

'Made in the Image and Likeness of God'



By Archbishop Alfred C. Hughes, S.T.D.

A Pastoral Letter on Racial Harmony

Fifty years ago Archbishop Joseph Rummel issued a landmark Pastoral Letter, "The Morality of Racial Segregation." In this 1956 ground-breaking message, he announced that racial segregation was to be gradually dismantled in all Catholic schools in the Archdiocese. He stated unequivocally: "Racial segregation as such is morally wrong and sinful because it is a denial of the unity-solidarity of the human race as conceived by God in the creation of Adam & Eve."

Archbishop Rummel, who had served as the pastor of a parish in Harlem, New York, before being named a bishop, had been painstakingly preparing for this courageous action ever since his arrival in New Orleans from Omaha in 1935. He was already in the process of desegregating archdiocesan organizations. Opponents mounted a vocal and aggressive campaign of resistance. "The Association of Catholic Laymen" wrote to Rome and demanded that Archbishop Rummel be required to retract his teaching and directives. "Save Our Nation" made

the untenable claim that the Bible supported segregation. The "Citizens Council of Louisiana" warned that integration would lead to the destruction of the white civilization in the South. The "Citizens Council of New Orleans" implored Catholics to keep money out of collection plates on Sunday and labeled Archbishop Rummel's action a "Communist Conspiracy by the Church." The State Legislature threatened to remove the tax exempt status of Catholic schools. Although Archbishop Rummel had to slow down the implementation of his plan when public officials indicated they could not provide public protection at the schools, he remained firm in his decision.

Fifty years later we hail this courageous pioneer of racial integration, even as we try to make a realistic assessment of the progress and the challenges that are ours today.

The Catholic Church continues to welcome children of all races and backgrounds to her schools. During this school year, we have an archdiocesan enrollment of almost 41,000

children. Over 7,000 are African American. Almost 1,500 are Hispanic. Just over 1,000 are Asian. Two hundred are multi-racial. We are offering education to almost 1,500 students from our public schools. Many of our Catholic school graduates have become the first members of their families to attend institutes of higher learning, move into professional and business courses and break the cycle of poverty that had previously gripped their families.

Now we are in a new situation in post-Katrina New Orleans. The painful suffering that gripped us along with the devastating flood water has brought home the still unaddressed issues which weigh heavily upon us: the unacceptably high rate of poverty among African Americans; the limited choices in education because of the failing public schools; the disproportionate percentages without health insurance; the difficulty in finding adequate affordable housing.

As Katrina stormed in on us, I was

completing a pastoral letter on racial harmony. It was due for release in September 2005. Hurricane Katrina sidetracked the issuance of the letter but has not changed the significance of the issue. It seems even more important now to move forward with the release of this message in the hope that grappling with the truth about race from a faith perspective may help to contribute to the way we live together in the new New Orleans.

We did not need the chaotic days following Katrina to become aware that heroic goodness and human degradation can live side by side in our city. I had already heard such stories in the focus groups of parishioners of different races and cultures as they gathered to share with me their experiences. Their accounts helped me to understand how far we have come and how far we have to go.

In the Judaeo-Christian tradition, water is an ambiguous reality. At the creation, Genesis depicts God as taming the chaotic water in service to future life. In the time of Noah, flood water was highly destructive, but it provided new life for eight human beings, the animals of the earth and their descendants. At the Red Sea, the water drowned the Egyptian army but provided liberation to the children of Abraham. Christ chose water to symbolize and effect both death to sin and new life in the sacrament of baptism. What a great grace it would be if the waters of Katrina (which means cleansing) were not only to wreak devastation but also to wash away the stain of racial prejudice and division, and enable us to rise to a new life of racial justice and harmony!

My Own Story

Each of us in the Church has a unique history to tell. As most of you know, I come from Boston, Massachusetts. The community in which I lived was totally white, so I did not interact with those of other races in my neighborhood or church or school. It was not until seminary that I experienced the friendship of African and Asian American fellow students.

I was already a priest when the 1973 federal court decision required the desegregation of the Boston public schools and the busing of students to accomplish it. I can remember taking part in a public march in protest of the Boston School Committee's stonewalling of the integration of the schools. Many parish priests accompanied black students on buses to escort them into white neighborhoods. But, as in so many cities of the United States, resistance then took the form of a white exodus from the city. As a seminary faculty member, I was part of the development of a seminary policy which

provided for field education in the inner city and participation in summer programs similar to New Orleans' Summer Witness Program.

In Boston, I began to serve people of many different backgrounds, including Hispanics and Vietnamese. But it was not until I came to live in south Louisiana that I really got to know African Americans on a personal basis. I became conscious of the number of separate black church parishes. I wondered if continuing the separate parishes undermined racial integration until I discovered how



important they were in the development of black Catholic identity, community, leadership, liturgy and spirituality. Soon I came to the conclusion that it was important to ensure both that our territorial parishes were open to everyone and that those who preferred to remain in historically black parishes were given the opportunity to do so as well.

Now the Katrina experience has reinforced for me the need to address responsibly the racial undercurrent to so many issues we face in our community. The housing crunch, economic barriers, the failures in public education, the two-tier health care delivery system in New Orleans, the shortcomings of civic, governmental and church leadership have impacted us all, but the poor to a disproportionate extent.

African Americans seem to find it the most difficult to return. The African-American middle-class wonders what will be the future for New Orleans East. Latinos who have migrated to the New Orleans area to work in the jobs of recovery and rebuilding often experience prejudice and unjust treatment. Even though the Vietnamese community found itself outside the civic decision-making

structure, it has manifested a remarkable community resolve not only to rebuild, but also to protect the neighborhood from harmful toxins connected with the dumping of debris and to create a new and better community. Sometimes the people of St. Bernard and lower Plaquemines feel all the attention is on New Orleans and their plight is being ignored. In each of these areas the Church is challenged to contribute to the common good.

A recent controversy highlights how persistent racial undercurrents can impact human issues. Last March 15, we promulgated our Archdiocesan Pastoral Plan for the seven deaneries most devastated by the flooding. It called for postponing the reopening of twenty-four parishes and schools as well as the closing of six parishes. The announced closing of the parishes was based on the recommendations included in a pastoral report developed in the 1990s, *Catholic Life 2000*. Those recommendations were rooted in pastoral deficiencies which it was thought would be remedied best by a merger with another parish to provide better pastoral care.

St. Augustine Parish was one of these with few registered parishioners, inadequate religious education and sacramental preparation, limited pastoral services and serious financial struggles. But soon resistance to this decision, including a sit-in, became framed in racial terms because of past Church decisions which had been experienced as unjustly discriminatory. It became important to seek a resolution that would address the pastoral deficiencies, but also would give the parishioners an opportunity to address them responsibly and satisfactorily. It is my hope that the reprieve will allow this to happen. This incident brought home to me that racial wounds from the past are not yet healed.

Defining Racism

"Make every effort to preserve the unity which has the Spirit as its origin and peace as its binding force." (Eph 4:3)

I have always been uneasy about using the term racism. It has an emotionally charged meaning for many people. The Church, however, is not hesitant to define racism as both a personal sin and a social disorder rooted in the belief that one race is superior to another. Hence, it involves not only individual prejudice but also the use of religious, social, political, economic or historical power to keep one race privileged. The teaching of the Second Vatican Council, echoed in "The Catechism of the Catholic Church," has made clear that "every form of social or cultural discrimination of fundamental personal rights on the grounds of sex, race, color, social conditions, language or

religion must be curbed and eradicated as incompatible with God's design."¹

We need to recognize that racism can be both personal and institutional. It is personal when it is expressed in attitudes or convictions that lead to racial slurs or the depreciation of the value and the gifts of those of another race or culture either in word or in behavior (cf. Jas 3:1-12). It can exist even within one race when shades of color lead to unjust discrimination.

It is institutional when the organizations in which we live foster attitudes or practices that lead to unjust discrimination (cf. 1 Cor 12:12-26). Institutional racism exists in our broader society in economic and political life, our educational systems, and our housing or living patterns.

It may be evident in the difficulty experienced by one race in seeking equal economic opportunity, leading to significant gaps in income and wealth. It may be manifested in the difficulties some experience in moving into certain urban or suburban neighborhoods, or in trying to join some clubs or organizations. Those who violate the law often experience significant disparities in sentencing related to race, especially when it comes to the imposition of the death penalty.

Institutional racism is also experienced in the Church. While the Church as the Body of Christ is holy in her Divine Head, the Church in her members can and do sin (cf. 1 Jn 1:8). When members, whether in leadership or not, treat other racial or cultural expressions as inferior or unwelcome, they contribute to an institutional form of racism within the Church – for which we must continually repent and ask forgiveness (cf. 1 Jn 1:9-10).

The Church's Teaching

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all!" (2 Cor 13:13)

As Christians, we need to remind ourselves that the fundamental mystery of faith God has revealed to us is his own Trinitarian life. There is one God but three Persons. Each Divine Person is distinct and has a distinctive relationship with each of the other Divine Persons. Yet the Divine Persons are one in nature and in dignity. Father, Son and Holy Spirit, bound together in a communion of divine love, act in unity with one another. This communion of Divine Persons with distinctiveness in personal identity and relationships, yet

equality in nature and dignity, forms the foundation for the plan that God had in mind in creating human beings.

God in his original plan created men and women, distinct in persons and relationships, yet one in nature and dignity. Our original parents were to found a human race that would live in harmony in response to the Father's loving desire and will for them (Gn 1:28-30).

But something went unmistakably wrong at the beginning. The refusal of our first parents to respond to what God was asking of them plunged the whole human race into resistance to God's loving plan (Gn 3:1-24).



This original sin led to a state of alienation of peoples, languages, and cultures from God and from one another (Gn 11:1-9). All subsequent generations were born into this state. Original sin, then, has cast our minds into darkness, weakened our wills, and divided our hearts.

In response to this tragic situation, the Son of God accepted the Father's mission of becoming man, to live in our midst, suffer, die and rise (cf. Jn 1:1-18). In fulfilling this, he freed us from the guilt of original sin, but did not remove all the effects of original sin. It is now ours to accept the grace of redemption, and in cooperation with God, to reverse the power of the continuing impact of original sin (cf. Rom 8:1-13). In Christ Jesus, the Father has welcomed us back and adopted us as sons and daughters, brothers and sisters of the Lord and of one another. Redemption has restored the original dignity granted in God's creation and enhanced it immeasurably. The redemptive gift of the Holy Spirit, then, urges us to love one another as Christ has loved us.

As members of his Church, we claim to be disciples of Jesus Christ. We are enabled by sacramental grace "to exercise the mission which God has entrusted to the Church to fulfill in the world."² Consequently, we are to participate in God's plan so that the Church may be experienced as the universal sacrament of salvation. As a Eucharistic Church, we are called to reflect in our lives his universal redemptive love by accepting

his urgent call to communion with him and one another in him.³ The Eucharist challenges us to live what we proclaim. (cf. 1 John 3:1-24).

The most significant body of Church teaching on racial justice has built on the teaching of the Second Vatican Council. In 1979, the Catholic Bishops of the United States, thanks to the leadership of Bishop Joseph Francis,⁴ issued a pastoral letter, "Brothers and Sisters to Us." The bishops stated, "Racism is the sin that says some human beings are inherently superior and others essentially inferior because of race."⁵ In 1988, the Holy See released "The Church and Racism," which restated the 1965 U.N. Convention declaration, "Any doctrine of superiority based on differences between races is scientifically false, morally condemnable and socially unjust and dangerous."⁶ Both the "Catechism of the Catholic Church" and "The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church" present the same teaching.⁷ The Louisiana Catholic bishops, in a 1997 statement, declared, "Racism is the theory or practice which assumes that one race or ethnic stock is

superior to another. It denies the equal dignity of all members of the human family."⁸ Despite this teaching, significant challenges remain for us to address in our time.

Our Nation's "Original Social Sin"

The founders of our nation were unable to come to agreement with regard to the issue of slavery. Hence, the Constitution failed to address it and our nation was born into what some have called America's "original sin of racism." Slavery became a focal point of political debate in 1818 when Missouri made application for admission to the Union. The debate raged for the next forty years. The election of Abraham Lincoln as President marked a significant turning point. Unfortunately, the tensions eventually spilled over into a violent war that almost tore our nation permanently apart. In January 1863,⁹ President Lincoln promulgated the Emancipation Proclamation that freed the slaves in the areas still under Confederate control. In 1864, Congress passed the 13th amendment to the Constitution, legally abolishing slavery. The amendment was ratified the following year. The Northern victory in the Civil War preserved the nation, but did not resolve the painful struggles that were yet

necessary to realize what the Emancipation Proclamation and the 13th amendment to the Constitution guaranteed.

Although freedom had been won in principle, a new phenomenon of institutionalized racial segregation took over. It was established by law in the South. It existed in housing, educational and economic patterns throughout the country. Not until the 1960s did the civil rights movement gain momentum. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. provided the heroic leadership (along with other courageous citizens of all races) that led to the development of legislation and judicial decisions that finally secured the “legal” rights of those who had been deprived of them because of the color of their skin.

Continuing Disharmony

“What happens is that I do, not the good I will to do, but the evil I do not intend.” (Rom 7:19)

Unfortunately, today as in the past, we in the Church have been slow to appreciate the full depth and breadth of the meaning of Divine Revelation that each human person is made in the image and likeness of God. Christ, through His cross, has granted us the grace to live a new life in Him. Racial and cultural differences are no longer to be causes of division (Gal 3:26-28).

In “Brothers and Sisters to Us,” the bishops tried to draw attention to the relationship between racial and economic justice. This description seems to be particularly apt for today: “In an era characterized by limited resources, restricted job markets and dwindling revenues, the poor and racial minorities are often asked to bear the heaviest burden of these economic pressures . . . Crude and blatant expressions of racist sentiment . . . are manifest in the

tendency to stereotype and marginalize whole segments of the population whose presence is perceived as a threat. It is manifest also in the indifference that replaces open hatred. The minority poor are seen as the dross of a post-industrial society – without skills, without motivation, without incentive. They are expendable.”¹⁰

The Church’s response to this unjust situation has been uneven and often half-hearted. First, the official teaching is not widely known. Secondly, many Church leaders and many of the faithful have not given it a high priority.¹¹ Moreover, as communities moved from historical segregation in territorial church parishes, white flight has created segregation in many other places. Persistent challenges regarding community life, public education, economics, drugs and violence have been labeled “their problem, not ours.” Both members of the Church and the wider community have failed too frequently to help the man going down from Jerusalem to Jericho who fell prey to robbers. (Lk 10:30)

As we continue to work toward racial justice today, it is important to understand what is recognized as “white privilege.” Those with lighter skin color have certain advantages, privileges and benefits that persons of darker color do not enjoy. (In Louisiana, 36 percent of African-American families live in poverty, compared to 11 percent of whites.) People of color have certain systemic disadvantages, burdens and stigmas that they have to overcome. From a white perspective, everything is normal because white people often do not see the advantages that are inherent simply in being born into society with physical characteristics valued by that society. Such privilege shows up, however, in current everyday occurrences. In stores and restaurants, preferred treatment is at times given to

some, while others are delayed or denied the same equal service.

As members of a privileged race, we may not have espoused a conviction that our race was better than other races, but we probably have accepted uncritically the privileges attached to our race no matter how this has impacted others. Anyone who has accepted social privilege at the expense of people of another race is complicit in the fostering of attitudes and behavior that unfortunately can feed racial disharmony.

Our Archdiocesan Heritage

“Praised be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has bestowed on us in Christ every spiritual blessing in the heavens.” (Eph 1:3)

As we consider how we might foster racial harmony in the Archdiocese in the future, might we draw some positive lessons from our past? New Orleans has been a multi-racial and multi-cultural community for almost three centuries. Peoples from diverse lands have enriched the life and history of the city and surrounding area. In 1727, the Ursuline Sisters welcomed in their school children of different races and religious backgrounds. Our Cathedral records show that in 1803 there were parishioners from France, Spain, England, Scotland, Ireland, the Canary Islands, Cuba, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Belgium, Greece, Sardinia, Denmark, Bohemia, Santo Domingo, Mexico, Canada, Martinique, Majorca, Spain, Morocco, Puerto Rico and Cartagena in the Indies. In 1800, 69 percent of the children baptized were of African descent. Their parents came from Barbara, Chamba, Congo, Gambia, Fon, Guinea, Ibo, Mandingo, Mina and the Senegal nations.¹² The church parish was never free from cultural tensions. But a deeper reality still

**Our schools were open to everyone,
whether previously in Catholic schools or not.**



bound people together in their Catholic faith.

The Witness of Henriette Delille

Henriette Delille, born a free woman of color in 1813, grew up in a New Orleans family. Her mother, sister, grandmother, great grandmother and great, great grandmother were an integral part of the society wherein some women of African descent, both enslaved and free, were expected to enter into liaisons with white men. Some of them were brief; some were more lasting. At 22 years of age, Henriette experienced a profound conversion. She sensed that God was calling her to make a gift of herself to educate slaves deprived of the opportunity for education by virtue of the law of the time. She gathered around her like-minded free women of color and established a school, first in Faubourg Tremé and then on the present site of the Bourbon Orleans Hotel. She then formed a religious community, ultimately to be called the Sisters of the Holy Family, who still grace us today in the Archdiocese and beyond. She simply wanted to ensure that all children were included in God's family. She died in November 1862, two months shy of the promulgation of the Emancipation Proclamation. She never did see the slave children that she educated become free. She was a Catholic for whom personal faith and social concern converged in a truly remarkable way.¹³ On November 10, 2006, the Congregation for the Causes of Saints issued a decree of juridical validity in the investigation of the life, virtues and reputation of sanctity of Mere Henriette Delille.

Some Heroes of New Orleans in the 20th Century

New Orleans has also known some special heroes in the 20th century. A 30-year-old shoemaker and a member of St. Augustine Parish, Homer Plessy, refused to leave his seat on a New Orleans train in 1892 and set in motion a court battle that made its way to the United States Supreme Court. The Court ruled against Plessy. In 1954, the Court reversed itself in *Brown v. Board of Education* on the constitutional legitimacy of racial segregation in schools sanctioned by law. In 1953, three years before his Pastoral Letter, "The Morality of Racial Segregation," Archbishop Joseph Rummel wrote "Blessed are the Peacemakers," committing to the desegregation of all Archdiocesan parish activities and organizations. He remained

faithful to this commitment and extended it to Catholic schools in 1956 despite strong opposition from significant members of the lay community and even some priests. During the civil rights movement of the 20th century, Reverend Avery Alexander accepted arrest and even maltreatment in an effort to integrate the cafeteria facilities at City Hall. He also exercised strong leadership in the organizing of low-income hotel workers.

Attorney A.P. Tureaud can be properly called the dean of New Orleans black civil rights attorneys. A seventh-warder, a friend of St. Augustine

Jack Nelson, a prominent white attorney, championed the cause of civil rights by filing numerous lawsuits that challenged laws which perpetuated racial segregation. Post-Katrina, Dr. Norman Francis has exercised leadership in the recovery efforts as chair of the Louisiana Recovery Authority and president of Xavier University. Father Vien Nguyen has inspired the recovery of the Vietnamese community. Father José Lavastida joined other priests in offering heroic pastoral care to the sick at Louis Armstrong Airport in the height of the evacuation. Father Danilo Digal and Ms. Doris Voitier have pioneered parochial and public school recovery in St. Bernard Parish for all citizens. Father Gerard Stapleton has inspired the community of south Plaquemines to regroup across racial lines at St. Patrick Church in Port Sulphur. Thanks be to God for these and so many other heroes in our midst.

Social Justice Response by the Archdiocese

Our local Church has had a rich history of social outreach to minorities and the poor. Both religious communities and the Archdiocese have established Catholic schools that have provided the education so important for breaking the cycle of poverty for the poor. St. Katharine Drexel was personally responsible for establishing 40 schools for African Americans in south Louisiana, including Xavier University. Archbishop Hannan began the Social and Hispanic Apostolates to address some of the systemic ways in which poverty trapped the poor, especially African and

Latin Americans. He supported a number of civil rights efforts on the local scene. He welcomed refugees from Vietnam into the Archdiocese after the fall of Saigon. During Archbishop Hannan's tenure, Bishop Perry became the first African-American auxiliary bishop in the South. Bishop Carmon now fulfills that role and serves people of all races in an exemplary fashion. Catholic Charities has consistently reached out to offer programs of relief and self-help to people from all racial and ethnic groups.

The Catholic Campaign for Human Development has assisted low-income communities to learn how to address crime, drugs and employment issues. Christopher Homes has offered housing with dignity across racial lines for seniors who are in need. The Catholic and civic black leadership in this Archdiocese is largely composed of graduates of our Catholic schools. Archbishop Schulte insisted that inner-city Catholic schools remain open and offer the opportunity for quality academic and religious education to children who might otherwise be trapped in failing schools. Bishop Morin first came to New Orleans to participate in the Summer



High School, President of the New Orleans branch of the NAACP, Grand Knight of Peter Claver, he successfully argued civil rights cases throughout Louisiana.

Congressman Hale Boggs and, after his death, Congresswoman Lindy Boggs broke ranks with the Southern congressional delegation to promote and vote for civil rights legislation. Mayor Moon Landrieu became the first mayor of New Orleans to support civil rights initiatives in a turbulent time in our history and integrated City Hall. The Josephites, Divine Word Missionaries, Blessed Sacrament Sisters, Holy Ghost Fathers and Holy Family Sisters pioneered efforts to pastor and educate those who had been victimized by racial segregation.

Dora Zuniga and Elise Cerniglia worked for over 30 years to help immigrants and refugees secure housing, employment and education. Oretta Castle Haley opened her house to both blacks and whites. She fostered dialogue and training in her efforts to promote understanding and integration. Monsignor (now Bishop) Dominic Luong came to the support of his fellow Vietnamese who were fishermen. He defended their right to fish in open waters, even in the face of considerable community opposition.

Witness program and has continued to promote racial cooperation in both Church and the wider community.

Post-Katrina, Father William Maestri, the Archdiocesan School office, Catholic school administrators and teachers have spearheaded the return of education to Orleans Parish. Our schools were open to everyone, whether previously in Catholic schools or not. Catholic Charities was responsible, through the Second Harvest Food Bank, for the distribution of almost 40 million pounds of food to the hungry in the first four months of recovery. They have established 12 community centers strategically located to serve the most vulnerable with the basic necessities for survival. They have provided for volunteer cleaning and gutting of over 1,000 homes of the poor, for basic healthcare for over 3,000, and for personal outreach to over 700,000 people to help them access available services. Christopher Homes has returned over 1,300 seniors to their apartments. The Providence Community Housing Coalition has brought together Anglo, African, Latin and Asian American expertise in the planned development of an initiative for mixed-income, interracial and multi-ethnic housing for 7,000 families.

The Need of the Church - and of Us as Members - to Respond in this 21st Century

*“Once you know all these things, blest will you be if you put them into practice.”
(Jn 13:17)*

The action plan proposed later in this pastoral outlines a strategy for moving forward as a Church and as a post-Katrina community. It is important for us to take concrete initiatives in order to make up for abuses or disadvantages in the past. We should never, of course, promote unqualified people to assume positions they cannot handle. We should, however, spread the net wide when we are looking for the best qualified people to lead and serve. Compensating for the past by increasing opportunities in the present is just.

It is also important, as we move forward, to clarify that racism is not the same as fear, although fear can feed racism. As human beings, we have a natural anxiety and sometimes fear of people with different cultures or language. We may fear violence. We may fear economic loss. Fear in itself is not the equivalent of racism. The way in which we handle our fears can, however, lead us either to overcome them or to succumb to behavior that contributes to racial disharmony.

One of the phenomena of the recent past which we need to look at very realistically

is the significance of white exodus from the inner city and the toleration of poverty resulting in inferior schools, housing and healthcare for those who are racially and culturally different. Today, post-Katrina, African-American children and their parents seem to experience more difficulty in returning to the area. We also need to acknowledge that in rural and suburban areas racial and ethnic tensions exist as well. Sometimes it is very difficult to mobilize us Catholics to recognize and respond to our social responsibility for addressing the plight of these families and children. We have to take seriously the need for improved schools, just wages, affordable housing and accessible health care. We also need to encourage and find ways to support responsible marriages, good parenting and wholesome family life. Racial disharmony can be reinforced by human apathy.

A new challenge before us is the need for immigration reform. In the

political stalemate for partisan purposes. We need a thorough review of our immigration laws.

Some would suggest that it is important to address racial disharmony solely out of self-interest. In effect, those who experience privilege are negatively impacted just as much as those less privileged. But, our Church has a loftier call. We have the unique role of lifting up the truth. Working for racial and cultural harmony is imperative, if we are to live the Gospel message of Jesus Christ (1 Jn 2:8-11). This is also the time for us to deepen our rich history of a Jewish-Catholic partnership in this Archdiocese and to recommit ourselves to resist all expressions of anti-Semitism in our community. Moreover, our efforts to address racial justice today should also have a significant impact on the way we, in this age of increased terrorism, address ethnic and religious prejudice against Muslims.

Repentance, Forgiveness and Healing

“Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” (Mt 6:12)

I want to express an apology for the way in which I or other members of the Church have acted or failed to act. I want to acknowledge the past in truth, seek forgiveness and recommit myself and our Church in New Orleans to realizing the Gospel message in our relations with one another.

Repentance is truly Christian only if there is a resolve to examine our conscience and behavior and then to act differently in the future. Obviously, this involves the commitment to refrain from words and actions that perpetuate disharmony. It should include a commitment to work actively to counteract disharmony and racism wherever they may exist.

For racial harmony to prevail, it will also be important that those who have experienced personal or systemic hurt move to forgiveness and the healing of past memories. Hurt engenders anger. It is the way in which we handle that

anger that is critical. Pope John Paul II provided rich teaching about the grace of people who have been victimized in the past moving beyond resentment to a mature addressing of the evil and eventually to a forgiveness of those who have hurt them.¹⁴

Many of the memories that motivate us are subconscious. Hence, it is important that we surface these, lift them to God and ask for his healing grace. Christ has showed us that the saving way to move



wake of the September 11, 2001, attacks, our nation has given a high priority to national security. This has led to some unacceptably inhumane immigration policies and practices. Every country has a responsibility to defend its citizens, to protect its borders and to develop responsible control over immigration. But policies which penalize legitimate refugees or workers needed in our country or prevent the reunification of spouses and families are not responsible. We cannot tolerate a

from victimhood to victory is through forgiveness.

I am going to prepare a public opportunity at St. Louis Cathedral to ritualize our desire to accept the Lord's commission that we be instruments of repentance, reconciliation, justice, forgiveness and healing. Some of us need repentance because we know not what we do. Some of us need to grant forgiveness in order to be freed of resentment. All of us need to embrace Christ's call to be sons and daughters of the Father, brothers and sisters to one another.

Since beginning the consultative process in the development of this pastoral letter, unfortunate incidents both pre- and post-Katrina in our Archdiocese have reinforced the realization that we still have much work to do to realize the racial harmony in which God wants us to live. I am hopeful of meeting with other religious, elected and civic leaders to address how we together can form one body, one spirit of hope in our community. When Pope John Paul II met with African-American Catholics at Xavier University in his September 1987 visit, he declared, "There is no white Church. There is no black Church. There is only the one Church of Jesus Christ." It is important for us to be able to say: there is only one community in our new New Orleans.

Embracing All Peoples

When the levees breached, and metropolitan New Orleans was inundated with devastating floods, boats of every kind became life boats for people stranded at their homes, churches or public buildings. In the Gospel, the disciples experienced a life-threatening storm on the Sea of Galilee. Jesus remained asleep in the back of the boat. The disciples awakened him in their alarm and panic. Jesus rebuked the wind and calmed the water with the winds: "Quiet. Be still." Some Fathers of the Church and spiritual writers have speculated that the boat, probably Simon Peter's, could be interpreted as a symbol of St. Peter's barque, the Church. The storm is expressive of turbulence in the life of the Church. The sleeping Christ reminds us that, in times of trial, God seems to be distant or asleep. Only after the winds die down and the waters are calmed do we recognize that God was always faithful.

God's people have often turned to music in time of turbulence to express what they were experiencing. Moses did at the Red Sea. David did in his struggles. The Lord did as he and his disciples wended their way from the Last Supper to the Garden of Gethsemane. New Orleans is renowned the world over for music, especially jazz. A significant element of that music is harmony. Harmony presumes difference, since it is possible only when different notes are sounded simultaneously in a manner attractive to the ear. Harmony, therefore, embodies a richness that is realizable only through the cooperative expression of differences. Cannot, then, the music of New Orleans serve as a powerful symbol

of the beauty that is possible when diversity is allowed to flourish in a community that welcomes, values, nurtures and celebrates the gifts and differences of people from all racial and ethnic backgrounds? How wonderful it would be if all the churches that once had segregated areas for worship could truly become vibrant, multi-racial, multi-cultural communities of faith. What a grace it would be if we could find better ways to share and benefit by the rich and varied cultural gifts, traditions and expressions in spiritual, liturgical and pastoral life.

If Katrina should enable us to develop public schools which truly teach the mind and form children in virtue; if Katrina should make it possible for us to provide health care for all our citizens including the most vulnerable; if Katrina should goad us into truly working together for flood protection, public transportation, economic development and housing communities which are mixed-income, interracial and culturally uplifting; if Katrina should give rise to more citizens and public officials who truly want to serve the common good, then God will have enabled us to transform tragedy into victory.

I pray that we might, as a Church and a community, become a place welcoming to linguistically, racially and culturally diverse people, a place of beauty, a place of safety, a place of peace, a place for spiritual enrichment and renewal. God grant us the grace, the wisdom and the courage to realize this vision.

Pastoral Plan of Action

In order to ensure that the Church's teaching, contained in this pastoral letter, permeates ever more fully our thinking and our lives, I present the following plan of action for our Archdiocesan administration, parishes, schools and ministries:

Commitments of the Archdiocese

1. That the Archdiocesan Office of Worship, in collaboration with the Office for Black Catholics, the Hispanic Apostolate and the Asian leadership, plan a commissioning service to dedicate ourselves to the formation of a new New Orleans that truly welcomes all as brothers and sisters.
2. That the Office of Worship, in collaboration with the Office of Black Catholics, the Hispanic Apostolate and the Asian leadership, promote liturgies throughout the Archdiocese that reflect the religious and cultural symbols, music and heritage of our many different Catholic people.
3. That Catholic Charities, in consultation with the Office of Continuing Education of the Clergy, the Office of Religious Education, the Office for Black Catholics, the Hispanic Apostolate and the Asian leadership, identify and develop effective

programs in racial and cultural education for priests, deacons, archdiocesan and parish staffs, religious, teachers and catechists.

4. That the Archdiocesan Administrative Council, in consultation with the Office of Human Resources, prepare a protocol for recruiting both personnel for leadership/administrative roles as well as volunteers to serve on consulting boards so that the racial and cultural diversity and gifts of our Catholic community can be better represented.

5. That the Finance Office develop an Archdiocesan policy which promotes a more effective consideration and engagement of Black, Hispanic, Asian and Native American

professionals, contractors and vendors, especially in our rebuilding effort.

6. That all Catholic entities refrain from holding meetings or events in clubs or establishments which are not open to a racially and culturally diverse membership.

7. That the Archdiocesan Office for Ecumenical and Interfaith Affairs, in consultation with the Office for Black Catholics, the Hispanic Apostolate and the Asian leadership, develop an initiative to promote a collaborative effort of Christian and non-Christian religious congregations to address racial and cultural discrimination.

8. That the Archbishop continue his efforts to advocate with Congress for comprehensive immigration reforms that conform to the principles espoused by the U.S. Catholic Bishops in the pastoral letter, "Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope."

9. That the Archbishop propose to the Louisiana Catholic Conference initiatives which promote fair wages, housing and employment practices.

10. That St. Joseph Seminary and Notre Dame Seminary continue to improve their efforts to prepare seminarians for priestly ministry in a multi-racial and multi-cultural Church. Seminarians of the Archdiocese of New Orleans need to study this Pastoral Letter in order to participate in its implementation.

11. That all Archdiocesan entities review and refine, if necessary, policies and procedures to ensure that they are respectful of our multi-cultural and multi-racial parishioners, clients, faculties, students and staff.

12. That the parishes, schools and Catholic Charities make every effort to assist people of varying races and cultures to return to our community.

13. That the newly formed Providence Community Housing Coalition continue to collaborate in the efforts to assist in the development of mixed-income, multi-racial housing in our Archdiocese.

14. That the Archdiocesan Family Life Office develop initiatives to assist in the strengthening of marriages and families in the lives of the poor.

15. That an implementation task force assist Archdiocesan offices in developing effective vehicles for promoting this

pastoral message and acting on this pastoral plan in parishes, schools and ministries.

Initiatives for Quality Education

1. That the Archdiocesan Office of Catholic Schools, the Office of Religious Education and the Youth Office continue efforts to ensure quality education and to access financial assistance for our schools, parishes and youth programs especially those which offer special services to racially and culturally diverse students.
2. That the pastors and Catholic school administrators take the initiative to increase diversity in teaching faculty, fostering an appropriate exchange of guest teachers or lecturers and student interaction to help young people experience the richness of our multi-racial Catholic heritage.
3. That the Superintendent of Catholic Schools continue to work closely with the Executive Director of the Louisiana Catholic Conference, state and city officials to find the most effective ways to offer all children a quality education, including advocacy efforts promoting parental choice in education.
4. That the Archdiocesan Superintendent of Schools, Archdiocesan Chief Financial Officer and Development Office work together to ensure that sufficient capital is available in this post-Katrina period to address both major capital needs in the rebuilding effort and equitable salaries in schools largely dependent on Archdiocesan support.
5. That the Archdiocesan School Office continue to explore ways to encourage adults to serve in tutor/mentor relationships with underprivileged and at-risk students.

Recommendations for Parishes

1. That pastors and pastoral staffs participate in the Archdiocesan workshops and programs on racial and cultural sensitivity, in order to incorporate into parish life and ministry initiatives that foster racial harmony.
2. That parishes (who are not already engaged) consider twinning or similar programs with another parish of different racial or cultural background in order to promote post-Katrina recovery, and inter-parochial fellowship including exchange of choirs, prayer groups, service and social justice projects.
3. That parishes explore effective ways to ensure a welcoming hospitality to those who are racially or culturally different.
4. That parishes regularly offer prayers for racial harmony and consider invoking saints such as St. Martin de Porres, St. Katherine Drexel, St. Josephine Bakhita, St. Peter Claver, St. Paul Miki, the Vietnamese Martyrs, Bl. Kateri Tekakwitha and St. Juan Diego.
5. That parishes assist in identifying and

nurturing vocations to the priesthood, diaconate and religious life among African, Hispanic, Asian and Native American peoples.

6. That parishes seek ways to collaborate with civic and interfaith groups to promote racial and social justice.
7. That the Archdiocese continue its efforts to provide appropriately for cultural and racial needs in future decisions to reopen church parishes and schools

Recommendations for All Catholics

1. That each of us ponder the implications of this teaching and enter into the conversion God calls us to experience.
2. That we confront and reject any racial stereotypes, remarks and prejudices.
3. That we consider inviting persons of other races and cultures into our gatherings and homes.
4. That we participate in Archdiocesan and parish efforts to promote racial and social justice including fair wages, housing and employment.
5. That we refrain from membership in clubs or organizations which are not open to a racially or culturally diverse membership, or that we actively invite as guests and promote as members those currently excluded.
6. That we vote for public officials who are committed to human life, human dignity and racial, cultural and systemic justice.
7. That we support church and community-based initiatives and efforts to correct discriminatory injustices in order to empower and lift up the poor.

Conclusion

Our Holy Father, in his encyclical letter, "Deus Caritas Est," has expressed the truly Christian motivation for acting to promote racial harmony. "Love of neighbor is thus shown to be possible in the way proclaimed by the Bible, by Jesus. It consists in the very fact that, in God and with God, I love even the person whom I do not like or even know. This can only take place on the basis of an intimate encounter with God, an encounter which has become a communion of will, even affecting my feelings. Then I learn to look on this other person not simply with my eyes and my feelings, but from the perspective of Jesus Christ. His friend is my friend. . .

"But if in my life I fail completely to heed others, solely out of a desire to be 'devout' and to perform my 'religious duties,' then my relationship with God will also grow arid. It becomes merely 'proper,' but loveless. Only my readiness to encounter my neighbor and to show him love makes me sensitive to God as well . . . Love of God and love of neighbor are thus inseparable, they form a single commandment. Both live from the love of God who has loved us first. No longer is it a question, then, of a 'commandment' imposed from without and calling for the impossible, but rather of a

freely bestowed experience of love from within, a love which by its very nature must then be shared with others. Love grows through love. Love is 'divine' because it comes from God and unites us to God; through this unifying process it makes us a 'we' which transcends our divisions and makes us one, until in the end God is 'all in all' " (1 Cor 15:28).

Footnotes

- 1 "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World," Vatican Council II, 29, 2 (cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1935)
- 2 Catechism of the Catholic Church, 871
- 3 "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church," Vatican Council II, 1
- 4 Bishop Joseph Francis is a native son of Lafayette, Louisiana. His brother, Dr. Norman Francis, continues to serve as the able president of Xavier University.
- 5 Brothers and Sisters to Us, 3
- 6 The Church & Racism, Pontifical Commission on Justice and Peace, 1988, 33
- 7 Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1935 and The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 144 and 557.
- 8 Racial Harmony, 1
- 9 President Lincoln released the statement on September 22, 1862, with an effective date of January 1, 1863
- 10 Brothers and Sisters to Us, 1 and 6
- 11 In a pastoral issued by the United States Bishop's Committee on Black Catholics on the twentieth anniversary of Brothers and Sisters to Us, the bishops wrote: "The reality of racism vis-à-vis theological considerations on the subject forcefully challenges our consciences. In spite of all that has been said and written about racism in the last twenty years, very little if anything at all has been done in Catholic education; such as it was yesterday, it is today. Good people would react positively if they realized, too, that freedom for the victims of racism is a right to life issue. Racism is a key 'evangelization deterrent' within the African American community."
- 12 Dr. Charles Nolan, Archdiocesan Archives, provided this information from the review of the St. Louis Cathedral sacramental records.
- 13 Cf. Cyprian Davis, OSB, Henriette Delille: Servant of Slaves: Witness to the Poor for the biography of this remarkable woman.
- 14 cf. John Paul II, Rich in Mercy, 1980, 13 and 14 and in many homilies.

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