

With all of you, I have watched the events of the past few weeks with a range of emotions: anger, sadness, frustration, fear and helplessness. The murder of George Floyd, on top of the murders of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and so many other people of color has rekindled the conversation about race in our country like I have never seen before.

What do I do? What do we do? As a white man and priest, in a predominately white parish and neighborhood, I need to recognize the privileged position from which I speak. I do not have to fear what would happen if I am stopped by the police. I do not have to fear taking a walk in my neighborhood. So I believe all of us have to first acknowledge how we have benefited from the institutional racism existent in our country.

This is a difficult and uncomfortable conversation to have with ourselves and others. Yet if we want to make sure that all of these people have not died in vain and we want to bring a sense of healing to our society and community, it is one we must have. We must move to be anti-racist and not be complicit with the system. As Pope Francis said today, “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.”

So what do we do? I’m committing ourselves as a community to some beginning actions. With the staff, I will be participating in anti-racism and anti-bias workshops. I hope to eventually include parishioners and volunteers in this training. We are working with DePaul and with some of our neighboring parishes to sponsor speaker series and book discussions. For me, this is not just a short-term project, but one I want to engage for the long term.

In “A Letter From a Birmingham Jail,” Dr. King critiqued white religious leaders and Christians who counseled patience and waiting instead of action, who said they agreed with the principles of the movement, but not the tactics. His words still ring true nearly 60 years later:

“I had hoped that the white moderate would understand that 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. I had hoped that the white moderate would understand that the present tension in the South is a necessary phase of the transition from an obnoxious negative peace, in which the Negro passively accepted his unjust plight, to a substantive and positive peace, in which all men will respect the dignity and worth of human personality. Actually, we who engage in nonviolent direct action are not the creators of tension. We merely bring to the surface the hidden tension that is already alive. We bring it out in the open, where it can be seen and dealt with. Like a boil that can never be cured so long as it is covered up but must be opened with all its ugliness to the natural medicines of air and light, injustice must be exposed, with all the tension its exposure creates, to the light of human conscience and the air of national opinion before it can be cured.”

I invite you to join me on this journey of justice. It is truly Vincentian, truly Catholic to work against injustice. Our vision statement that we are a community that loves and serves the Body of Christ without exception rings hollow if we do not take up this cause and seek to change an unjust system that is long overdue to be discarded. We need to say that Black Lives Matter because not to say it is to betray our belief in the dignity of each and every person, and each human life. It is not a political statement, but a statement of faith: Black Lives Matter.