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OPINION

Opinion: Catholic teaching affirms dignity of Black lives, promotes peace

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Throughout history, the [Scripture passage](#) from Micah “to do justice and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God” has inspired people of faith. It has particular significance this year in the wake of the killings of George Floyd, Rayshard Brooks and others in the Black community who have sadly lost their lives. These tragic events have pushed our society to consider how best to move through the anger, the grief and concern for the future.

Catholic teaching offers a path forward. It starts with acknowledging and treating every person with the dignity he or she deserves as a unique individual. All are made in the image and likeness of God; those of every race, age and circumstance. This teaching has clear direction for the way Catholics should live life in concert with that teaching and how to interact with one another. It means that the unborn, the immigrant, the elderly, the imprisoned and those struggling with poverty, illness or other challenges have inherent value. Everyone’s status as a child of God demands respect, a concept that resonates beyond the Catholic Church.



All are made in the image and likeness of God; those of every race, age, and circumstance, Long writes. (Photo: Todd McInturf, The Detroit News)

It is crucial in the current moment to reaffirm specifically the dignity of Black lives, especially those that have been lost to senseless acts of violence. To do so does not negate the fact that all lives have value. Instead, it speaks in a special way to the challenges that the Black community is facing, and recognizes that threats to any one community undermine the value of life for others. The U.S. bishops’ recent pastoral letter [Open Wide Our Hearts](#) offers further reflections on racial tension while encouraging ongoing acts of love.

Conversations about race, injustice and police reform are important opportunities for people with differences to better understand each other’s experiences. The Catholic Church can assist in these

conversations by promoting the command to love one's neighbor, by encouraging active listening over partisan bickering (from all political persuasions), by calling out the evil and sin of racism, and by advocating for policy changes that address unjust societal structures.

Last month Pope Francis [repeated](#) "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." Combating racism is a pro-life issue. Racist acts, jokes and insults, the humiliation of racial profiling and racial discrimination in hiring, housing and educational programs all must end. Catholic bishops have pointedly referred to these personal and systemic indignities as "failures to acknowledge another person as a brother or sister, created in the image of God."

The destructive violence that has taken place this summer has removed the spotlight from addressing injustice, distracted from the listening that must take place, and has put more community members in harm's way. Similarly, policies that belittle and dehumanize peace officers or that promote attacks against their person or occupation damage the cause for justice and healing. In the midst of a year beset by pandemic, anger and violence, the Church calls for peace.

Michigan Catholic Conference this year supported legislation that calls for training law enforcement on de-escalation, implicit bias, and mental health resources. These measures are important steps toward recognizing the dignity of all and working towards a safer and more just society.

Promoting peace requires people of all races to move beyond the rhetoric, to listen to one another and to engage in difficult conversations, including within their places of worship, homes and workplaces. America's ongoing quest to expunge the ignorance and intolerance of racism will not be successful until society is willing to reform the very causes of racism — namely, ignorance, lack of love for the other and an inability to forgive.

Taking steps to learn from one another and to reflect deeply on the root causes of racism will not be easy for all. Let us not shy away from Jesus' teaching to love God and neighbor. These steps are a critical part of the Christian call "to do justice, to love goodness, and to walk humbly with God." They are absolutely worth doing, for our communities and our souls.

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