

Shared here is a letter co-written by Cardinal Cupich and Bishop Horace E. Smith, M.D., senior pastor of Apostolic Faith Church. Published by the editorial board of the *Chicago Tribune*, this commentary is for all within our community to reflect and pray upon.

Systemic racism is real, and all Americans play a role in addressing it

It has been a summer of anguish for Black Americans. Six months after Breonna Taylor was shot to death by Louisville police officers in a botched drug raid, the nation is once again seized by grief, anger and despair over the spectacle of another young Black person killed by police — and no one has been indicted for her killing. After three days of deliberation, a Kentucky grand jury has charged one now-former police officer with recklessly endangering Taylor’s neighbors, even though she was the one who ended up dead.

We write on behalf of a group of pastors that also includes the Rev. Ira J. Acree, senior pastor of Greater St. John Bible Church; the Rev. Chris Harris, pastor of Bright Star Church Chicago; the Rev. Marshall Hatch, senior pastor of New Mount Pilgrim Baptist Church; and the Rev. Otis Moss III, senior pastor of Trinity United Church of Christ.

As pastors who minister to Black families, brown families, Asian families and white families, we find ourselves once again faced with the horrifying question: Why does this keep happening, and what can we do about it? After we do our part to bind up the deep psychic wounds of our parishioners, neighbors, friends and family members, we are left asking, what now? Pray for peace, march for peace, work for peace — yes, peace. This is what Christians are supposed to be for, believing as we do in the Prince of Peace. And who could argue against it? In the face of wanton violence, we are called to take responsibility for building a culture of nonviolence.

But while peace may be necessary to the cause, it is insufficient, for creating a culture of peace requires something that ensures its endurance. That something is what we call justice.

Justice is a complex thing. It takes hard work. It requires systems of transparency, vigilance, fairness and accountability. It needs people who take stock of and resist systems of injustice. One of those is racism. We have heard from those who claim there is no such thing as systemic racism. We have been told that racism is something that perverts the hearts of individual women and men, and that in the absence of avowed racists — of which we still have not a small number in this country — there can be no racist system.

It can be comforting to people who have never experienced racial prejudice when they reflect on their lives and cannot identify times when they have behaved in racist ways. Look, some may say, at the strides our society has made since the era of institutionalized slavery. Yes, our Black brothers and sisters are no longer made to use different water fountains, explicitly barred from “Whites Only” shops, bought and sold as chattel — all instances of systemic injustice.

But our Christian faith demands more than an acknowledgment of gains. It requires that we make an examination of conscience, not simply of our own individual consciences, but collectively, as a nation. We are called to examine our various social and governmental systems and ask whether they are bearers of justice or its opposite.

We don’t need to look back very far in Chicago’s history to see one of the most notorious examples of systemic racism: contract buying, the practice of predatory home pricing and sales that undermined the ability of Black families to accrue wealth as white families could.

We cannot turn away from the church’s own history, especially when it comes to mono-ethnic and mono-racial congregations. And we see other ways in which people of color are systemically disadvantaged: unemployment rates are much higher for people of color; the median wealth of white people is about 10 times what it is for Black people; quality and availability of education — by law — health care, transportation, even grocery stores are all much worse for Black Americans. These disparities are not accidental. They are the inevitable outcomes of systems designed through hostility or neglect to make it harder for Black Americans to flourish, or even to survive.

As the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops put it in its recent letter, “Open Wide Our Hearts”: “Racism can only end if we contend with the policies and institutional barriers that perpetuate and preserve the inequality — economic and social — that we still see all around us.”

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It's that last part that may be the hardest. Because seeing injustice is but the first step on the road to justice. Taking that step means being able to put aside one's own fears and sensitivities surrounding the issue of racial injustice. It means being able to see the fears of those who may not look like us, or live near us, or be able to afford what we can afford, to see their aspirations, their desire for safe neighborhoods, good education, meaningful job opportunities. It means, in a word, cultivating empathy.

For people of faith, it means looking at one another not as competitors in a cultural contest, as if the success of one kind of person requires the failure of another. No, we are called to look upon one another as God looks upon us, as responsible for one another, as children of the Creator who fashioned us in his image, and who wants nothing more for his family than a life of lasting peace secured by abiding justice. Or, to put it another way, as Pope Paul VI did: "If you want peace, work for justice."



Congratulations!

Congratulations to Deacon John & Karen Mutnansky, who are celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary.

Blessing of the Pets

Our annual Blessing of the Pets will be on **Saturday, October 10th** at 12:00 noon in Mary's Plaza. Humans are required to wear a mask, pets are not.



WeShare — Online Giving

With the Coronavirus emergency, if you wish to give online, please go to our parish website, www.stchristinaparish.org, where you can find more information about online giving. On the left side of the home page click on Online Giving WeShare and follow the instructions.

Sunday, October 4th Mass

Please watch Sunday, October 4th Mass with Fr. Tom on the parish website, stchristinaparish.org.

Bulletin Submission Guidelines

To submit items to *The Sign*, please email your article or announcement (**HARD COPIES CANNOT BE ACCEPTED**) to Marybeth Sprague at saint.christina.bulletin@gmail.com by **Monday at 12:00 noon** for publication in the following Sunday's bulletin. Earlier deadlines apply to some holidays.

Microsoft Word is the preferred file format; Microsoft Publisher or high-quality PDF files are also acceptable if necessary. Please send any accompanying images as **separate email attachments** at the highest resolution possible. Acceptable image formats are JPG, TIF, or PNG.

We reserve the right to edit submissions for content or space.



Cardinal Cupich's Statement on the murder of George Floyd and its aftermath

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. 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 twenty-dollar 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.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Cardinal Blase J. Cupich

Cardinal Cupich column: It's time for a national reconciliation

Please see below the recent *Chicago Catholic* column by Cardinal Cupich, "[It's time for a national reconciliation](#)," and share with others in our parish and school communities.

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 bird-watcher 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 9 minutes — despite the man's desperate cries for air, and, heart-breakingly, for his late mother. The man's name was George Floyd. We must never forget it.

(Read Cardinal Cupich's [May 31 statement](#).)

"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 non-white 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 re-institutionalized 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 humanity 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.