

## Reactions to Killing of George Floyd by Police

### Catholic Leaders

After George Floyd was killed while in police custody, the United States saw more than a week of protests and unrest. A police officer was filmed kneeling on Floyd's neck during an arrest in Minneapolis. Video of the May 25 incident showed a white police officer with his knee on Floyd's neck for several minutes as he struggled for breath and pleaded for the officer to stop. Subsequent video showed two other officers on top of Floyd, an unarmed African American. The first officer was arrested May 29, and on June 3, charges against him were upgraded to second-degree murder, and the two other officers and a bystanding officer were charged with aiding and abet-

*"The killing of George Floyd was senseless and brutal, a sin that cries out to heaven for justice."*

ting murder; all were fired May 26. Starting in Minneapolis May 26 and spreading throughout the nation and the world, protests against police brutality and killings of black people grew, as almost every major city in America saw large daily protests. After nightfall, some protests turned violent and looting took place in many areas. There was widespread anger as Floyd's killing came on the heels of other killings of unarmed African Americans by police and the lack of police reform as these killings happened again and again throughout the country over many years. The coronavirus pandemic that hit communities of color harder than white communities also spotlighted inequalities in American life. On June 1, White House officials ordered police to attack peaceful protestors outside the White House. Catholic leaders responded to all these events with statements, homilies and tweets. A sampling of these follow.

#### Archbishop José H. Gomez USCCB president

**t**he killing of George Floyd was senseless and brutal, a sin that cries out to heaven for justice. How is it possible that in America a black man's life can be taken from him while calls for help are not answered and his killing is recorded as it happens?

I am praying for George Floyd and his loved ones, and on behalf of my brother bishops, I share the outrage of the black community and those who stand with them in Minneapolis, Los Angeles and across the

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*Observing with great concern the social unrest unfolding in the United States, Pope Francis said no one can claim to defend the sanctity of every human life while turning a blind eye to racism and exclusion.*

*Addressing all “dear brothers and sisters in the United States” during his livestreamed general audience June 3, the pope said, “Today I join the church in St. Paul and Minneapolis, and in the entire United States, in praying for the repose of the soul of George Floyd and of all those others who have lost their lives as a result of the sin of racism.”*

*“Let us pray for the consolation of their grieving families and friends and let us implore the national reconciliation and peace for which we yearn,” he said in Italian.*

*The pope said he has “witnessed with great concern the disturbing social unrest in your nation in these past days, following the tragic death of Mr. George Floyd.”*

*“My friends, we cannot tolerate or turn a blind eye to racism and exclusion in any form and yet claim to defend the sacredness of every human life. At the same time, we have to recognize that ‘the violence of recent nights is self-destructive and self-defeating. Nothing is gained by violence and so much is lost,’” he said, quoting Archbishop José H. Gomez of Los Angeles, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.*

*Calling on faith in the Holy Spirit’s presence amid civil unrest and a global pandemic, Archbishop Bernard A. Hebda of St. Paul and Minneapolis celebrated Pentecost May 31 at the Cathedral of St. Paul in St. Paul.*

*“We have to believe that the Holy Spirit will once again bring peace,” the archbishop said, addressing his homily to a congregation less than a quarter its usual size as the people of the archdiocese*

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country. The cruelty and violence he suffered does not reflect on the majority of good men and women in law enforcement, who carry out their duties with honor. We know that. And we trust that civil authorities will investigate his killing carefully and make sure those responsible are held accountable.

We should all understand that the protests we are seeing in our cities reflect the justified frustration and anger of millions of our brothers and sisters who even today experience humiliation, indignity and unequal opportunity only because of their race or the color of their skin. It should not be this way in America. Racism has been tolerated for far too long in our way of life.

It is true what Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. said, that riots are the language of the unheard. We should be doing a lot of listening right now. This time, we should not fail to hear what people are saying through their pain. We need to finally root out the racial injustice that still infects too many areas of American society.

But the violence of recent nights is self-destructive and self-defeating. Nothing is gained by violence and so much is lost. Let us keep our eyes on the prize of true and lasting change.

Legitimate protests should not be exploited by persons who have different values and agendas. Burning and looting communities, ruining the livelihoods of our neighbors, do not advance the cause of racial equality and human dignity.

We should not let it be said that George Floyd died for no reason. We should honor the sacrifice of his life by removing racism and hate from our hearts and renewing our commitment to fulfill our nation’s sacred promise — to be a beloved community of life, liberty and equality for all.

### **National Black Sisters’ Conference**

In 1895 the activist and civil rights icon Ida B. Wells wrote a research pamphlet called *The Red Record*. In it Mrs. Wells tabulated the number of lynchings in the United States

since the emancipation of African slaves. The conclusion was that little had changed for the Negro in America by the end of the 19th century. The Emancipation Proclamation and federal programs like the Freedmen’s Bureau did not prevent the death of thousands of Negroes by the end of the 19th and early 20th century.

Ida B. Wells writes, “In slave times the Negro was kept subservient and submissive ... but with freedom the Negro is whipped, scourged, he is killed.”

Fredrick Douglass, in a review of Mrs. Wells’ groundbreaking study, wrote, “If American moral sensibility was not hardened by the persistent infliction of outrage and crime against colored people, a scream of horror, shame and indignation would rise from heaven.”

America’s sensibility is still hardened in the 21st century. Black Americans still scream in horror. We still cannot breathe. Black lives still do not matter.

One hundred twenty-four years later we are still writing the same story! African American men, women and children are still being lynched, murdered and executed for playing with a toy gun, watching television in one’s own home, and mistaken identity, driving or jogging while black and being choked to death in cold blood by law enforcement officers who have sworn to serve and protect.

We must speak and never forget their names.

Reason “Sean” Reed shot and killed in Indianapolis; Breonna Taylor, an emergency medical technician in Louisville, Kentucky, shot eight times in her bed; Ahmaud Arbery killed while out jogging; and George Floyd dying from a police officer’s knee on his neck as Mr. Floyd screamed, “I can’t breathe!”

The National Black Sisters’ Conference condemns the viral disease of systemic racism that America has legitimized and practiced for over 400 years! We will not remain silent! There is more than one pandemic affecting our nation!

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said, “I refuse to accept the view that mankind is so tragically bound to the starless midnight of

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racism.”

If this country is to reclaim its moral stature, we must confess and atone for our original sin or America will self-destruct as a nation. As Malcolm X once warned the white power structure, “The chickens have come home to roost.”

Without justice, there can be no peace, and justice demands that:

—Law enforcement is held accountable for their willful negligence and compliance in racist activities and actions.

—Chokeholds and other life-threatening forms of physical restraint will not to be used when a suspect is not resisting arrest and/or is already in custody.

—When justified, as in the death of Mr. George Floyd, law enforcement officers are held accountable for their actions and when warranted, arrested and prosecuted to the full extent of the law.

Finally, as black Catholic religious women, we call upon Archbishop Bernard A. Hebda, archbishop of St. Paul-Minneapolis, and all bishops of goodwill to speak out on behalf of the church by denouncing these violent acts of hate and racism.

As Dr. King told us, “The arch of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.”

If the most recent pastoral letter on racism “Open Wide Our Hearts,” written by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, is to have any moral legitimacy, then our episcopal leaders must give more than lip service to addressing the sin of racism that is destroying communities of color around this nation.

As Christians, as Catholics, as people of faith, we must do more than just pray; we must model Jesus’ message to love one’s neighbor.

Our neighbor cannot breathe! Our neighbor is being lynched! Our neighbor is dying! Our “red record” of hate must end now!

### **Bishop Robert W. McElroy, San Diego**

A deep and crippling sadness envelops this nation that we love so deeply. The peril and the burden of a pandemic have worn us down. We have become isolated, cut off from so many of the joys that give meaning to our lives and in many cases cut off from the blessing of family itself.

While at most moments such a trauma for our society would have created an energized sense of unity and solidarity, in this moment it has created division and alienation. Our economy has suffered a cardiac arrest, and the fear of economic free-fall duels with the peril of pandemic to blur the pathway forward. We are worn down.

And alongside this exhaustion of our entire people, the seismic fault line that is the greatest shame of our nation’s past and present — our legacy of racial prejudice, violence and silence — has erupted once again and now tears apart the fabric of our society. The death of one man — in the killing of George Floyd — conveys the evil of 400 years of racial oppression. The words of one man — “I can’t breathe” — capture the pervasive and insidious power of racial prejudice that is layered within the structures of American public life and its legal, political and economic systems.

Where lies grace in a moment such as this?

It lies in understanding that a genuine healing for our nation can only be found in a radical effort to accompany the African American community in their weariness and rage and hope and despair that have been formed and deformed upon the anvil of racism. Ours must not be an episodic response that seeks to calm the waters of racial turmoil and then return to normalcy.

The only authentic moral response to this moment in our nation’s history is a sustained conversion of heart and soul to genuinely comprehend the overwhelming evil of racism in our society and to refuse to rest until we have rooted it out.

Where lies grace in a moment such as this?

It lies in the words of Terrence Floyd, George Floyd’s brother, who in the midst of overwhelming grief pointed the way forward for our nation when he called for a peaceful unity to replace the destructive unity of looting, violence, divisive nationalism and partisan tribalism. We are in a moment which calls out for an unstoppable commitment to forge a new solidarity in our nation, finding in the very suffering of these past months a foundation for compassion and unity, friendship and peace.

Where lies grace in a moment such as this?

It lies in knowing that the presence of God surrounds us in these days of sadness and loss, and calls us to moral and spiritual conversion so that the soul of our nation can be renewed and our eyes might truly see the glory of the coming of the Lord once more into our midst.

### **Knights of Peter Claver and Ladies Auxiliary**

The Knights of Peter Claver condemn the senseless death of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis policemen. There is no explanation to justify the actions taken by the police that ultimately led to Mr. Floyd’s demise. We pray that God will grant his family peace and that the Minneapolis community finds healing during this difficult period.

*practice social distancing to curb the spread of the novel coronavirus.*

*“It’s so important to remember that the Holy Spirit will guide us through this difficult time. As we suffer through the great sorrow that’s in our hearts at the death of a man who should not have died,” the archbishop said, referring to the May 25 death of Floyd.*

*In a May 27 statement, Archbishop Hebda said the video showing a Minneapolis police officer kneeling on the neck of a handcuffed Floyd repeatedly saying “I can’t breathe,” and who appears to lose consciousness or die while being pinned down, is “gut-wrenching and deeply disturbing.”*

*“The sadness and pain are intense,” Archbishop Hebda said. “Let us pray for comfort for his grieving family and friends, peace for a hurting community and prudence while the process moves forward. We need a full investigation that results in rightful accountability and veritable justice.”*

*The bishop who heads the U.S. bishops’ Ad Hoc Committee Against Racism said the death of Floyd while in the custody of Minneapolis police “reminds us that people are losing their lives because of racism.”*

*It also serves as a reminder that “racism is a life issue,” said Bishop Shelton T. Fabre of Houma-Thibodaux, Louisiana, whose committee produced “Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love — A Pastoral Letter Against Racism,” which was approved by the U.S. bishops in 2018 (see Origins, Vol. 48, No. 27).*

*“Until we take the human dignity of each and every person — regardless of the circumstances of their lives — seriously, there will continue to be a loss of life due to racism,” he added. “It is outrageous that this is another African American death in police custody.”*

Bishop Fabre, in a May 29 phone interview with Catholic News Service, said: "Such events as this make it very, very clear to us that racism is not a thing of the past. It's not a political issue, it's a human issue. It's about people's lives. Racism is a danger. Racism is still with us."

"I hope the protests will be peaceful, that we will notice them and that we will hear what the protests are trying to convey, and that they will open our hearts anew to hear what is being shared with us. This is coming from people who are not being heard, people who feel they are not being heard," Bishop Fabre told CNS.

The widespread nature of the protests "reminds us that racism is far-reaching. Each and every one of us has a story with regard to racism. People of color have a story as to how racism has deeply affected them," Bishop Fabre said. "It is something you can see in protests brewing up."

With anger and frustration still high in the United States over the death of Floyd, religious leaders should organize ecumenical and interreligious prayer initiatives to bring people together and promote healing, said a top Vatican official.

"The one thing that can help George at this moment is prayer," Cardinal Peter Turkson, prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, told Vatican News June 3.

The Catholic Church and others have been calling for nonviolent efforts in the wake of the tragedy of his death and to stand up to ongoing racism, but the cardinal said he would "go one step further" and promote a call for forgiveness.

"This, I think, is the way we can dignify the memory of George Floyd," the cardinal said in the interview.

"No amount of demonstration, anger, frustration or

George Floyd.

George Floyd.

George Floyd.

George Floyd was a man, a human, a being. Not a stat. Not just another one. Not to be forgotten.

The Knights of Peter Claver and Ladies Auxiliary echo the outrage and demands not just for justice but for true respect of the dignity of black lives. These statements should not have to be made. These demands should not have to be made. These lives should not be lost.

We call on all who are sworn "to protect and to serve" — to carry out that very motto.

We call on all leaders elected to serve — to listen, to act, to legislate.

We call on all of God's children created to love — to do just that — love.

The anger, emotions and outrage must be followed by effective solutions that do more than just penalize murderous actions but eliminate future ones.

The ink has run dry on writing statements, and it is now time to write laws, to write policies, to write sentences.

George Floyd — let your name be remembered as the murder that sparked effective change.

As the nation's only historically black Catholic fraternal order, we are committed to the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death and will defend the right to life for everyone, especially the marginalized and underserved. While this most recent example of violent policing is troubling, we must never give up hope in the struggle for justice and the preservation of human life.

### Reynold Verret, Xavier University of Louisiana president

The merciless and unjust killing in Minneapolis weighs on me as it does you. My grief mingles with an unceasing lament for our many dead: a young man in Georgia, a young woman in Louisville, our alumna in Fort Worth, and so many known and unknown. We are brought to tears, clamoring for justice, asking, When will we expiate our nation's original sin of racism and slavery?

The quick rationalizations and excuses for these deeds are astounding in themselves but effective within the American mind corrupted by its notions of race. Thus an officer can say he was afraid ... therefore he shot an unarmed man. Ms. Cooper falsely claims to be in fear and threatened, but strangely she is confident that the police will take her side. Her confidence is well rooted in our history.

In the 1890s and early 1900s, when white-

ness resurged to wipe away the gains of emancipation and reconstruction, the nation reasserted the privilege of whiteness, a privilege to instill fear and to act with impunity on blacks. Thus came the Klan, the mobs and policies and laws to disempower folk of color.

Xavier was founded against the psychopathology of race and in the belief that education is an essential foundation of justice. We know that injustice persists but have faith that it cannot last. Thus, we struggle as we must for real change.

Let us not be misled by those who urge us to destroy. Let us act for justice, walk prudently, focusing righteous anger and pain toward right action, always honoring the memories of the sisters and brothers we lost. Your minds and hearts are gifts. They are your best instruments as you take on the calling to build the more just and humane world.

We act on behalf of our dead and out of love and fidelity to the young ones for a better world for all. *An election is coming. Our most powerful action is our vote in unprecedented numbers. We will be heard.*

Xavier awaits your return. Let your learning be your tool.

Be safe. You are ever in my prayers. *Deo adjuvante, non timendum.*

### Seven USCCB committee chairmen

We are brokenhearted, 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 nonviolent 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 18 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 among 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.

#### **Archbishop José H. Gomez, Los Angeles**

As we know, we are living in a moment of conflict and unrest in our city and in cities everywhere across this country.

We want to pray today for George Floyd,

who was killed this week, and for his family. And let us pray for all those who are working to put an end to racial injustice in our society.

It is an unhappy truth that we have tolerated racism for too long in America. But this is not what God wants.

Pentecost — this great feast that we celebrate today — shows us the truth about God’s purposes and plan for the human family.

As we heard in the first reading, at Pentecost there were men and women in Jerusalem from “every nation under heaven.” And when the Holy Spirit came down upon Mary, our Blessed Mother, and the apostles, all of them began speaking in “different tongues.” And everyone who was in Jerusalem at that time could understand what they were saying, “each in his own native language.”

This is the Creator’s beautiful dream for the human race.

When God looks at us, he sees beyond the color of our skin or the countries where we come from or the language that we speak. God sees only his children — beloved sons, beloved daughters.

Pentecost is the “birthday” of the church and the first day of her mission. And the mission that Jesus gave to his church is the beautiful mission of gathering all the peoples of the earth into one family of God.

And the church’s mission, my brothers and sisters, is our mission. Your mission and mine. The fire that started at Pentecost is meant to keep burning in us! We are called to continue the work of Pentecost in our society. In the Gospel today, Jesus tells the apostles: “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

Jesus is sending us out into the world. He is sending us out into our homes, the places where we work, our neighborhoods. Everywhere we find ourselves, Jesus is calling us to be missionary disciples.

And when we look at our city and our country right now, I think we can see that we have an important responsibility to share the truth that we are all children of God and that God loves every person.

As we know, this is a challenge.

In the events of this week and this weekend, we can see that there are millions of our brothers and sisters who are still forced to suffer humiliation, indignity and unequal opportunity just because of their race or the color of their skin. And as we were talking about it, that is not right. It should not be this way in America. Racism is a sin, and it denies what God wants for the human person. We know that.

But the way forward for us is love, not hate and not violence. Nothing is gained by vio-

*whatever can bring him back. There is only one thing that can be useful to George at this moment” as he stands before God, and that is “the forgiveness of his killers. Just as Jesus did,” said the Ghanian-born cardinal.*

*In those U.S. cities that have seen violence, the cardinal “humbly” suggested bishops, priests, pastors and leaders of various communities plan an “ecumenical, interreligious event.”*

*It could take place in a park or other open area with the goal of bringing people together to pray, he said.*

*Much like the coronavirus pandemic, racism is a “spiritual” virus that has spread throughout the world and must be eradicated, said Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, president of the Pontifical Academy for Life.*

*“I would compare (racism) to COVID-19, but it is a virus of the spirit, a cultural virus that, if not isolated, spreads quickly,” Archbishop Paglia told Catholic News Service June 1.*

*Archbishop Paglia told CNS that just as people were called to self-isolate in order to care for one another, racism can only be defeated by people caring for each other.*

*“Today we must start a revolution of brotherhood. We are all brothers and sisters. Brotherhood is a promise that is lacking in modern times,” he said. “In my opinion, the true strength that supports us in our weakness is brotherhood and solidarity. And just as it defeats the coronavirus, it also defeats racism.”*

*“It’s not enough to remain silent,” the Italian archbishop said. “To prevent the virus of racism from multiplying, those (who oppose racism) must also multiply.”*

*Archbishop Paglia said he believed Pope Francis should consider writing a document that addresses the subject of racism, a problem “all over the world.”*

lence, and so much is lost. Jesus says today in the Gospel, “Peace be with you.”

Jesus is sending each of us out to spread this message of peace person to person, heart to heart. Today more than ever, we need a spirit of peacemaking and searching for nonviolent solutions to our problems.

The peace that Jesus gives us is not the false peace of those who accept injustice out of fear or in order to avoid trouble or confrontation. The peace that Jesus gives is something we have to build, something we have to “make.” It means working to help people see another point of view, the other side of the argument. It means always working to build trust, to promote understanding, and to encourage forgiveness and friendship.

It is hard work, challenging work. And we know that we cannot do it without God’s help.

Peace is one of the “fruits” of the Holy Spirit, so on this great feast of the Holy Spirit we pray today for the gifts of his Spirit, the fruits of his Spirit.

In the Gospel today, Jesus breathes on the apostles and says to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”

Today he is speaking those same words to you and to me. He is inviting us to open our hearts, to receive his Spirit. To receive the power of God, the love of God.

When we allow the Holy Spirit to work in our lives, then we see all the goodness and beauty in the world, we see the image of God in others. And we also have a new compassion, a new sense of people’s needs and their sufferings — and we also feel our responsibility to love others for God’s sake.

So, my dear brothers and sisters, let us pray today to receive the Holy Spirit and to renew our awareness of his presence in our lives. And let’s especially ask the Holy Spirit to bring that fire to our hearts and our lives so that we can be better witnesses, stronger peacemakers in this challenging moment in our society.

Let’s also keep praying for all those who are sick with the coronavirus and all the brave men and women who are working to take care of them.

And let us ask the intercession of Mary, our Blessed Mother, who is the mother of the church and the queen of peace.

May she help us to follow the path of nonviolence and to find the strength to remove racism from our hearts and to work to build a society of life, liberty and equality for all.

### **Cardinal Blase J. Cupich, Chicago**

The past nights I have watched in great personal pain as the pent-up anger of our people caught fire across our country. I saw the city where I was born, the cities where I have lived, the city I pastor now catch embers from the city where I was educated and burn. Was I horrified at the violence? Yes. But was I surprised? No.

As the saying goes, if you’re not outraged, you’re not paying attention. What did we expect when we learned that in Minneapolis, a city often hailed as a model of inclusivity, the price of a black life is a counterfeit \$20 bill? When we added another name to the list of those murdered for being black or for caring about the marginalized?

I will not pretend to speak with any authority about the challenges people of color experience in our society. I do not share the fear they put on when they and their children leave their homes every day. I do not know what it means to be *other*.

But I know there is a way to fix it. And the fix begins when we stop talking about the proportionality of *their* response and start talking about the proportionality of *ours*.

Surely a nation that could put a man in space, his safety assured by the brilliance of black women, can create a fair legal system, equitable education and employment opportunities and ready access to health care. Laws do not solve problems, but they create a system where racism in all its forms is punished and playing fields are leveled.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been called a great equalizer. It has been even more a great revealer of societal cancers as deadly as the virus. As others have pointed out, health insecurity kills, and poverty is poison. We can and must make a society that views the soaring of a child’s potential with more joy than the soaring of a rocket.

I stand ready to join religious, civic, labor and business leaders in coming together to launch a new effort to bring about recovery and reconciliation in our city. We do not need a study of the

causes and effects. Those answers can be found on the shelves of government offices and academic institutions across our burning nation. No, we need to take up the hard work of healing the deep wound that has afflicted our people since the first slave ships docked on this continent. And we need to start today.

### **Archbishop Wilton D. Gregory, Washington**

In astonishment, we are seeing the reactions of people across the United States as they express feelings of frustration, hurt and anger in their cry for justice for George Floyd, whom we painfully watched being suffocated in front of our eyes on video in Minneapolis, Minnesota, this past week.

Many of us remember similar incidents in our history that accompanied the civil rights movement, where we repeatedly saw black Americans viciously brutalized by police on television and in newspaper photos. Those historic moments helped to rouse our national conscience to the African American experience in the United States, and now in 2020 we tragically still see repeated incidents of police brutality against African Americans.

We find ourselves in this national moment again with the awakening of our conscience by heartbreaking photos and video that clearly confirm that racism still endures in our country. On television and in social media, we are observing an overflow of pain felt acutely in the African American community and shared by too many other communities.

Moments like this cause people of goodwill, who believe in the value, respect and dignity of every human life, to wonder if and how we can move on from here. The horror of George Floyd’s death, like all acts of racism, hurts all of us in the body of Christ, since we are each made in the image and likeness of God and deserve the dignity that comes with that existence.

This incident reveals the virus of racism among us once again even as we continue to cope with the coronavirus pandemic.

We owe immense appreciation to our first responders who are currently working tirelessly to care for us and keep us safe. We remain grateful to them for their commitment to serve our commu-

nity by protecting and saving lives.

However, as a society, we must find ways to understand and to respond to the pain of our brothers and sisters. We see racism destroying the lives of Jewish, Muslim and Christian people because of their religious and ethnic heritages. Racism triggers the divisive and xenophobic attitudes of nationalism. It also targets people because of their cultural traditions or physical appearances, and it threatens immigrant people who seek nothing more than the opportunity to improve their lives and the lives of their children.

We must nonviolently and constructively work together to heal and build the “beloved community” that was spoken about by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

On this Pentecost weekend, I join my brother bishops throughout our nation, and especially Archbishop Hebda of St. Paul and Minneapolis, in calling on the Holy Spirit in the most urgent way. We must examine our own attitudes and actions in order to seek conversion from sin and turn our hearts toward Christ in order to end personal and structural racism. Now, and every day, we must pray to find the strength to do what is right and just as we encounter our neighbors from a culture, country, religion, race or experience different than our own and see in them God’s creative design.

This moment calls us to be the church of hope that Jesus Christ created us to be in a world full of pain and despair.

We pray for a new Pentecost: a renewal of love, justice and truth in our hearts. We are called to do justice and love goodness in order to walk humbly with God.

Since we are confident that the Father always hears our prayer for reconciliation, together we join in peaceful, nonviolent protest, action and prayer for the balm to cure all forms of racism starting today.

Please join me in asking our Father for the balm of love, justice, peace, compassion and mercy to end racism and hatred now. Come, Holy Spirit, come.

**John J. DeGioia, Georgetown University president**

In recent weeks my communication with you has focused on the global pandemic and how we — as a Georgetown University community — are working

our way through the challenges generated by a virus that has created a degree of dislocation and disequilibrium unlike any we have experienced in our lifetimes.

In just three horrific months, 1 in 4 Americans has become unemployed and is looking for work. More than 100,000 people in our country have lost their lives to COVID-19. Our individual and collective routines and rhythms have all been disrupted.

Although we are now beginning our tentative first steps toward a reopening (under conditions of great uncertainty), we know we have much to do to rebuild our nation.

In the midst of this devastating experience, the original fault line of our republic has been exposed once again for the nation. We grieve the killing of George Floyd in Minnesota, Breonna Taylor in Kentucky and Ahmaud Arbery in Georgia as unconscionable acts of violence. Their deaths, and subsequent nationwide protests, once again present our country — and each one of us — with the imperative to confront the enduring legacy of slavery and segregation in America.

On too many occasions over the years there has been cause for me to share reflections with our community as we grapple with the devastating impact of racism and hatred in our nation. In August 2014, following the killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri; in December 2015, following the grand jury decision in the killing of Eric Garner in Staten Island, New York; in August 2017, following the march of white supremacists and neo-Nazis in Charlottesville, Virginia.

In these moments, which encompass far from the full extent of experiences of racism and racist violence, I have tried to frame the work in which we must engage within the mission and purpose of the academy. Our role in society — to pursue the truth — through the methodologies and disciplines through which we establish knowledge in our world, demands our engagement. In our response, we have sought to accelerate our academic commitment to addressing racial justice, and to address our own connection to the institution of slavery and the enduring legacy of racism, and to undo the structural elements that sustain this legacy.

We know this legacy is sustained by two elements: First, it is sustained by our own interiority — our beliefs and attitudes, our biases and prejudices, our ways of interpreting and making meaning in our world. Perhaps this element is unconscious, implicit and unintentional, but it is nevertheless omnipresent and fundamentally influential. We also know that the very ideas of race and subsequently of racism are social constructs, the product of early American scholarship, developed and nurtured in order to justify the institution of slavery.

The second element consists of institutional structures that perpetuate inequity and inequality. Consider what we have seen since mid-March with the pandemic caused by COVID-19: African Americans in our country have been hit disproportionately hard by COVID-19.

A study by amfAR, the Foundation for AIDS Research, done in collaboration with colleagues at our O’Neill Institute for National and Global Health Law, indicates that 22% of U.S. counties are “disproportionately black” and that these counties “account for 52% [of COVID-19 cases] and 58% [of COVID-19 deaths].” In a recent column, Michele L. Norris of the Washington Post indicated:

—“Blacks comprise 32% of Chicago’s population but nearly 70% of COVID-19 deaths.”

—“Blacks comprise 26% of Milwaukee’s population but account for 73% of COVID-19 deaths.”

—“Blacks account for 40% of COVID-19 deaths in Michigan even though they represent just 14% of the state’s population.”

—“In Louisiana blacks make up 32% of the state’s population but 70% of those who have died because of the virus.”

For the members of the Georgetown University community, this evidence of structural injustice in health care has animated the work of many of our colleagues for decades. Recently, through the work of our colleague, Professor Christopher King, Ph.D., we have a deeper grasp of the health disparities here in our nation’s capital. His 2016 report, *The Health of the African American Community in the District of Columbia: Disparities and Recommendations*, provided a comprehensive presentation of the realities here in the District.

In the coming days, a second

report, *Health Disparities in the Black Community: An Imperative for Racial Equity in the District of Columbia*, will be released. Professor King calls us to the work of achieving the day “when race is no longer a predictor of a health outcome.”

There are other structures — economic, educational, housing, criminal justice — that sustain inequity and inequality that are the enduring legacy of our American history. Coming out of these past three months, we know we have a nation to rebuild. We need to find ways to put 40 million Americans back into the workforce, and we must still contain a virus that remains a lethal threat to all of us.

At the same time, we cannot return to a status quo that leaves inequity and inequality in place. As part of that determination, we must address the conditions that lead to the senseless and indefensible loss of life of our fellow citizens. We need to confront the violence that shapes the daily experiences of far too many who expect so much more of us as a people. We need to listen to the anger, the pain, the trauma that accompany our failure to meet these expectations.

This requires the work of each of us and of all of us. Individually, in each of our own interiority, we must determine how we contribute to perpetuating injustice and sustaining structures that cannot continue and that *now must be reimagined*. And, for us in our shared membership in this Georgetown University community, it remains for us in the academy to contribute to this work of reimagining the social, political, economic and moral structures to ensure justice for all — and especially for those for whom it has been too long denied.

### **Cardinal Blase J. Cupich, Chicago**

When news came that this past Memorial Day weekend was Chicago’s bloodiest in five years, most of the violence affecting communities of color, we had no idea how much worse the week would get.

Eight hundred miles east, a white woman walking her dog through Central Park was asked by a birdwatcher to leash the pet as required by posted signs. The man happened to be black. She responded by promising to call the police and say that an “African American man is threatening my life,” treating 911

as a customer-service line.

Twelve hours later and 400 miles northwest of Chicago, a Minneapolis man was arrested for allegedly trying to pass a counterfeit \$20 bill. He also happened to be black, but his encounter with a white person on Memorial Day, a police officer, ended differently. He died, after the officer knelt on his neck for about nine minutes — despite the man’s desperate cries for air and, heartbreakingly, for his late mother. The man’s name was George Floyd. We must never forget it.

*We*. It is a difficult word for white Americans to use in these days when searing anguish, simmering anger and existential sorrow explode into protest, some of which descends into violence. White people must never pretend that our place is to narrate the experience of nonwhite Americans, let alone feel justified in simply condemning the violence against black people or the violence that has sparked from that justifiable outrage. No one should allow themselves to dismiss the aims of peaceful protestors because some among them exploited the anger by engaging in criminal acts. Nor should we dismiss the legitimate work of first responders and law enforcement despite the dangerous overreactions of some against protesters and journalists reporting on these demonstrations.

The responsibility of any neighbor, any citizen, especially those of us who profess belief in Jesus Christ, is to do the work of accompanying their brothers and sisters who carry this pain every day of their lives.

That work begins by understanding that when such feelings erupt they do not come from nowhere. They are the consequence of centuries of national racial injustice that began with the inhuman practice of slavery, was reinstitutionalized during the Jim Crow era and continues today with the myriad ways people of color are treated as less-than or worse.

People of color suffer discrimination and indignities not only from racist individuals but from the very structures erected by our society that were meant to protect the vulnerable.

Americans must realize that beneath the outrage is the same aspiration all people have to freely pursue a life of meaning and flourishing. The death of George Floyd was not the sole driver of

the civil unrest our nation is witnessing today. It just ignited the frustration of a people being told repeatedly in our society: “You don’t matter”; “you have no place at the table of life” — and this painful frustration has been building since the first slave ships docked on this continent.

This is where our conversation about healing should begin, not with simple condemnations but with facing facts. We need to ask ourselves and our elected officials: Why are black and brown people incarcerated at higher rates than whites for the same offenses? Why are people of color suffering disproportionately from the effects of the novel coronavirus? Why is our educational system failing to prepare children of color for a life in which they can flourish? Why are we still asking these questions and not moving heaven and earth to answer them not with words but with the systemic change it will take to finally right these wrongs?

These questions should be particularly troubling to people of faith. As the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops put it in its recent statement on the death of George Floyd and the resulting protests: “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.”

Citing a recent document on racism, the USCCB went on to say, “As bishops, we unequivocally state that racism is a life issue.” Indeed, racism and its death-dealing consequences are not just offenses against our brothers and sisters as fellow human beings. They are offenses against God, the Father of us all.

And how do people of faith respond when they realize they have offended God? They confess. They acknowledge their sin, express remorse and commit to doing better.

But when it comes to slavery, our nation’s original sin, and racism, which continues to enslave in our time, have we done that as Americans? Have we done it as a church? Or have we more often sought comfort in the “over-there-ness” of racist acts and crimes? Have we averted our gaze by pretending that “gang-related violence” and the conditions that make it possible are not really “our problem”?

Other societies have experienced unfathomable offenses against human-

ity and found ways to engage the history, to admit the crimes, to hold accountable those who committed them and to move toward something resembling reconciliation: the murder of 6 million Jews by the Nazi regime, the Rwandan genocide, the crimes of South African apartheid.

We Americans can do this too. We are well past overdue for such a national reconciliation and the need to account for the history of violence against people of color in this country.

Tragedy does not eradicate hope. If there is anything we Christians take from our faith, it is that even the darkest deeds can be redeemed by love. And love is what is called for now.

As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, “Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.”

Not the love of transactional friendships and cheap associations made by the click of a mouse button or an easy retweet. Signpost solidarity will not do. Only the hard work of familial love will set us on the path toward justice. The love we read about in Scripture. The love God has for his children, every one of us, even when we fail — especially when we fail.

Because God knows what his children are capable of: not only how we can fail in our humanity, but even more how we can build it up. And it is up to us to show God, to show all our brothers and sisters, the neighbors we know and the ones we will never meet, how deeply we can love.

#### **Cardinal Seán P. O’Malley, Boston**

In Boston we are physically miles away from Minneapolis. But no American city and, really, no American citizen is separated from what we have seen this week in vivid detail. The killing of George Floyd has catalyzed reactions across the nation. It has done so because it is not a singular isolated event.

The killing of George Floyd by a police officer in Minneapolis this week was morally wrong and must be legally prosecuted. To say this is to state the obvious, but it is worth saying because there is a powerful link between the moral and legal dimensions of the killing, which has now sparked protest across the country.

As a nation we entrust power, even lethal force, to our government and its

representatives in law enforcement. But there are both moral and legal limits to how force can be used. If officers of the law use force in the way millions of us saw in an eight-minute video, then trust in the government, in the law and in the legal system is deeply wounded.

That is why the legal prosecution, following constitutional standards, must proceed with care and urgency. The police failed the moral test in George Floyd’s case; now the court will be tested. What is morally wrong must be pursued vigorously by legal standards. That much is lucidly clear.

There is a history here, one documented over decades in print, and now in social media and on television in our homes. The history is clear and tragic: George Floyd was an African American man who died at the hands of a police officer. This is a narrative which has been repeated often and in multiple locations across the country. The history is well documented, but it is known experientially in the African American community in a way that is not widely shared.

The wider community is aware of some cases, but the African American community lives with the experience and memories of these deaths in an entirely different way. It is a daily reality — one they must speak to their children about and live themselves with some fear.

This gap between different communities in what is one country, one civic community, is the broader reality which this week’s events force any of us to reflect upon.

George Floyd’s death occurred in the midst of the most catastrophic health care crisis in our history. We are all threatened by it. But the African American community has been impacted in numbers far beyond its size in the country. This fact in turn is related to and repeated in other issues of health care, employment and housing.

Responding to George Floyd’s death reaches beyond one person to some of what it reminds us about in these larger realities of our nation. In responding to his death, some have used violence. I can understand the frustration, but I must strongly oppose those methods. For any of us, the singular voice of Dr. Martin Luther King still rings true, “Darkness cannot drive out darkness;

only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.”

#### **Sister Helen Prejean, CSJ**

I saw the video. I made myself watch the full atrocity, hearing George Floyd’s hoarse whisper, “I can’t breathe,” to Officer Derek Chauvin, pressing his knee on Floyd’s neck for almost nine minutes.

Now, across the nation “I can’t breathe” has become the rallying cry of nationwide protests against police brutality of black Americans.

And now, for the first time in my memory, we are witnessing a number of white public officials publicly connect police brutality against black people to the 400-year legacy of slavery.

Racism continues to permeate every aspect of American life: inequities in income, employment, housing, health care, education and racism’s most blatant manifestation: repeated, constant, never-ending, pervasive police brutality against black people.

Is anyone who knows anything of our U.S. racist history surprised at the protests now erupting across the nation?

The suffused anger and outrage against injustice done to black people for centuries is now exploding into mass protests, violence and destruction of property across the land.

At a time when we desperately need a national leader who can address these historic hurts and attempt to heal the nation, instead we get a White House occupant who fires across social media the warning, “When the looting starts, the shooting starts.”

In my opinion that is the most inflammatory message anyone in authority could send to aggrieved Americans, righteously demanding centuries-long delayed police reforms.

This “looting-shooting” threat has its own vile history, too, first uttered by Miami’s white supremacist police chief in the 1960s against civil rights demonstrators who were raising their voices against racial segregation and demanding their constitutional rights.

As a white woman of privilege, I’ve never had to fear police crashing into my home or pointing a gun to my head after stopping me on the highway. But I believe and support African Americans, who tell story after story of abuse, threats or death at the hands of law

enforcement.

And at the apex of government-sanctioned killing, in our miserably racist criminal justice system, I have personally witnessed the legalized execution of African Americans at the hands of government officials.

After 30 years' experience with courts and prisons and execution chambers, I've seen just how riddled with racism our entire criminal justice system is, so why should we expect local police forces to be any different?

Now, in this pivotal moment of history, in the wake of George Floyd's death and in respectful memory of so many people of color who have died at the hands of police, may Floyd's dying words, "I can't breathe," echo in our consciences and become our rallying cry.

We must join our black brothers and sisters in the struggle for police reform and complete reform of the criminal justice system, an institution rooted in racism.

Can any citizen breathe freely in a nation in which law enforcement officials, entrusted with serving and protecting our citizens, have themselves often proved to be the most feared, lethal threat of all?

Let us stand resolute: No more black deaths at the hands of police.

**Father Joseph M. McShane, SJ,  
Fordham University president**

It is with a heavy and (let me be honest here) angry heart that I write to you today. I suspect that your hearts are also angry and heavy with sorrow. And how could we not be angry, dismayed and sorrowful at this moment?

In the course of the past few painful months, we have witnessed the savage and senseless killings of George Floyd in Minneapolis and Ahmaud Arbery in Brunswick as well as many other instances of violence — lethal and not — against people of color in the United States. That is not to mention the long-standing economic violence against people of color and their communities in this country, and the widespread, systemic and shameful disregard for the value of their lives in the eyes of others.

(We have seen this systemic disregard quite clearly during the COVID-19 pandemic: Amid the suffering across the country and especially in the Bronx,

communities of color were and are more vulnerable and more harshly affected than are white communities.)

I do not think I have to convince any of you that these acts and this state of affairs are sinful and immoral, and that they go against everything that a Jesuit university stands for. I do, however, think that some of our fellow citizens need to be reminded that they are happening every day in our very midst — in our own communities.

Although we don't all like to admit it, people of color — and let's be frank, especially black people — live lives of relentlessly hostile scrutiny, and they have been telling us so since the ink on the 13th Amendment was barely dry.

Four years ago, when we were confronted with a sadly similar shameful moment, former President Obama wrote that "when incidents like this occur, there's a big chunk of our fellow citizenry that feels as if because of the color of their skin, they are not being treated the same. And that hurts. And that should trouble all of us. This is not just a black issue. It's not just a Hispanic issue. This is an American issue that we should all care about. All fair-minded people should be concerned." And he was and is right.

The problems that we must confront belong to all of us. Therefore, we need to own up to them. We have to own them. All of us. Their solutions also need to be owned by everyone but especially by our leaders and those in positions of authority and influence.

Yesterday, in the immediate aftermath of George Floyd's death, former President Obama once again issued a statement that said, in part, "we have to remember that for millions of Americans, being treated differently on account of race is tragically, painfully, maddeningly 'normal' — whether it's while dealing with the health care system, or interacting with the criminal justice system, or jogging down the street, or just watching birds in a park."

As you might imagine, I found myself returning to President Obama's haunting reflections over and over again in the course of the past few days. And I was made uneasy by them — in the best possible sense of that word. For you see, I heard in them the unmistakable ring of truth. And that truth pierced me to the heart.

Therefore, I asked myself how the Fordham family can and should respond to the challenges that the events of past week have presented to us. Of course, as a community of faith, we will pray for the repose of the souls of George Floyd and Ahmaud Arbery. We will also pray for their families as they wrestle with the losses they have suffered in and through the deaths of those whom they loved so dearly. That goes without saying, and I ask you to join me in those fervent prayers.

But, let's be honest. That is not enough. We must do more. We are a university community. Therefore, we must also recommit ourselves to the work that is proper to us as an academic community. A university's greatest strength is its intellectual capital — the research, teaching and learning that occurs both in and outside of the classroom. It is our central mission and the one on which we expend the great majority of our budget and most of our energy — intellectual and moral.

Tapping into these strengths and assets, we must recommit ourselves to the work of *educating for justice* and to doing all we can to figure out how our beloved nation, to paraphrase President Abraham Lincoln, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all are created equal, has allowed itself to stray from the ideals (and the promises those ideals hold out to all) upon which it was founded.

We are not, however, merely a university community. We are a Jesuit university community. And what does that mean for us and the work we must undertake? As I have told you before, I believe that the issues that divide and challenge our nation are *moral* issues. Therefore, I believe that precisely because we are a Jesuit institution, we have a special responsibility to reflect on the events of the past week and on the challenges that they have created for our nation in particularly moral terms.

What do I mean? Just this: We can remind our students (and ourselves) that the situation in which the nation now finds itself is one that requires us to engage in an honest examination of conscience and consciousness so that we can be what God wants us to be. If we are willing to engage in this examination of consciousness, we will be able to take the first step toward the conversion of

heart that will free us from the bondage of anger, frustration and suspicion that holds us back.

I will not lie to you. The work of conversion is hard. And frequently it takes time. A long time. But I assure you that it is worth the exertion that it requires. The death of innocents calls us to it. The Gospel that has always stood at the center of our life and mission calls us to it. Therefore, let us all look into our hearts and see what justice would look like for the communities of color that are languishing and being crushed under the weight of racism in our country.

Let us take to heart the loving invitation contained in the message issued on Friday by the U.S. Catholic Conference:

“Encounter the people who historically have been disenfranchised [and] continue to experience sadness and pain 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.”

As I said, the work of conversion is hard, but if we commit ourselves to its rigors, we will be able to redeem the promises of our founding ideals for all of our citizens, who are (in the eyes of God) our brothers and sisters. Our beloved brothers and sisters.

You are in my thoughts and prayers today and every day.

#### **Archbishop Gregory J. Hartmayer, OFM Conv, Atlanta**

The sin of racism continues to haunt America. In the past month, we have watched two black men die — one of them as he begged for his life. We wake this morning to face the outpouring of grief and rage over the latest manifestations of racism in America. In Atlanta, the birthplace of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., that anger boiled over last night into violence and destruction.

Yesterday, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a statement in response to the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis. In February, here in Georgia another black man, Ahmaud Arbery, was senselessly killed. I join my brother bishops in their condemnation of racism in all its forms. I join them in calling on all those in positions of

authority, police, elected officials and yes, even pastors, to struggle with this issue — to seek the conversion we need to do the hard work of pursuing true justice in our world.

I echo the words of Dr. Bernice King, daughter of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., from last night, when she said, “This is a time when we all have to listen — we have to listen to the cries coming out from the hearts and souls of my young brothers and sisters and all of the others that are in the streets of America right now and in our city.”

Dr. Bernice King called for nonviolent response to this evil. “We will never get to the end of justice and equity and true peace, which is not merely the absence of tension but the presence of justice, unless we do it through nonviolent means.”

Senseless murders will only become more normative in our society until we see each other as a reflection of our Creator and recognize the precious gift of human life from the moment of conception. God has never created a mistake. What we do to our life or another's life is rooted in our free will and a manifestation of love or evil in our world. Our free decisions have consequences.

I call on our Catholic community in Georgia to come together this Pentecost weekend and beyond. Let us seek out true justice. Let us encounter our neighbors in love and let us join in prayer and work for an end to racism. In the words of St. Paul VI, “If you want peace, work for justice.”

#### **Bishop Curtis J. Guillory, SVD, Beaumont, Texas**

“I can't breathe!” These were the dying words of George Floyd, a black man, as he was pinned down, in handcuffs, with a white police officer's knee on his neck. No matter the color of the officer or the person being arrested, the action is inhumane. But because the police officer was white and Mr. Floyd was black, it raises once again the ugliness of racism in our country — our country's original sin. Though much progress has been made, we evidently still have much to do.

Action is needed *now* to counteract racism and injustice, but violence, looting and burning buildings are *not* the actions to be taken. I am recalling Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s admoni-

tion, “Hate begets hate, violence begets violence.” That concept was vividly described in the Gospel of Matthew. As St. Peter draws a sword to defend our Lord, Jesus tells him, “Put your sword back in its sheath.” That was not the time for the sword to be used — and neither is this the time.

Instead, our actions — yours and mine — should be a courageous call for justice, community prayer that calls us together in our diversity and honest dialogue so that we can have a more just society. “People fail to get along because they fear each other; they fear each other because they don't know each other; they don't know each other because they have not communicated with each other.” — Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

I join with my fellow Texas bishops in offering our prayers for Mr. Floyd, his family and friends, all those affected by his killing and the events that followed. Let us pray as well for the family of the police officers involved in Mr. Floyd's death, for they are also hurting. I ask you to pray for the Holy Spirit's guidance as we approach Pentecost in order that we might work *now* to create a society where justice and peace are shared with all God's children.

“If you want peace, work for justice.”  
— Pope Paul VI

Know that each of you and our entire nation remain in my prayers.

#### **Bishop Anthony B. Taylor, Little Rock, Arkansas**

Last Sunday we celebrated the great feast of Pentecost, the day when Jesus' earliest followers were empowered by the Holy Spirit to go forth and proclaim to all the nations the good news that in Jesus' victory over the power of sin and death, the walls that separate people must now come down.

The diversity of languages that day gives witness to the fact that the kingdom of God will include people of every race and tongue. Jesus proclaimed this vision of inclusion throughout his public ministry. What was the greatest commandment of the law? We must love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength. And what is the Second Commandment? That we love our neighbor as ourselves. These are commandments of God, not just recommendations.

Loving our neighbor as ourselves leaves no room for anything that harms our neighbor. And in our country, no disease has inflicted more harm to our African American neighbors than that of racism. Both individual acts of hatefulness and systemic evils rooted in our nation's history that continue to produce societal differences that especially disadvantage many African American children right from birth.

If the George Floyd murder had been just an isolated incident, we might be able to chalk it up to a single bad actor — accompanied by several bad actor “see-no-evil” companions, made worse by the fact that as police officers they were sworn to uphold the law, not turn a blind eye to murder. But coming in the wake of several other such occurrences, it is clear that acts of racial hatred are not just something in the past — nor are African Americans the only victims.

Remember last year's massacre in El Paso that targeted Hispanics, killing 23 persons and injuring 23 more. Most of us are not so malicious as to ever do anything directly intended to harm someone of another race, but our willingness to tolerate the systemic economic and social disparities that so disadvantage people of color right from birth is also very damaging to the entire fabric of our society.

Surely all fair-minded people can see that this has got to change. Police officers as a group are not the problem — most of them are outstanding, self-sacrificing public servants tasked with a very demanding and dangerous job. Most of them deserve our compassion, respect and admiration. Moreover, there is no justification for violence, regardless of the righteous anger that many are feeling, nor the destruction of property, understandable though it may be.

The problem is the structures of racism that are embedded throughout our economy and society, much of which is invisible to us who are not ourselves disadvantaged but often glaringly evident to those who are — and so the frustration and grievances and pent-up anger builds.

The bottom line is that we as a nation need to remove those things that continue to harm our neighbor. Racism will only end when everyone has — and feels like they have — equal protection under the law, a just wage, decent housing and

true access to health care, among other basic human rights.

Here in the South, removing things that continue to harm our neighbor includes removing anything that serves to memorialize the Confederacy in a positive way. This is especially necessary when it comes to monuments to the so-called “Lost Cause,” most of which were erected not in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War but rather during the height of the Jim Crow era as a means of intimidation and assertion of white superiority.

The use of the Confederate battle flag must be abandoned as well, indeed anything intended to put this horror in our national history in a false positive light. Even if some consider these to be symbols of our identity as white Southerners, they need to be set aside because much of the population finds them hateful — otherwise we are not loving our neighbor as ourselves. Is that too high a price to pay for helping to heal the deep racial wounds in our nation's soul? Surely not.

You don't have to be African American to see these symbols and recoil with disgust. If our white Southern identity needs a touchstone — for what purpose I cannot imagine — we need to find something inoffensive instead. As for the Confederacy, the numerous cemeteries we have are already enough to memorialize a time that is better dead and buried once its bitter lessons have been learned.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once wrote, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly” (*Letter from a Birmingham Jail*, 1963).

What is the greatest commandment of the law? This is worth repeating! We must love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength, and our neighbor as ourselves. Racism and all its demeaning expressions must be eliminated not only because they harm our neighbor, but because they violate how God has created us to be.

#### **Archbishop Paul D. Etienne, Seattle**

The Catholic bishops of the United States recently issued a pastoral letter against racism titled “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 Seattle Police Department, “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 co-worker 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.

**Bishop Edward K. Braxton, Belleville, Illinois**

It has been my custom for many years to greet you with the words, "May the peace of Christ be with you!" These words have never been more heartfelt as our nation continues to struggle with the deadly coronavirus pandemic which has brought pain, suffering, death and financial losses to so many. Added to that is the brutal murder of Mr. George Floyd by a former police officer, Derek Chauvin.

Now the justifiable, peaceful demonstrations concerning the painful racial divide in this country are being undermined by the nationwide destructive civil unrest that has cost more innocent lives, destroyed needed neighborhood businesses, and turned the attention of the nation away from Mr. Floyd's death and the concerns of nonviolent demonstrators.

The crisis has been exacerbated by the rhetoric of some elected officials and some extremist groups. Representatives of the media have not only informed us but also they have at times reinforced various biases. I share your anxiety, concern and bewilderment in the face of this sad and volatile situation.

Let us pray that St. Charles Lwanga and his Ugandan companions, who were brutally martyred, will intercede for us and for the United States before the Prince of Peace.

It is important for all of us to see the direct connection between the return to eucharistic celebrations in our churches and the need to heal the racial divide in the United States. When we participate in the celebration of the Eucharist, we are fed on the body and blood of Christ. This is more than spiritual food that fills us with grace. It is nourishment that calls us to conversion to live by Christ's law of love of God and neighbor, and work with sincere hearts for healing all forms of strife and conflict in our communities.

We as Catholics may feel that we are not in any way contributing to the terrible virus of racial strife the country is enduring. But if we examine our consciences, there may be small things we are doing and saying that reinforce this divide.

We may subconsciously harbor stereotypes of certain groups of people without realizing how these stereotypes influence attitudes and actions. We may think that since some African American men commit serious crimes, we must give the police the benefit of the doubt when they arrest them. Since they are risking their lives, perhaps they need to use excessive force.

We need this bread from heaven now more than ever. If only our neighborhoods and our parish communities were more diverse, with large numbers of people of different racial backgrounds living as neighbors and receiving the body and blood of Christ together. This would make it easier for us to sit and share our views over coffee with individuals who are unlike us.

While discussing these difficult days with a group of Catholic people, one person said with painful honesty, "I fear that these problems will still be with us 100 years from now." Another said that "sadly, young African American men kill one another far too frequently in neighborhoods far from ours with little notoriety. Why is it that when a white police officer kills an African American man, it is national news? Do not all lives matter?"

We must get Jesus Christ out of our reopening church tabernacles and into our hearts, into our neighborhoods.

It is with a greater sense of urgency, therefore, that I write to you today to give you further instruction on the gradual reopening of our churches for the renewal of the sacramental gifts given by Christ to the church at the Last Supper. Gov. J.B. Pritzker has moved us into the next phase of his executive order modifying the stay-at-home order with guidance for opening possibilities, including our Catholic churches. As you see in his new directives, the governor has been very receptive to the recommendations made by the bishops of the province of Chicago.

I wish to thank the leaders of our parishes, who have been working hard to prepare for the reopening of our

churches. As I have stated in my letter of May 13, 2020, once the celebration of Sunday Eucharists begins, the bishops have decided to keep the current dispensation in place.

However, if the safety procedures provided in the sacramental guidelines in the parish reopening plan are strictly adhered to and parishes have completed the necessary preparations to receive the faithful back into the church, parishes may begin the regular celebration of the Eucharist this weekend, June 6-7.

I would ask you to print the Parishioner Reopening Guide and give it to all parishioners as they enter the church this weekend. This will make the transition easier. This guide offers to the Christian faithful helpful tips on what to do before they arrive at church, what to expect when they get there and what to do during and after the Mass.

If you are planning on establishing a ticket or reservation system, now is the time to do so. There are many apps available. Be sure to allow for those individuals unsure of or unable to use computers or cellphones to make reservations. Provide the parish office phone number and assign a team member to pick up the voicemail reservations.

It is important that you reassure those who are concerned about immigration status that no information other than their name is needed to register. There should be no requirements to include phone numbers, mailing addresses or any other type of contact information to register to participate in the Eucharist.

I am very aware that all parishes are not yet ready to reopen. I am counting on the parish leadership to be mindful of the seriousness of this pandemic and act out of an abundance of caution. Do not rush to reopen if you are not truly prepared. Move at your own pace. Be sure that all safety precautions have been taken. Please take your time and be vigilant in following carefully all of the guidelines that I have sent you. The Office of Worship will certainly continue to help you in this process and provide as much assistance as possible.

I know that for some parishes with limited staff and resources this may be a particularly tedious undertaking. You and some of your parishioners may even wonder if this is really necessary. We remind ourselves of a central teaching of the Second Vatican Council:

“The Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life. The other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented toward it. For in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the church, namely Christ himself, our Pasch. The Eucharist is the efficacious sign and sublime cause of that communion in the divine life and that unity of the people of God by which the church is kept in being. It is the culmination both of God’s action sanctifying the world in Christ and of the worship we offer to Christ and through him to the Father in the Holy Spirit.”

I thank each of you for your hard work and generous dedication to these efforts to make it possible for the people of God to gradually return to the house of the Lord to sing his praises and plead for his guidance at this difficult and uncertain juncture in our history.

May we all heed the words of Mr. Floyd’s brother Terrence: “We are a peaceful family, a God-fearing family. We do not want violence, stealing and burning down our stores. We want the end of racism in America. We want justice and peace.”

St. Charles Lwanga and companions, pray for us! *Oremus pro invicem.*

Prayerfully and appreciatively yours in Christ.

### **Bishop Robert J. Brennan, Columbus, Ohio**

The events surrounding the death of Mr. George Floyd in Minneapolis are deeply troubling for all people, causing unrest and anger. The feelings surrounding this situation and others like it are justified, and there are so many ways those feelings and thoughts can and should be voiced.

We are blessed to live in a nation that affords us the right to express ourselves, but the violent protests that have occurred in Columbus and elsewhere only bring additional harm to innocent persons and to business owners, so many of whom have suffered during the coronavirus pandemic. They represent a participation in the toxic cloud of stereotypical judgment which such protests rightly seek to condemn.

Mr. Floyd’s death calls for an honest self-examination on the part of all of us that seeks to identify sinful attitudes and

judgments that must be remedied. Laws and policies must do more to protect the fundamental rights of those at risk.

I recognize also that most in our law enforcement community are very good people who find these situations abhorrent and have a strong reaction against what has happened. They too share in the call for investigation and action to prevent these situations from occurring again. I thank them for their service and willingness to risk their well-being to help assure the common good.

As people of faith in God, we must be totally committed to eradicating racism and encouraging all our neighbors to peace toward people of every race, creed and color. The path of peace will lead us toward bringing an end to everything that is contradictory to the call to love God and neighbor.

I invite all in our community here in central Ohio to join together in this effort to forge a path built with the pavers of justice and reverence for every human life toward a harmony that allows us to enjoy a peaceful future for our children and for all ages to come.

### **Archbishop Dennis M. Schnurr, Cincinnati**

Yesterday, on Pentecost Sunday, we learned from St. Paul that “as a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit” (1 Cor 12:12-14).

These words are particularly poignant coming as they do just days after the senseless and brutal killing of George Floyd at the hands of a law enforcement officer in Minneapolis. I join Archbishop Bernard A. Hebda of St. Paul and Minneapolis and my brother bishops across the United States in praying for the repose of the soul of Mr. Floyd and all others who have lost their lives in a similar manner.

This deeply disturbing incident reminds us once again of the divisions that continue to plague our human family, which is called to be one body in Christ.

Through creation, as a divine gift, God has endowed each person with intrinsic worth and value. Human life is sacred. Every human being is cre-

ated in the image and likeness of God. The dignity and sanctity of each person, without exception, is inherent and permanent, and is to be respected from conception to natural death.

Because of this, the Catholic Church opposes as profoundly sinful racism and anything that is antithetical to God’s will and the Gospel of life.

We cannot turn a blind eye to the humiliation, indignity and unequal opportunity experienced by millions of our brothers and sisters simply because of their race or the color of their skin and yet still profess to respect every human life. Opposing racism must therefore be an integral part of our pro-life witness as Catholics.

What is needed, and what I am urging for each of us, is a genuine conversion of heart, a conversion that will compel change and ultimately reform our institutions and society.

As Catholics, we are called to radiate the love of Christ to all people and to be witnesses to his kingdom on earth. We need to look deep within ourselves in prayerful humility and ask our Lord to remove any vestige of prejudice or hatred from our hearts, any sinful inclination that keeps us from loving as he does.

Please join me either in person or online this Wednesday, June 3, the feast of St. Charles Lwanga, at 5:15 p.m. at the Cathedral of St. Peter in Chains for a “Holy Hour for Conversion and Peace.” Many parishes across our archdiocese are also engaging in prayer for conversion and peace.

As one body in Christ, let us pray:

We thank you, O Lord, for in your loving wisdom you created one human family with a diversity that enriches our communities.

We pray to you, O Lord, that we always recognize each member of this human family as being made in your image and beloved by you, with worth and dignity.

We pray to you, O Lord, that we may envision a way forward to heal the racial divisions that deny human dignity and the bonds between all human beings.

We pray to you, O Lord, that we may affirm each person’s dignity through fair access for all to economic opportunity, housing, education and employment.

We pray to you, O Lord, that we may have eyes to see what is possible

when we reach out beyond fear, beyond anger, to hold the hand of our sisters, our brothers.

We thank you, O Lord, for your call and challenge to us that we may reveal your teachings and your love through our actions to end racism and to proclaim that we are all your children, heirs to your sacred creation. Amen. (USCCB)

### **Bishop Gerald R. Barnes, San Bernardino, California**

We are living through a vulnerable time as we face the acute threat to human life in the coronavirus pandemic. In the midst of this we are now confronted with the death of George Floyd at the hands of law enforcement in Minnesota.

The images of Mr. Floyd's death that have surfaced are heartbreaking and disturbing. Let us offer our prayers for his eternal rest and that God console his family and community in this time of great pain.

It is imperative that this matter be investigated and adjudicated with total impartiality so that justice can be served. The wound that many are carrying with regard to race and its relationship to our criminal justice system has been tragically reopened. We cannot dismiss the outcry of the people for justice for all before the law.

While we do not condone violent and destructive responses to this, let us, as people of faith, receive the justifiable feelings of anger, exasperation and despair that are being expressed with empathy and understanding.

And, finally, let us ask ourselves, how can we take the lesson that we are learning about the value of human life from COVID-19 and apply it to this situation? How can we carry out relationship-building without any walls of color, gender, age, economic condition, political party or other divisions that plague us? I invite you to pray over these questions.

### **Archbishop Oscar A. Solis, Salt Lake City**

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 a 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 humankind, 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, Ahmaud 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-prayersof-the-faithful.cfm>.

3. Ensure parishioners are aware of and access “Open Wide Our Hearts,” the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops 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. ■

**Readers: Due to the coronavirus pandemic, most events are being canceled. The following events have either been canceled, postponed or moved online.**

## June 23

Orientele Lumen XXIV VIRTUAL Ecumenical Conference. Sponsor: Eastern Christian Publications. Theme: "Liturgy and Icons: Worshiping Through Icons." Two-hour live interactive panel discussion via Zoom 1:00 p.m.-3:00 p.m. For links to prerecorded speakers' video presentations and to register for the panel discussion: <https://olfoundation.net/conferences/ol-xxiv>

## June 30-July 2

Annual Catholic Media Conference WILL TAKE PLACE ONLINE: "Together While Apart." [www.catholicmediaconference.org](http://www.catholicmediaconference.org)

## July 7-10

National Association of Pastoral Musicians Annual Convention WILL TAKE PLACE ONLINE. Theme: "Called From Living Waters: A Virtual Event to Renew Our Hearts and Spirits." <https://npm.org>

## \*July 7-10 and 13-17, 1:00 p.m.-4:30 p.m.

Catholic Association for Diocesan Ecumenical and Interreligious Officers Annual Summer Institute for Interreligious Leadership WILL TAKE PLACE ONLINE. Registration: Father Don Rooney, [frdonrooney@stbernapar.org](mailto:frdonrooney@stbernapar.org)

## July 15-19

Annual Tekawitha Conference. CANCELED.

## \*July 15-19

Unity Explosion 2020: An Evangelization and Liturgical Conference. CANCELED.

## \*July 18-23

National Black Sisters' Conference Joint Conference. CANCELED.

## July 23-26

Social Action Summer Institute of the Roundtable Association of Catholic Diocesan Social Action Directors. CANCELED.

\*signifies new entry

## On File

President Donald Trump and first lady Melania Trump visited the St. John Paul II National Shrine in Washington June 2 before he signed an executive order back at the White House to expand U.S. support for international religious freedom efforts. The cross-town trip was excoriated by several Catholic leaders, including Archbishop Wilton D. Gregory of Washington, who said he found it "baffling and reprehensible that any Catholic facility would allow itself to be so egregiously misused and manipulated in a fashion that violates our religious principles" by allowing the visit. The Trumps' visit to the shrine in Northeast Washington came on the 41st anniversary of the start of St. John Paul II's pilgrimage to his native Poland, the first trip by the pope during which he repeatedly addressed religious and political freedom. Archbishop Gregory said Catholic teaching calls the faithful to "defend the rights of all people, even those with whom we might disagree." The evening before the shrine visit, Trump walked from the White House to St. John Episcopal Church, which was set afire during protests May 31 that called for the nation to address racism and police violence after the killing of George Floyd, an African American, by a white police officer May 25. Authorities fired flash-bang shells, tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse a crowd that had gathered in Lafayette Square across from the White House so Trump could walk

to the church, where he held up a Bible as photographers captured the scene. Archbishop Gregory in his June 2 statement questioned the decision to disperse the protesters in such a manner. "St. John Paul II was an ardent defender of the rights and dignity of human beings. His legacy bears vivid witness to that truth. He certainly would not condone the use of tear gas and other deterrents to silence, scatter or intimidate them for a photo opportunity in front of a place of worship and peace." Episcopal Church leaders also condemned the attack on peaceful protestors and the use of their church as a political prop. The St. John Paul II National Shrine issued a statement about the visit less than two hours after the president and first lady left. It said White House officials originally scheduled the visit "as an event for the president to sign an executive order related to global religious freedom." The statement added, "This was fitting given St. John Paul II was a tireless advocate of religious liberty throughout his pontificate." At least one other bishop was critical of the shrine visit. Bishop John E. Stowe of Lexington, Kentucky, tweeted early June 2 that he hoped during the visit "someone proclaims today's Gospel (Mk 12:13-17) where Herodians and Pharisees are called out for their hypocrisy." A spokeswoman for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops said the bishops would not comment on the event because it "was not ours."