sanctity, whether in the form of disenfranchising Black voters, threatening Black men and women engaged in peaceful and lawful activities, or unwarranted assumptions leading to unnecessary brutality against suspected wrongdoers.

This Sunday, let us renew our commitment and live that understanding in solidarity and action to overcome discrimination, violence, and injustice.

Our first action comes in our celebrations of Pentecost this weekend.

1. Offer Parish Masses starting Pentecost Sunday and the whole week for those who died from the pandemic, violence, discrimination and other forms of injustice.
2. Include in your Masses: one or more of these suggested Prayers of the Faithful: <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/racism/racism-prayers-of-the-faithful.cfm>
3. Ensure parishioners are aware of and access *“Open Wide Our Hearts,”* the USCCB’s pastoral letter on racism, with accompanying study guides and other materials at <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/racism/index.cfm>
4. On June 5, 2020, First Friday of the month, provide parishioners opportunity for adoration of the Blessed Sacrament/Benediction to pray for healing from coronavirus, end of war, racism and for unity and peace in our nation and the world
5. On June 6, 2020, First Saturday of the month, encourage parishioners to pray the Rosary and seek the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary for all our intentions.

ADDENDUM

US Bishop Chairmen’s Statement in Wake of Death of George Floyd and National Protest

Seven U.S. bishop chairmen of committees within the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops have issued a statement in the wake of the death of Mr. George Floyd and the protests which have broken out in Minneapolis and in other cities in the United States.

Bishop Shelton J. Fabre of Houma-Thibodaux, chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee Against Racism; Archbishop Nelson J. Pérez of Philadelphia, chairman of the Committee on Cultural Diversity in the Church; Archbishop Paul S. Coakley of Oklahoma City, chairman of the Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development; Archbishop Joseph F. Naumann of Kansas City in Kansas, chairman of the Committee on Pro-Life Activities; Bishop Joseph C. Bambera of Scranton, chairman of the Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs; Bishop David G. O’Connell, auxiliary bishop of Los Angeles, chairman of the Subcommittee on the Catholic Campaign for Human Development; and Bishop Joseph N. Perry, auxiliary bishop of Chicago, chairman of the Subcommittee on African American Affairs have issued the following statement:

We are broken-hearted, sickened, and outraged to watch another video of an African American man being killed before our very eyes. What's more astounding is that this is happening within mere weeks of several other such occurrences. This is the latest wake-up call that needs to be answered by each of us in a spirit of determined conversion.

Racism is not a thing of the past or simply a throwaway political issue to be bandied about when convenient. It is a real and present danger that must be met head on. As members of the Church, we must stand for the more difficult right and just actions instead of the easy wrongs of indifference. We cannot turn a blind eye to these atrocities and yet still try to profess to respect every human life. We serve a God of love, mercy, and justice.

While it is expected that we will plead for peaceful non-violent protests, and we certainly do, we also stand in passionate support of communities that are understandably outraged. Too many communities around this country feel their voices are not being heard, their complaints about racist treatment are unheeded, and we are not doing enough to point out that this deadly treatment is antithetical to the Gospel of Life.

As we said eighteen months ago in our most recent pastoral letter against racism, **Open Wide Our Hearts**, for people of color some interactions with police can be fraught with fear and even danger. People of good conscience must never turn a blind eye when citizens are being deprived of their human dignity and even their lives. Indifference is not an option. "As bishops, we unequivocally state that racism is a life issue."

We join Archbishop Bernard A. Hebda of St. Paul and Minneapolis in praying for the repose of the soul of Mr. George Floyd and all others who have lost their lives in a similar manner. We plead for an end to the violence in the wake of this tragedy and for the victims of the rioting. We pray for comfort for grieving families and friends. We pray for peace across the United States, particularly in Minnesota, while the legal process moves forward. We also anticipate a full investigation that results in rightful accountability and actual justice.

We join our brother bishops to challenge everyone to come together, particularly with those who are from different cultural backgrounds. In this encounter, let us all seek greater understanding amongst God's people. So many people who historically have been disenfranchised continue to experience sadness and pain, yet they endeavor to persevere and remain people of great faith. We encourage our pastors to encounter and more authentically accompany them, listen to their stories, and learn from them, finding substantive ways to enact systemic change. Such encounters will start to bring about the needed transformation of our understanding of true life, charity, and justice in the United States. Hopefully, then there will be many voices speaking out and seeking healing against the evil of racism in our land.

As we anticipate the Solemnity of Pentecost this weekend, we call upon all Catholics to pray and work toward a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Let us pray for a supernatural desire to rid ourselves of the harm that bias and prejudice cause. We call upon Catholics to pray to the Holy Spirit for the Spirit of Truth to touch the hearts of all in the United States and to come down upon our criminal justice and law enforcement systems. Finally, let each and every Catholic, regardless of their ethnicity, beg God to heal our deeply broken view of each other, as well as our deeply broken society.