

31 August 2016

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Rev P. John Bauer
Basilica of St. Mary
88 N 17th St
Minneapolis, MN 55403

CC: Ms. Janice Andersen, Dir. of Social Justice; Mr. Erik Miles, Christian Life Rep; Jill Ahern, Parish Council Chair; and, Ann Wilczynski, President **Basilica Landmark** at **The Basilica of St. Mary**. Mr. John Hedba, interim-Archbishop at **Archdiocese of St. Paul & Mpls.** Archbishop Joseph E. Kurtz, President of the **U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops**. Archbishop Christophe Pierre, **Vatican Ambassador to United States**. His Holiness, Pope Francis at **The Holy See of Vatican City State**. Ms. Betsy Hodges, Mayor and Ms. Janee Hartau, Chief of Police at **The City of Minneapolis**. Ms. Nekima Levy Pounds, Esq., President **NAACP Minneapolis**. Mr. Ed Graf, Superintendent **Minneapolis Public Schools**.

Dear Fr. Bauer,

I write in behalf of Me to Racial Healing, to respectfully seek your engagement of unmistakable change in our Church. Accompanying this letter you'll find information that honors Pope John XXIII's directive: "[See, Judge, Act](#)." The overview, analysis and request for action that addresses a recent incident and, more so, the longstanding realities of our black neighbors, as they relate to our Catholic obligation to ensure social justice in our communities.

I am a lifelong Catholic, former member of the Basilica of St. Mary in Minneapolis and current member of Church of the Ascension, in North Minneapolis. I am also founder of [Me to We Racial Healing](#), an international group headquartered in Minnesota. These experiences and others make me aware that among the most intransigent tests Christians face have to do with race and ethnicity. Many are global or theoretical in scope. I'd like to focus on local contexts and real-life responses. Keeping in mind what Pope Francis said on his visit to the United States last summer. "**To use a telling phrase of the Rev. Martin Luther King, we have defaulted on a promissory note.**"

While the attached pages establish contextual realities, please do not mistake them as superficial documentation or open-ended complaints. They are supplied as a resource, developed for the express intent of informing, inciting and accelerating clear efforts and concrete outcomes. Their purpose would be utterly lost if you don't feel compelled to doing substantive work to change the circumstances and structures behind the stories of neglect their gestalt tells.

Accordingly, I beg you to also hold in sustained conscience what our beloved Pope John Paul XXIII told us, in 1963, of our "duty to carry out our economic and social activities in a Christian manner." And similar words drafted that same year by Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., in his anguished [Letter from a Birmingham Jail](#) to his fellow Christian leaders. "In the midst of blatant injustices inflicted upon the Negro I have watched white churchmen stand on the sideline and mouth pious irrelevancies and sanctimonious trivialities," he wrote. As well as:

"In deep disappointment I have wept over the laxity of the church. But be assured that my tears have been tears of love. There can be no deep disappointment where there is not deep love. Yes, I love the church. How could I do otherwise? (...) Yes, I see the church as the body of Christ. But, oh! How we have blemished and scarred that body through social neglect and through fear of being nonconformists."

We know this. "The solemn proclamation of human rights is contradicted by painful reality," our Catechism tells us. "There is a gap between the 'letter' and the 'spirit' of human rights, which can often be attributed to a merely formal recognition of these rights." For citizens of Minneapolis and all Catholic communities, the Magisterium's reminder of the "contradiction inherent in affirming rights, without acknowledging corresponding responsibilities," makes it imperative that all carry out their respective duties—to *finally* achieve authentic social justice for all.

Please lead this holy work by employing that greatest of laws that Jesus Himself gave us, to *love our neighbors as ourselves* (Bible, Mark 12:31). While we, as Reverend King envisioned, carve "a tunnel of hope through the dark mountain of disappointment," powerfully "meeting the challenge of this decisive hour." Let us hasten to act on the words from that wonderful hymn. "The Lord of all kindness has called us to be a light for his people," and "build a city of God."

In Peace and Love,



Andrea Morisette Grazzini
Me to We Racial Healing

An Overview, Analysis and Request for Action on Social Justice.

Made for and to—

**the Co-Cathedral of the Basilica of St. Mary, Minneapolis,
The Holy Roman Catholic Church of the United States**

and

All Christian and all other faith-based groups of any denomination in the United States

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Solidarity is the moral virtue of “firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good. It is “not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people.”

—Pope John Paul II

Purpose and Power of Symbolism

We Catholics are steeped in the semiotics of our religion. These are meant to open our hearts, inform our minds and engage our bodies in our faith’s ‘meaning’ and ‘methods.’ Symbolism permeates all we do and experience from Baptism to final Anointing. In every sacrament, sermon and architectural structure, we are invited to spiritual dialogue. “At once body and spirit, (we) express and perceive spiritual realities through physical signs and symbols (Vatican-Christian Mystery).” So, we cross ourselves and bow to the crucifix, kneel in prayer and greet each other with a sign of peace. It’s how we sustain our relationship with God and in the communal relationships to which He calls us.

All of this, along with the image below inspires this request for action. The photo features [Black Lives Matter](#)¹ leaders, including, in red, [Nekima Levy-Pounds](#), president of the Minneapolis Chapter of the [NAACP](#) and longtime professor of law at [the University of St. Thomas](#), in St. Paul. Immediately in front of and facing her is Janice Andersen, Director of Christian Life at the Basilica. The photo was apparently taken after officers from the Minneapolis Police Department (MPD) became aggressive with nonviolent demonstrators at last summer’s Basilica Block Party. The popular event, whose proceeds support the “[Basilica of Hope](#),” was founded to insure the building remains “a beacon,” as Director of Liturgy Dr. Johan VanParys refers to it. He [depicts](#) the cathedral’s pro-social meaning as to “reach out to the people (VanParys).” When then-rector Fr. Michael J. O’Connell was enjoined by then-city council member Sharon Sayles Belton and mayor Don Fraser to help stop increasing cycles of poverty in Minneapolis, he recalls, “This building has to make an impact on this community (to) [justify the enormous sums](#) being poured into (it) (Grazzini, *Go With God* pg. 2).” Basilica began using this quote to inspire and orient it’s work:

“Seek the well-being of the city to which I have sent you.”

– Jeremiah 29:7



Though Ms. Andersen was likely not aware of or intending it, her posture communicates something contrary. Her arms, stretched wide, suggest an awkward protectiveness. Even a tragic incongruence, perhaps. Highlighting Ms. Levy-Pound’s question: “Why (did) the Basilica hire a police force that has perpetrated violence to work security at the event?”²

Please prayerfully reflect on Ms. Levy-Pounds’s question.

¹ [Black Lives Matter](#) started in 2012 after the murderer of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin, George Zimmerman, was acquitted. The dehumanization of Martin and other young black men, many killed by police, fueled the national movement to insure that black lives should matter as much as all others.

² Ms. [Nekima Levy-Pounds](#)’ comments are from an August 1, 2016 [post](#) she made on her Facebook account, about a Black Lives Matter demonstration at the Basilica Block in July, 2016, and the related encounter with Janice Andersen and Minneapolis Police Officers who were serving as security for it.

What “signs and symbols (that) communicate with others, through language, gestures, and actions (Catechism 1146)” are Basilica’s black neighbors likely to interpret? Might they experience a barrier between their concerns and Church interests? Do our prevailing actions communicate efforts for ‘seeking the well-being of the city?’ Or, just the City’s authorities? Does the sum of our behaviors representatively encapsulate decades of division this [first American basilica](#) would have witnessed in all of her years? The vision evokes the vestiges of a tumultuous history since its public opening in 1913. It was that same year that America celebrated the 50th Anniversary of the [Emancipation Proclamation](#), enacted the [14th Amendment to the Constitution](#), brought us [Rosa Parks’](#) birth, and [“Moses” Harriet Tubman’s](#) death.

The dissonances seem metaphorically akin to a cavernous Cathedral, where an ephemeral enigma echoes against massive stone columns and stained glass, mumbling Holy Scriptures, while a flickering altar candle reveals glimpses of abayent shame in unspoken doctrinal negligences. As the photo accidentally animates, this all seems reminiscent of the ironic “Midwest Christian,” “Minnesota Nice” persona. Those socially acceptable facades that belie the hidden truths of our city’s abysmal race record. Though easily overlooked, this all conflicts with Catholic teaching: “As a human person is entitled to the legal protection of his rights,” wrote Pope John XXIII, “such protection must be effective, unbiased, and strictly just (JXXIII, *Pacem* 27).”

It can’t be said enough that certainly it is not assumed that Ms. Andersen or any specific others at Basilica are unconscious or intentional enemies of justice. I worked under her leadership at it’s St. Vincent de Paul mission and well understand that nuances exist beyond appearances. She only had the misfortune of symbolically embodying the persistent persona and perception of our Church. Which induced the question: *Is our Church a true friend to black lives?* If so, how would we know?

From Theory to Practice

“The Church’s social doctrine is presented as a ‘work site’ (Compendium 86).” In the spirit of engaging the Basilica beyond social charity to the commission of social justice, this letter seeks to refocus our Church to our ‘work.’ The mutually rewarding labors of a transcendent kind of love. One that Pope Benedict XVI described as “the extraordinary force which leads people to opt for courageous and generous engagement in justice (Benedict, *Caritas* par. 1).” While Pope John XXIII acknowledged that the “transition from theory to practice is of its very nature difficult,” he was unequivocal, too, reminding us that we cannot fulfill our Christian obligation without actively practicing “the right use of liberty (JXXIII *Mater*, par. 228-232).” And when Archbishop Joseph Kurtz spoke at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops last year about our “violent, sorrowful history of racial injustice” that “has destroyed communities and broken down families,” he was clear: “Our efforts must address root causes.”

Indeed, “Catholic social teaching is an important framework for calling people of faith to accountability,” says Ms. Levy-Pounds, also a faithful Christian, explaining the Block Party demonstration. “We saw our advocacy as a chance to bring the issue of police reform to the Church’s doorstep.” It sounds a bit like something Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. might have said 50-some years ago. Not long after Pope John XXIII’s 1961 encyclical, King addressed his peers—fellow religious leaders who questioned his methods (King, *Letter*). “I am in Birmingham because injustice is here,” he wrote in 1963.

“I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro’s great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is (...) the white moderate, who is more devoted to ‘order’ than to justice; (...) who constantly says: ‘I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct action’; (...) Shallow understanding from people of goodwill is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. (King, par. 21). I had hoped the white moderate would understand law and order exist for the purpose of establishing justice and that when they fail in this purpose they become the dangerously structured dams that block the flow of social progress. (King par. 21). Far from being disturbed by the presence of the church, the power structure of the average community is consoled by the church’s silent--and often even vocal--sanction of things as they are (King, par. 37).”

His words underscored, in many ways, a point delineated by Pope John XXIII two years prior: “It is useless to admit that a man has a right to the necessities of life, unless we also do all in our power to supply him with means sufficient for his livelihood (JXXIII, *Pacem* par. 32).” That same year, 1961, Thomas Merton added granularity by noting that changing government, alone, does not suffice as an adequate solution: “Civil Rights legislation (is) not the end of the battle, but only the beginning of a new and more critical phase in the conflict.” (Merton-*Seeds*) And Dr. King explained how discomfort (inherent in all growth) is a central part of the process required for racial justice and peace to prevail: “(T)ension is a necessary phase of transition from obnoxious negative peace, in which Negroes passively accept unjust plight, to substantive positive peace in which all respect the dignity and worth of human personality (King, par. 6).” Our Catechism affirms the Scriptural connections: “In biblical revelation, peace is much more than the simple absence of war; it represents the fullness of life (Catechism, *Dignity of Person* 489).”

What would we say to the heroic Dr. King—and our beloved “*il Papa buono*?”

How would we explain to these great leaders that our Church’s Twin Cities community today is not only not much better for our black neighbors than it was then—during the years of [Roy Wilkins](#), [Hubert Humphrey](#), [Nellie Stone Johnson](#) and countless others worked to secure the Civil Rights Act of 1964—but that it may actually now, in some ways, be worse?

THE SITUATION

The following is a far-from exhaustive, but representative accounting of data on racial disparities in Minneapolis, primarily, and, more generally, Hennepin County and the state of Minnesota. More detailed information is available upon request.³

Shameful economic inequities:

- In the 1960s Minnesota families of color earned 74% of what white families did. Now they earn less than half.
- Minnesota families of color have near-poverty median incomes of \$27,000, less than half whites' \$81,500. (Magan)
- The average black family in Minnesota is now poorer than their Mississippi counterpart. (Rienan)

Lest the common assumptions still prevail: people of color are no more lazy than other people. Workforce data indicate that Minnesota's black and white people are equally engaged in job seeking. A recent study found that "even if our black residents had the same demographic profile (and certain select factors) as whites, disparities would remain (Met Council)."

Sinfully chronic disparities in education.

- Minneapolis public schools graduate less than half their black students ontime, versus over 75% of their white students. Their combined graduation rates make it *the worst* of all major metropolitan areas nationally.
- Nearly half of Minneapolis black eighth graders can't read at Basic level, compared to 14% of their white peers.
- Black students in Minnesota are identified having subjective emotional/behavioral disorders 10 times more than white students, three times the national average and *more than any other state* in the nation. (Flatow)

It seems Minneapolis teaches our youth how to go to prison. One prerequisite is mortifyingly easy: be black.

- Black kids account for only 30% of Minneapolis youth, but are arrested six times more than white kids. (Anderssen)
- In 2015, 60% of youth in Minnesota prisons and jails, (50% from Hennepin County), were black. (MN, *Juveniles*)
- The same year, 35% of adult inmates, 25% of whom were from Hennepin County, were black. (MN, *Adult Inmates*)

Minneapolis streets seem to be prison recruiting grounds--and it doesn't take much to get in.

- Black people account for 60% of Minneapolis Police Department (MPD)'s low-level arrests, overall. (Samuelson)
- Between 2012-14 [MPD arrested Blacks nearly ten \(10\) times more](#) for low-level offenses⁴ than whites.
- In Hennepin County, the incarceration rate of the blacks is nearly 10 times that of the whites. (ACLU, *Picking up Pieces*).

Rights to life lost to police shootings.

- Last year US police killed 258 black people, while around 39 per year were lynched from 1890-1965 (Merelli).
- Of 149 Minnesotans killed by police between 2000 and 2015, over a third (67) were people of color (Bjorus).
- Nationally, black men represent 6% of people, 26% of police killings and 40% of unarmed victims of police killings (Kindy).

Minneapolis public safety seems laissez-faire about it's problematic encounters with residents.

- Making a misconduct complaint at most MPD precincts is difficult, if not, nearly impossible.
- [Recent research](#) shows the department takes little action on complaints -- even legitimate ones (CBS News MN).
- Minneapolis made \$14 million in payouts for alleged police misconduct between 2006 and 2012 (Furst).
 - More than half of the 439 reviewed cases were dismissed because they were older than 270 days
 - In the end, not one officer was disciplined by the department.
 - Improvements seem to be coming, but, at a very slow pace at best.

Just as troubling is the contentiousness that some public safety personnel persist in exhibiting, particularly [against Black Lives Matter](#) and their allies--including the [Minnesota Lynx](#) (SB Nation). Most ugly is the [inflammatory rhetoric](#) of police union head [Bob Kroll](#) (CBS-MN). Beyond these, says the American Civil Liberties Union, MPD's "inequitable practices are most pronounced in North and South Minneapolis, and city center (Mpls, *Complaints*)." This is the [Basilica's](#) neighborhood.

Where are we practicing "right" social justice to heal these chronic wounds?

While Dorothy Day offers the assurance that "It is hard to feel that the color of our skin in a way separates us from this mass of people whom we have injured," she nonetheless presses us: "It is with too little and too late that we are engaging ourselves. But even if it is at the eleventh hour that we are called to serve, we can respond (Day, *Pilgrim* par. 31)."

³ For more information contact: Andrea.Grazzini@wethep.org.

⁴ **Low-level offenses**, which individual police officers have more choices in how to respond, and that can easily lead to into a downward spiral of a life-cycle of arrests, incarceration and unemployment, include things like: curfew violations, loitering, trespassing, drinking in public, and open bottle. Of nearly 10,000 low-level arrests over 33 months in 2013-4 made by 1017 Minneapolis officers between 2013-14, the vast majority were made by eight officers. Seven averaged between 1000-1250. And one made 2026. In 2014, The average low-level arrests per officer was 51. Even taking out the eight officers who make the majority of arrests, black citizens were still arrested 8.5 times more than whites were for low-level violations.

It hopefully goes without saying that all appreciate the Basilica's need for security. Still, the fact that it hires officers from MPD suggests a lack of sensitivity for the lived reality of our black neighbors. This seems perceptible, too, in larger Church demeanors. As welcome as parishioners' support for refugees are, as important as the St. Vincent de Paul ministry is, as appreciated as Basilica's contributions to affordable housing and its other charity initiatives are, they are not social justice. Similarly, the Basilica's rich educational offerings are valuable for raising awareness. But charity and knowledge, alone, as much history shows, do not create change. Neither answers our full Christian responsibility.

No one is ungrateful for the Church's efforts and no thoughtful person supports the vilification of the police. Still, this should not effect silence about serious concerns and questions about MPD. "It is quite clear that any attempt to check the vitality and growth of ethnic minorities is a flagrant violation of justice," Pope John IXXXX told us (IIXX, *Pacem* par. 95). In light of the visible harms and regressed race relations, the Basilica's employment of MPD personnel when other services are available, illustrates a certain level of tolerance for many documented violations and unrepaired ruptures. By association this naturally rouses a not-long-ago history that none of us wishes to repeat—or see any more children have to suffer.

"The Negro children of Birmingham, who [walked calmly up to the police dogs](#) that lunged at them with a fury capable of tearing their small bodies to pieces, were not only confronting the truth in an exalted moment of faith, a providential *kairos*," wrote the American Catholic monk, Merton. "They were also bearing heroic Christian witness to the truth, for they were exposing their bodies to death in order to show God and man that they believed in the just rights of their people, knew that those rights had been unjustly, shamefully and systematically violated, and realized that the violation called for expiation and redemptive protest, because it was an offense against God and His truth. They were stating clearly that the time had come where such violations could no longer be tolerated (Merton, *Seeds*. Pg 44)."

By not confronting the truth and demonstrating for God and all that Catholics not only believe in all people's sacred human potentials, but that we are fearlessly toiling to achieve justice, we are complicit in the oppression of our Christian values. The doctrinal implications amount to a collective and institutional *social sin* against our *common good*. Which, we're taught, "are always connected to concrete acts of those who commit them, consolidate them and make them difficult to remove. It is thus that social sins grow stronger, spread and become sources of others, conditioning human conduct (Compendium 227)." What is holding us back? "Interference (...) delay and slow pace," must be judged, warned Pope John Paul II (JPII, *Sollicitudo* 26). Understanding that there "are obstacles and conditioning that go well beyond the actions and brief life span of the individual and interfere in the process of the development of peoples (Compendium 228)." How will the children of our future learn to live up to their potentials—and *Jesus's loving imperatives*—if we don't provide them an heroic model that takes on and overcomes shameful, systematically violated rights? What legacy will this historical Basilica leave? A popular music party and the gilded Cathedral its proceeds supported? Or something far more symbolic, that illustrates an unquestionable commitment to perpetuating our faith's most genuine beliefs?

"Was not Jesus an extremist for love?" Reverend King asked. "Was not Amos an extremist for justice: 'Let justice roll down like an ever flowing stream?' Was not Paul an extremist for the Christian gospel: 'I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus?' Will we (King, par. 25)," (meaning us Catholics, too), "be extremists for the preservation of injustice or for the extension of justice?" The latter-day King pointed out the parallels to our Holy King's Passion. "We must never forget three were crucified for the same crime. Two were extremists for immorality, and thus fell below their environment. The other, Jesus Christ, was an extremist for love, truth and goodness, and thereby rose above his environment (King, par. 29)." Saint Dorothy Day illuminated the essence of his point: "The Gospel takes away our right, forever, to discriminate."

THE PRINCIPALS

"If you want peace, work for justice" urged Pope Paul VI (Paul VI, *Day of Peace*). We do appreciate that Janice made efforts to reach out to discuss the issues. She has already met with at least one Black Lives Matter leader. Still, if the Basilica and larger Church does passionately seek [biblical stewardship](#)⁵, it will take much more. Starting with Church leadership truly modeling the Basilica's:

- [Mission](#)
Advocate for Change Work toward justice, peace and equality for all.
Beacon of Hope Welcome all with respect, dignity and care, especially where most needed.
- [Strategic Direction](#)
Enhance the Experience of Belonging Welcome everyone as Christ.
- [Biblical Stewardship](#)
Global Promote peace throughout the world.
Local Create bridges between communities and advocate for those in need.

⁵ **Biblical stewardship** generally refers to humans and institutions acting as caretakers and advocates or stewards of all of God's gifts to the world for all of eternity. These gifts include personal and community or worldly, spanning from individual person's time, talents and possessions, including money or wealth, as well as relationships between people, shared communities and their physical and social assets, including the environment and all that it encompasses. All of which are intended to be used in the ways God would use them to uplift and support the best for all and the world.

In fact, our Catholic Catechism insists on more, including, through the following directives:

The Right and Duty of Conscientious Objection asserts that “It is legitimate to resist authority should it violate in a serious or repeated manner the essential principles of natural law (JohnII).” Noting, “Christ reveals to human authority, always tempted by the desire to dominate, its authentic and complete meaning as service.” And warning: “When human authority goes beyond the limits willed by God, it makes itself a deity and demands absolute submission; it becomes the Beast of the Apocalypse, an image of the power of the imperial persecutor (Compendium 382).” Related to police and government misconduct, “It is a grave duty of conscience not to cooperate, not even formally, in practices which, although permitted by civil legislation, are contrary to the Law of God. Resistance to authority is meant to attest to the validity of (...) seeking (...) radical change (Compendium 400).”

The Doctrine of Justice “Justice is the cardinal virtue of constant, firm will to respect others’ rights in equitable relationships (Catechism 442).” Christians, especially, have the moral obligation, according to the degree of one’s responsibility,” Pope John Paul II told us, “to take into consideration, in personal decisions and decisions of government, the relationships of universality and interdependence which exists between their conduct and the (neglect of) so many others’ rights (JPII, 9).” Our Catechism lays out the stakes: “There exist sinful inequalities, in open contradiction of the Gospel. Excessive economic and social disparity between individuals and peoples of the one human race is a scandal that militates against social justice, equity, human dignity, as well as social and international peace (Catechism, Dignity 1938).”

“Every form of social or cultural discrimination on the grounds of sex, race, color, social conditions, language, or religion must be eradicated as incompatible with God’s design (Catechism, Dignity 1935).” While “the Church’s social Magisterium constantly calls for the most classical forms of justice to be respected: commutative, distributive and legal justice (Compendium 201).” Even more than this, “the social, political and economic aspects and, above all, the structural dimension of problems and their respective solutions,” must be penetrated and reformed. “Justice is particularly important in the present-day context, where the individual value of the person, his dignity and his rights—despite proclaimed intentions—are seriously threatened by the widespread tendency to make exclusive use of criteria of utility and ownership.” We must move beyond the “reductionist contractualistic justice” of institutionalized relationships and prevailing social norms to the mutually enriching “justice of loving solidarity (Compendium 201-202).”

The Catholic Social Doctrine acknowledges that “(t)he Church exists and is at work within history. She interacts with the society and culture of her time in order to fulfil her mission,” that is, “in the concrete circumstances of their difficulties, struggles and challenges,” like those which face our black neighbors. “Today more than ever the Word of God will be unable to be proclaimed and heard unless it is accompanied by the action of Christians in the service of their brothers and sisters, at the points in which their existence and their future are at stake.” When they say “Black Lives Matter,” our neighbors are telling us that black people’s existence and their children’s future is at stake! “The Church’s social doctrine places alongside the value of justice that of solidarity,” adding, “that it is the privileged way of peace.” Our Catholic privilege can provide a venue in service to racial peace. “Respect for the legitimate autonomy of earthly realities,” we’re assured, “does not prevent (the Church) from intervening to show how, in the different choices made by people, these values are either affirmed or denied (Compendium 197).”

The Priority of Civil Friendship “The political community and civil society,” we cannot forget, “are not equal in the hierarchy of ends.” In all relationships, “it should not happen that certain individuals or social groups,” including police, the wealthy or whites “derive special advantage,” or less scrutiny. “Nor should it happen that governments become obstacles.” Our faith is meant to be placed in God’s words, not only those of authority or civic organizations, regardless how well-meaning they seem. God was unequivocal when He spoke of institutions who “outwardly (...) appear to men to be just, but inwardly (...) are full of hypocrisy and iniquity (Matt 23:28).” Expedient, determinate reactions tend to be inflexible. “Civil society is multifaceted and irregular; with ambiguities and contradictions (Compendium 418),” Progress is asymmetrical. “The social nature of human beings is not uniform but is expressed in many different ways. In fact, the common good depends on a healthy social pluralism (Compendium 151).”

To be clear, “no legislation, no system of rules or negotiation will ever succeed in persuading men and peoples to live in unity, brotherhood and peace, (Compendium 207).” Whether government adequately serves this is separate altogether from whether it wishes to. Our Christian duty doesn’t allow us to wait and see. “Different interests clash, with the risk that the stronger will prevail over the weaker (Compendium 418).” Even when stronger institutions insist they are trying to improve, no matter how sincere, we’re not absolved from clear action reflective of our “commitment to social pluralism,” and our “aims at bringing a more fitting attainment of common good and democracy, according to principles of solidarity, subsidiarity and justice (Compendium 417).”

While we may well have a “fraternity” with certain government and public safety employees, as people, these cannot supercede our commitment to the people and groups that their employment impacts. Our Catechism teaches us that “civil friendship is the most genuine actualization of fraternity, which is inseparable from freedom and equality.” Yet we witness, “this largely has not been put into concrete practice in our modern political society (Compendium 390),” including, again, here in Minnesota.

The Virtue of Social Solidarity “The principle of solidarity, also articulated in terms of ‘friendship’ or ‘social charity,’ is a direct demand of human and Christian brotherhood (Catechism, *Dignity* 1939).” Calling on us to understand that, “Solidarity must be seen in its value as a moral virtue that determines the order of institutions. On this basis the ‘structures of sin’ that dominate relationships between individuals and peoples must be overcome. Meaning the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all (Compendium 193).” In fact, “Solidarity rises to the rank of fundamental social virtue since it is in the sphere of justice.” Thus, a “commitment to one’s neighbour good with the Gospel readiness, to ‘lose oneself’ for the sake of the other, instead of exploiting him, and to ‘serve him’ instead of oppressing him for one’s own advantage (Compendium 193).”

Concrete Indications of Participatory Democracy according to our catechism, it’s not enough for us to aspire to social justice. “The principle of subsidiarity protects people from abuses by higher-level social authority and calls on these same authorities to help individuals and intermediate groups to fulfil their duties,” with visible outcomes. “This is imperative,” we’re told, “because every person, family and group has something original to offer. (...) The presence of pluralism and due representation of its vital components must safeguard (...) the rights of minorities (Compendium 187).” “It is therefore evident that every democracy must be participative. This means that the different subjects of civil community (Compendium 189).”

There is a Hunger and a Need

Dear leaders, there is a longing in so many fellow Catholics and others for all to achieve their fullest human potentials and civic success. “As we spoke and preached and prayed outside of the Basilica to raise awareness of the seriousness of these issues as folks were on the inside partying,” Nekima Levy-Pounds shares, “four young adult Catholics left the Block party and joined our protests. It was amazing to witness! That was a blessed result under the circumstances.” Those Block Party attendees must have understood Thomas Merton’s point that: “The white man, if he can possibly open the ears of his heart and listen intently enough to hear what the Negro is now hearing, can recognize that he is himself called to freedom and to salvation in the same *kairos* of events which he is now, in so many different ways, opposing or resisting (Shannon, 997-998).”

THE ENGAGEMENT

We must somehow start hearing what our black neighbors hear. We must open our ears, eyes and hearts to hear Black Lives Matter, Nekima Levy-Pounds and so many others, like Me to We Racial Healing member James Robinson, say. He calls for a new and constant habit of racial healing “especially with those of different color, faith, language, thinking.” And we must answer questions like this one that James asks: “How do we get our leaders to sit down, talk the issues behind and leading up to the situations and what government initiative or action could help alleviate the problem?”⁶ Pope Francis has the excellent advice for those who will demonstrate their sincerity by daring to answer such questions. “Look, the last thing you need to do is to say something,” he recently advised Jesuit priests, “Begin by doing something.” (San Martin, *Shades of Grey*).

Only then can we prove what Pope Francis promised in our behalf when he spoke to President Barack Obama and our nation last summer: “Together with their fellow citizens, American Catholics are committed to building a society which is truly tolerant and inclusive, to safeguarding the rights of individuals and communities, and to rejecting every form of unjust discrimination (Francis, *White House Remarks*).”

“See, Judge, Act” - Pope John Paul XXIII

Your Minneapolis Church has already communicated its wonderful plans to do more: “Looking ahead into the future, [the Basilica will continue to expand](#) its role in the community,” its website reads. “There is no justification then for despair or pessimism or inertia,” exhorted Pope John Paul II (JPII 47 par. 3). Indeed. To help us get moving, Pope John XXIII offered us [three stages](#) to putting social justice principles into action. [1. Review](#) the concrete situation; [2. Make a judgment](#) on it, congruent with the Church’s social principles; and, [3. Decide and Do](#) what can and should be done to implement solutions (JXXIII, *Mater* 236). Our Church has all the motivation, information, justification and direction we need. Dear leaders, the future is here.

“I am sure that none of you would want to rest content with the superficial kind of social analysis that deals merely with effects and does not grapple with underlying causes (King, par. 5),” Reverend King protested. “There was a time,” he recalled. “When the early Christians rejoiced at being deemed worthy to suffer for what they believed. In those days the church was not merely a thermometer that recorded the ideas and principles of popular opinion (King 36).” We must engage not only hearts and mind but also our bodies, the body of our Church, all of her people—by turning up the heat with the real work of real social justice, alongside and for the real people of our community— especially now, in this fertile moment—this *kairos*.

It is time for our Church—all of its thoughtful leaders and laypeople—to powerfully live up to Her (*our*) promises. Not just preaching about social justice, but determinedly participating in it—**with no more delays or excuses**. To embody Her symbolism with robust and enduring solutions. And living up to Reverend. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr’s dream that we, undoubtedly, be “the thermostat that transforms the mores of our community (King, par. 36).”

⁶ Me to We Racial Healing members offered comments for this letter on the Me to We Racial Healing [Facebook Page](#).

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