

Statement by the APP Regarding the Recent Killings of People of Color

(Ap'd 6/8/2020)

The Association of Pittsburgh Priests is outraged and heartbroken over the murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and so many others which reveal a complete disregard for the lives and dignity of People of Color in our country. The racism that is at the heart of these incidents penetrates every aspect of life in the United States, seeding the terror that threatens communities of color and disfigures all our humanity. The Association of Pittsburgh Priests stands in solidarity with those in Pittsburgh and around the country who are protesting White supremacy with their voices and their bodies, and we recommit ourselves to working to dismantle systemic racism in all its forms.

Pope John Paul II called racism "the most persistent and destructive evil of the nation." As Catholics, it is not enough to relegate our concern to words, thoughts, and prayers. Our church, at every level, must speak out boldly and unequivocally against the sin of racism, including the plague of police brutality aimed at George Floyd and so many other people of color. Our church—from our institutional leaders through the faithful in the pews—must let the injustice and violence of these needless deaths seep into our bones, disturb our consciousness, rend our hearts, and puncture our souls.

This is especially true for White Catholics who, because of privilege, are afforded a safe distance from the despair and agony that communities of color experience in moments like this. None of us can stand for this any longer. We encourage our Diocese of Pittsburgh Catholic White members to support People of Color movements in the area and stand with them as allies. Those who seek to keep the system intact for their own power rely on White people remaining silent and separated from movements for justice. Our silence would render us complicit.

Defeating racism requires tangible steps to build an anti-racist society, including addressing the culture of policing that upholds White supremacy and working to dismantle it. Together, we need to teach the history of systemic and institutional racism, and dive deeply into the discomfort that such conversations—that such realities—raise for some of us, especially White people.

Our church's history includes support for slavery, the promotion of segregation, discrimination against people of color, and the silence that equals complicity. Repentance demands that we raise our voices and take action each and every time one of us is threatened, harmed or killed. In May, it was our brother, George Floyd. His death—and the deaths of so many People of Color year after year—exposes the historical reality that Black lives don't matter in our country. Our church should be at the forefront of changing that reality and asserting that Black lives do matter.

For the Association of Pittsburgh Priests, we bring our vocation of peacemaking and our commitment to gospel nonviolence to confront the personal and systemic racism that perpetuates deep spiritual and social brokenness and endangers each of us. The violence which flows from racism is an affront to the God who creates, redeems and sanctifies all and calls us together as one family.

For those of us who would follow Jesus, our attention needs to be on this world, here and now. We are called to find the Jesus who is still here, crucified in our midst, to stand at the foot of that Cross, and to mourn. To mourn for George Floyd. And to turn that mourning into the action needed to heal our world and dismantle the racism that upholds a culture of death.

Adapted from the Pax Christi USA Statement for the Association of Pittsburgh Priests, June 8, 2020