



## CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF SASKATCHEWAN

### **Regarding Racism in our Society and a Call for Respect and Caring**

July 13, 2020

#### **Dear Brothers and Sister in Christ:**

As Catholic bishops of our province's Catholic churches and institutions, we express our great concern regarding racial injustices. We join others in our community who support efforts at addressing racial injustice and respond to the scandal of how people treat one another.

The protests that began over the tragic death of George Floyd in the United States have expanded as protesters raise awareness of widespread injustice. In our own provincial context, people across the province are calling on government, businesses, and all institutions to address inequality and injustices caused by systemic racism. In our context, such systemic racism continues to impact Indigenous Peoples, and those of African and Asian descent, including most recently anti-Asian assaults and offenses in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic.

We also continue to hear of incidents here in Saskatchewan and in other parts of Canada that are of grave concern. As we observe this deterioration of human respect and kindness, we need to affirm the intrinsic dignity of every human person and seek respectful and constructive ways to solve problems and differences, versus spiraling into increasing disrespect and violence. There is far too much at stake to continue down this fateful and destructive path!

There is much to affirm on this issue in our Catholic tradition, beginning in the first book of the Bible, where we read how all peoples are created in the image and likeness of God Himself. (see Genesis 1:26-27) With the privilege of being created *fully human* comes the responsibility to live and act towards others as God acts towards us. St. Paul affirms this call when he states,

“If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy

complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus..." (Phil. 2: 1-5)

The privilege of our humanity carries with it the great responsibility of the preferential care of our brothers and sisters – especially those who deal with obstacles, injustices, or other barriers to their human flourishing.

One of these barriers is systemic racism. Racism affects our culture in many ways. Times of crisis – such as the current circumstance of the COVID-19 pandemic – further aggravates racism's effects as people are under further strain and feel threatened. If not addressed, racism will tear apart human solidarity as it corrupts our minds and hearts.

Let us work together to end the scourge of racism and intolerance by encouraging respectful dialogue that addresses our society's major justice issues, including addressing obstacles to human dignity, and seeks ways to bring about constructive growth and change. In the biblical tradition, such change always first involves a personal change of mind and heart – an ongoing interior conversion. "Get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit!" (Ezekiel 18:31) We can work constructively for systemic change and growth when we are open to this in our own lives.

Such change also needs to address how we engage and dialogue about difficult topics and issues. In all ways – the Christian community and all people of good will need to hold the bar high in how we behave ourselves and as we seek constructive and respectful dialogue versus the way of destructive confrontation or melancholic disengagement. Pope Francis highlights the primacy of dialogue as follows:

"If there is one word that we should never tire of repeating, it is this: *dialogue*. We are called to promote a culture of dialogue by every possible means and thus to rebuild the fabric of society. The culture of dialogue entails a true apprenticeship and a discipline that enables us to view others as valid dialogue partners, to respect the foreigner, the immigrant and people from different cultures as worthy of being listened to. Today we urgently need to engage all the members of society in building a culture which privileges dialogue as a form of encounter' and in creating 'a means for building consensus and agreement while seeking the goal of a just, responsive and inclusive society."

Let us pray and commit ourselves to this honourable and very needed path! As bishops we join with all of you in expressing the good work of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, completed in 2015. We have only just begun to carry out its vision for achieving reconciliation. The circumstances that we face highlighting racism, injustice and violence in our world remind us that we are at an important threshold. *May we choose wisely and walk courageously as we, "... act justly, love kindly, and walk humbly with our God"* (Micah 6:8).

Yours in Christ,



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Archbishop of Regina  
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Most Rev. Bryan Bayda  
Ukrainian Eparchial Bishop of Saskatoon



Most Rev. Murray Chatlain  
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