

USCCB Special Task Force to Promote Peace In Our Communities: Final Report and Recommendations



The Most Reverend Wilton D. Gregory
Archbishop of Atlanta
Chairman, Special Task Force to
Promote Peace in Our Communities



Task Force to Promote Peace in Our Communities

3211 FOURTH STREET NE • WASHINGTON DC 20017-1194 • 202-541-3181

November 10, 2016

Your Eminence/Your Excellency:

As Chairman of the Special Task Force to Promote Peace in Our Communities, I am pleased to present you with our final report and recommendations.

We find ourselves at a critically important moment for our individual communities and our nation as a whole. The Church has a tremendous opportunity and, we believe, an equally tremendous responsibility to bring people together in prayer and dialogue, to begin anew the vital work of fostering healing and lasting peace.

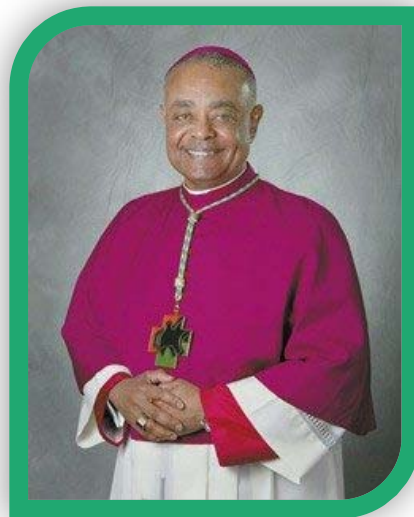
As the Task Force notes in our findings, the effort needed to root out racism and create healthy dynamics in our neighborhoods, dynamics based on encounter and deeper understanding, is a long-term project. Even so, we must not be intimidated or afraid of the hard work before us. The Church is at her absolute best when she is a bold and prophetic voice for the power of the love upon which our faith is based, the love of Jesus Christ.

I pray that you will find the recommendations in this report of value, knowing that they are based on prayerful dialogue and the insight of men and women who bring unique perspectives and experience to the questions before us.

I thank you for the honor of chairing this Task Force, and I am confident that the Holy Spirit will enlighten and enliven us all as we work together to promote peace and dialogue in the days, weeks, and years ahead.

Fraternally yours in Christ,

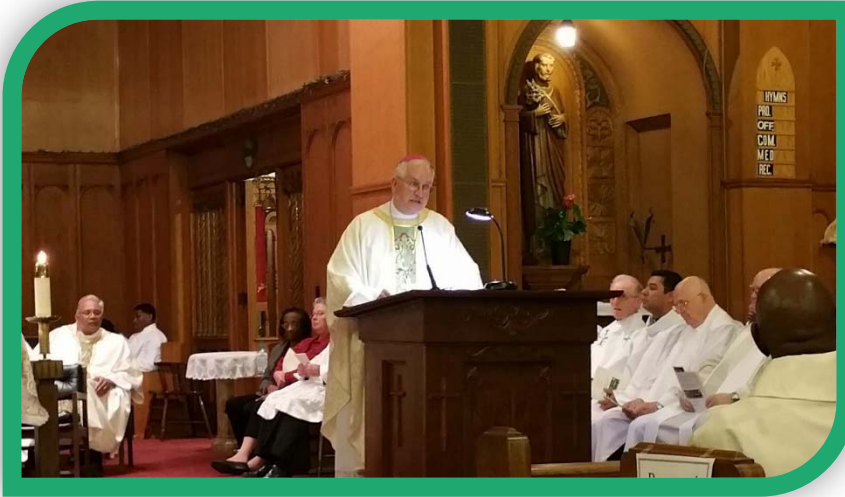
Most Reverend Wilton D. Gregory, S.L.D.
Archbishop of Atlanta



Contents

Letter from Chairman.....	1
Contents	2
Background and Purpose	3
National Day of Prayer	5
Listening Session Insight	7
Additional Interviews	12
General Recommendations.....	14
Conference Recommendations and Next Steps.....	16
Appendix	18

Background and Purpose



With seemingly continual tragedies occurring in every region of our nation, Archbishop Joseph E. Kurtz, Archbishop of Louisville and President of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) called for a National Day of Prayer on September 9th, the feast of St. Peter Claver, as one way

to nurture open, honest and civil dialogue in our communities struggling with unprecedented tension and violence. At the same time, he announced the formation of a special Task Force to help bishops and their faith communities to understand, assess, and address the multi-layered and pervasive challenges associated with race relations in the United States in 2016.

Archbishop Kurtz expressed that “[b]y stepping forward to embrace the suffering, through unified, concrete action animated by the love of Christ, we hope to nurture peace and build bridges of communication and mutual aid in our own communities.”

Task Force Structure

Archbishop Wilton D. Gregory (Atlanta) was asked to chair the *Task Force to Promote Peace in Our Communities*, and Archbishop Thomas G. Wenski (Miami), Bishop Shelton J. Fabre (Houma-Thibodaux), Bishop John H. Ricard, SSJ (Pensacola-Tallahassee, ret.) and Bishop Jaime Soto (Sacramento) were invited to serve as bishop members. The following Bishops and other consultants with relevant experience working through violence and discord in their local communities participated in the work of the Task Force:

Bishop Consultants

- Bishop Gerald R. Barnes – San Bernardino
- Archbishop Robert J. Carlson – St. Louis
- Cardinal-elect Blase J. Cupich – Chicago
- Bishop Frank J. Dewane – Venice
- Cardinal-elect Kevin J. Farrell – Dallas, Prefect, Dicastery for the Laity, the Family and Life
- Bishop Robert E. Guglielmone – Charleston

- Archbishop William E. Lori – Baltimore
- Bishop Robert W. McElroy – San Diego
- Bishop Robert William W. Muench – Baton Rouge
- Bishop John G. Noonan – Orlando
- Bishop David G. O’Connell – Auxiliary Bishop, Los Angeles
- Bishop J. Terry Steib – Memphis, ret.
- Archbishop Stefan Soroka – Philadelphia - Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church

Other Consultants

- Father Ray Bomberger, SSJ – Pastor, St. Peter Claver Parish, Baltimore, MD
- Bishop Phillip A. Brooks, Sr. – Church of God in Christ, Inc.
- Monsignor Raymond East – Pastor, St. Teresa of Avila Parish, Washington, DC
- Sister Julia Huiskamp, DC – Griffin Center, East St. Louis, IL
- Pastor Michael McBride – The Way Christian Center, Berkeley, CA
- The Honorable Arthur McFarland – Chief Municipal Judge, Charleston, NC (ret.)
- Father Michael Pflieger – Pastor, St. Sabina Parish, Chicago, IL

Task Force Activities

In addition to supporting and providing resources for the National Day of Prayer, the Task Force met telephonically in early September and then in person on October 11 in St. Louis, Missouri. The focus of the in person meeting was to “size the problem,” discuss current best practices, and begin to propose a way forward with respected civic and religious leaders who have been at the fore of this crisis across the country. Supplemental interviews were conducted after the meeting. Bishop members of the Task Force as well as bishop consultants were subsequently consulted in the drafting of this report and approved the recommendations contained herein.

National Day of Prayer



In preparation for the National Day of Prayer for Peace in Our Communities on September 9, 2016, the Task Force and USCCB staff provided support and resources to bishops and (arch)dioceses:

- **Prayer Card** – An approved prayer card for

the Day of Prayer was created in English and Spanish and made available for download at www.usccb.org/racism. The prayer is a useful resource for dedicated Masses, group prayer, and continued use by the faithful in homes and/or prayer groups following the conclusion of the National Day of Prayer.

- **Possible Day of Prayer Observances** – The Task Force suggested various activities for (arch)dioceses to observe the National Day of Prayer:
 - *An (Arch)diocesan Mass or special prayer service.*
 - *A dedicated Rosary for peace in our communities with streaming and video components for the homebound and those unable to attend in person.*
 - *Ringing local church bells at a designated time.*
 - *Promotion of events and presentations that relate to issues of race, violence and community peace.*
 - *Ongoing diocesan and community conversations on race.*
- **Additional Resources** – The Task Force provided additional resources and support:
 - *Webpage on Racism* - <http://www.usccb.org/racism> - This page provides the latest information in a “What’s New” section, Church statements and background documents, statements and letters from bishops, prayer and liturgy resources, teaching material, models and stories of communities coming together to address violence and build relationships, blog posts and relevant links. Information is continually updated on this page.
 - *Template for Day of Prayer Observances* (See Appendix, A-1).
 - *Sample Prayers of the Faithful* (See Appendix, A-2).
 - *Prayer Card* (See Appendix, A-3).

Reports were positive from dioceses that participated in the National Day of Prayer, and both local and national media covered aspects of the day. At the USCCB, Monsignor J. Brian Bransfield, General Secretary dedicated the noon Mass for staff in observance of the Day of Prayer, and staff prayed together the Prayer for Peace in Our Communities. Staff were encouraged to dialogue as well as pray for one another and those experiencing racism in their own lives or families.

Listening Session Insight

At Archbishop Carlson's kind invitation, the Task Force to Promote Peace in Our Communities conducted an in-person listening session on October 11, 2016, at the Hilton St. Louis Airport Hotel, St. Louis, Missouri from 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

The following Task Force members, bishop and other consultants, and staff were in attendance:



- Bishop Gerald R. Barnes –San Bernardino
- Archbishop Robert J. Carlson – St. Louis
- Bishop Robert E. Guglielmone – Charleston
- Bishop Robert W. McElroy – San Diego
- Bishop Robert William W. Muench – Baton Rouge
- Bishop David G. O'Connell – Auxiliary Bishop, Los Angeles
- Archbishop Stefan Soroka – Philadelphia – Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church
- Father Ray Bomberger, SSJ – Pastor, St. Peter Claver Parish, Baltimore, MD
- Bishop Phillip A. Brooks, Sr. – Church of God in Christ, Inc.
- Monsignor Raymond East – Pastor, St. Teresa of Avila Parish, Washington, DC
- Sister Julia Huiskamp, DC – Griffin Center, East St. Louis, IL
- Pastor Michael McBride – The Way Christian Center, Berkeley, CA
- The Honorable Arthur McFarland – Chief Municipal Judge, Charleston, NC (retired)
- Father Michael Pflieger – Pastor, St. Sabina Parish, Chicago, IL
- Mr. David Spotanski – Chief Operating Officer, Archdiocese of Atlanta
- Dr. Jonathan Reyes – Executive Director, USCCB Department of Justice, Peace, and Human Development
- Mr. Ralph McCloud – Director, Catholic Campaign for Human Development, USCCB
- Ms. Donna Grimes – Assistant Director, African American Affairs, Secretariat of Cultural Diversity in the Church, USCCB

Archbishop Gregory encouraged candid conversation and frank dialogue among those present, and was rewarded with valuable insights into both the nature of the challenges in our communities and healing and transformative responses for bishops, priests and deacons, the faithful and the wider community.

The summary below does not necessarily reflect a consensus by the participants; specific recommendations are provided elsewhere in this report. Some detail is provided to illustrate a diversity of opinion or to note a viewpoint shared by a particular constituency. Commentary has been summarized under broad topic headings rather than listed in detail and attributed.

Nature of the Challenge

While the country is at a critical moment, many present stressed that the work of the Task Force was a continuation of an ongoing conversation and not meant to provide one-time solutions. The interrelated nature of the challenges facing our communities are such that much sustained work on many levels (individual, shared and structural) is necessary to face festering problems and move toward lasting solutions and healing.

Participants emphasized that matters of race relations and the evil of racism were central issues to be confronted and addressed. Related to these are the relationships between law enforcement and communities of color, especially in African American communities. This point must not get lost in a broader conversation. “Class” distinctions were also discussed as a factor in terms of family and poverty, as well as income inequality.

Even with this clarity, challenges present in our communities are complex and inter-connected, drawing into the spotlight difficulties related to our education systems, poverty, lack of jobs, domestic violence, gun violence, prisons and incarceration, migration and the like.

Adequacy of Church Response

The Church, rightly, addresses and must prioritize a multitude of concerns. There was a distinct sense that the statements of the past by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and its predecessor organizations on racism were important and remain relevant. Even so, these alone were not sufficient to address the difficulties of the moment.

Some stressed that the Church must find its bold prophetic voice at this important time, both heeding the voice of conscience as well as bringing right conscience into the public square. The power of the Church, in collaboration with others, in helping set the stage for a conversation on large questions ought not be underestimated. The Church has an opportunity to convene and bring those with fresh insight to the dialogue. This is a moment to hear from young people, and foster real dialogue on topics that directly impact their perceptions of their own futures.

At the same time, the obstacles to bold action were discussed in some detail. In helping to overcome those impediments, the importance of looking to and replicating successful models, and moving forward with confidence that the long-term gains outweigh any short-term risk of addressing real problems, was emphasized. Discussion included reflecting internally as Church to see where our own approaches might contribute to challenges relating to race, from hiring practices to parish and school closures.

The significance of prayer was stressed and held up as a unique contribution of the faith community, one that is critical to the challenges facing people. This prayer must involve members of many denominations and be proactive, sustained at all times and not only in the heat of a tragic moment.

Encounter and Understanding

Participants identified a lack of understanding and inadequate opportunities to gain insight into realities within others' communities as a particular problem. Intentional efforts to encounter one another are vital to lasting solutions and healing.

The need for honest dialogues across many groups and communities was stressed – with and among faith communities, as well as with law enforcement (including judges and prosecutors), community leaders, young people, activists, and community groups. Dialogue need not mean endorsement, but no progress can be made if we are unwilling to engage one another and find new ways to hear others' perspectives. Bishops can be important conveners of and participants in these conversations, leading by example among those most affected.

Innovation in Response

In September 2016, the National Black Catholic Congress (NBCC) expanded its regular biannual meeting to discuss issues of race and tension. At the conclusion of their deliberations they prepared a report (Appendix A-4), which was submitted to the Task Force at the October gathering.

For new approaches to achieve peace in our communities to be successful, involvement of African Americans throughout the United States is essential. Ecumenical and interfaith collaboration is vital to make efforts credible in affected communities.

Participants agreed that modes of communication and engagement that are “outside of the box” and which do not get bogged down in bureaucracy are important. Some responses and approaches will require bishops to be nimble, both at the national and local levels.

Polarization within the Church community was discussed, as was the fact that the social issues in question and concerns of racism have human dignity, family, and life concerns at their cores.

Some participants urged local dialogues as a way to gain general perspective, but also as part of a process to season the Conference's forthcoming statement on racism.

The significance of community organizing efforts and the Catholic Campaign for Human Development were shared. Outreach and awareness-raising by people to others within their own communities was recommended, particularly within white communities. Wealthy parishes can also interact very intentionally with parishes of more modest resources.

Focus on countering the culture of fear and criminalization of poverty was explored. Some participants mentioned the relatively small numbers of communities plagued by killings and other violence. The heightened, disproportionate level of publicity distorts public perception. Even within those communities with high levels of violent activity, a minority of residents in isolated areas are often responsible. Mediation, conflict-resolution mechanisms, proper policing techniques and engagement are essential. The faith community can be a mediating body where such entities do not exist.

We must also understand the scarring influence of trauma. We know that trauma is the accumulated impact of events that damage the soul, the spirit, the mind, and that trauma can linger. Communities of faith bring a powerful healing influence, and we must infuse our work with trauma-informed care. Clergy training programs can assist in raising up ways that heal and restore rather than ways that punish the poor.

Some contributors shared remarkable approaches to tackling extremely challenging circumstances. One such effort brings gang members into a basketball outreach, three to five gang members per team. The program works with 350 gang members; over 120 have completed coursework at the church. Fifteen are now in college, and close to 400 have signed an agreement against violence. Another initiative asks the city to take 50 at-risk youth and support them toward full-time employment.

The value of the "Building Intercultural Competence for Ministers" trainings offered by the USCCB was extolled. One of the modules for the program that focuses on racism seems to be among the most difficult for people. It is important to work with these challenging materials.

The upcoming convenings for the V Encuentro and efforts of the NBCC are important components of lasting solutions. Programs that work with those in prison, bringing the message of the Gospel, as well as connecting individuals to those who can provide support after incarceration, are key.

Mention was made of Saint John Paul II's encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, which emphasizes participation and self-development. For those suffering from injustice in society, one vital component for lasting change is for people to be able to participate in the conversation about their

future and the transformation of their lives. We must find a way to provide forums for individuals and families to speak their pain. Some efforts focusing on peer transformation and building community dynamics were detailed. Reaching the affective level with our work was stressed.

Immersion experiences, particularly among school-age children, were held up as a valuable approach. The group discussed community engagement with police through organized citizens, as well as the success of community policing models.

The participants discussed the potential for impact in the Catholic university system, particularly in providing a forum for dialogue. The 2017 Convocation in Orlando, Florida was also discussed as an opportunity to highlight these important realities and learn from one another.

Disaffection after the election was repeatedly mentioned during the meeting, particularly as an opportunity for the Church to provide some deeper thought and action at a critical time. This moment gives us a sense of urgency to catch the imagination of people on these topics and to provide constructive outlets for frustration and anger that is just under the surface in many places in America.

Additional Interviews

Additional interviews were conducted by USCCB staff with key individuals following the listening session on October 11, 2016.

Engaged Student

A student who participated in demonstrations in both Ferguson and North Charleston was interviewed. He expressed alarm at the violence that has stricken his small southern hometown, including the reality of young teenagers with ready access to weapons and the urban violence that often follows.

The young man mentioned that the Church can facilitate honest dialogue especially among young people to listen to their concerns and issues. He has remained active in the Church and credits his faith for any success he has attained. As a child, he was active in the Junior Knights of Peter Claver and other ministries aimed at him and his peers.

He hopes to enter film school after graduation and has already produced a few short films that speak to the reality of young African American people.

Law Enforcement Officials

Interviews were conducted with law enforcement officials to provide their perspectives. The varied but interrelated causes of violence were mentioned, including poverty, the educational system, and the trauma that many young people are experiencing now which cause them to be constantly in a state of heightened anxiety. A lack of hope often leads to violent activity.

From the perspective of one police official, a lack of empathy and compassion on the part of law enforcement can prevent peace. Demonstrating that one cares about another can go a long way toward building the trust needed to move toward peace. Officers need to interact, get out of their vehicles and get to know members of the community.

In the opinion of one law enforcement official, the Catholic community and church leaders can work to set up community events in various neighborhoods that promote dialogue and give police and the community a chance to sit and talk. They can also hold police departments accountable for the actions of the officers, both good and bad.

The official said, “[t]he Catholic Church as an institution can work with police departments to become transparent to the public that they serve, as well as support departments by encouraging them to work to serve the communities in the right way. Be more proactive in speaking out when it comes to injustices.”

One official warned that when local church leaders become too politically connected, there can be a lack of action when it comes time to decry violence. It is important that they be willing to hold those on the local level accountable for their actions or lack of action.

Another law enforcement official began work on the same day as a tragic killing of two people by a teacher in the local school district. He stressed the importance of parental involvement and allowing parents to be supported and informed. Combatting parental denial about the activities of their children, particularly in violent crime, was stressed.

The role of the Church community in helping to provide support and fill in the gaps with struggling families is key, as is treatment for mental illness (both for the children and other family members).

In terms of dealing with racism, a law enforcement representative felt that the Church needs to be honest, courageous, cutting edge/prophetic, and acknowledge that the issues are complex and difficult.

He initiated a program where each church in his area was tasked with being responsible for what happened within a one mile radius of their church building. Each church was given training on how to engage in conversations that would build community dialogue around the church.

The role of the Church as convener was described as critical to his work. He would often be part of meetings that included community leaders, business owners, faith leaders, service providers, higher education and law enforcement professionals. The representatives of the police department attended without uniforms, badges or guns. Police and church leaders put themselves in the mode to listen and facilitate critical discussions.

General Recommendations

Based on the foregoing information, the Task Force to Promote Peace in Our Communities recommends the following local action items for bishops in the United States:

1. **Prayer** – Prayer for peace in our communities is essential. Bishops should initiate opportunities for solidarity in prayer during the year – Masses, Rosaries, ecumenical and interfaith services, and so forth. These can be powerful moments for encounter in God’s grace and mercy.
2. **Conduct Local Dialogues** – Bishops would be well-served to convene members of the local community for conversations on race, violence, policing, incarceration, and the like. The convening power of the Church, which was indicated and lifted up by many, is a powerful tool to begin the process of understanding, give voice to past and current pain and difficulty, and begin healing. Dialogues, hosted by the local bishop, can include affected communities, youth, members of faith communities, and law enforcement, among others.
3. **Parish-based and Internal Diocesan Conversation and Training** – As we now encourage our parishioners to grow in their awareness about race relations and related issues, clergy and staff will benefit from dialogue meant to explore how the Church can plan to be even more active within communities that face tension and race-related strife. By surfacing local realities and discussing collaborative approaches, we can ensure that the Church is proactive in building bridges and providing constructive forums for engagement by all people. Bishops may wish to explore intercultural competence trainings for staff and parishioners.
4. **Foster Opportunities for Encounter** – Bishops can foster opportunities for themselves, their clergy, and the faithful to see firsthand the challenges within their own and others’ communities. Creating forums and settings in which all are able to experience lived realities, dialogue with individuals and families, and deepen relationship is critical.



5. **Catholic Campaign for Human Development** – Empowering communities to identify and begin to address the challenges they are experiencing for themselves is an important step in community healing. The Catholic Campaign for Human Development helps to fund many groups that work to address, in constructive ways, concerns about race, poverty, housing violence, education, policing, and much more. Bishops ought to look for ways to engage with local parishes, neighborhood organizations and members of affected communities in exploring the feasibility of funding efforts aimed at working toward community peace and understanding.

Conference Recommendations and Next Steps

The Task Force to Promote Peace in Our Communities recommends the following action items for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops:



1. **National Day of Prayer** – The National Day of Prayer for Peace in our Communities ought to be a standing, annual observance, supported by the relevant USCCB committees and staff departments and offices.
2. **Prayer Resources** – The relevant USCCB committees, staff departments and offices should regularly create and disseminate materials and resources to assist in prayer for peace and racial harmony.
3. **Statement on Racism** – A statement from the full body of Bishops on racism is more important than ever. The Task Force has two recommendations in this regard:
 - a. That the Administrative Committee of the USCCB, in collaboration with relevant standing committees, do all it can to expedite the drafting and approval of the statement on racism currently contemplated in the 2017-2020 Strategic Plan, given the urgency of the present moment;
 - b. That the Conference President and relevant USCCB committees identify opportunities for a shorter-term statement (perhaps a joint statement of a key number of Committee chairmen) to address many of these same concerns in the context of likely post-election uncertainty and disaffection.
4. **Standing Committee Collaboration** – Because the Committee on Cultural Diversity in the Church and the Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development already have civil rights and racism (along with many other related topics) included in their priorities, the Task Force recommends that an annual report on collaborative efforts to foster peace and combat racism be made to the Administrative Committee in September of each year. Collaboration ought to include regular consultation with key groups (National Black Catholic

Congress, Black and Indian Mission Office, etc.). Recommendations and best practices concerning coalition-building in local communities should be explored and shared.

5. **2017 Convocation** – The Convocation in July of 2017 presents a tremendous opportunity for the USCCB to lift up constructive solutions to address issues relating to race, and to provide solutions and resources to local communities. The program ought to reflect this topic in an intentional way.

6. **Catholic Campaign for Human Development** – The Catholic Campaign for Human Development, mindful of its commitment to those who are marginalized in American society, should be tasked with identifying and funding new and innovative approaches that promote community development and peace. Special attention should be given to projects that directly involve the local (arch)dioceses in dialogue and civic engagement to foster healing and social solidarity. Insight into models which are effective in reaching people who “slip through the cracks” and are not served by our ministries but find themselves at the highest risk of being involved in violence should be explored and shared with local dioceses. A report on this increased emphasis can be included in the aforementioned standing committee annual report given to the Administrative Committee.

APPENDIX



[(Arch)Diocese Name] Activities for the National Day of Prayer For Peace in Our Communities

Archbishop Joseph Kurtz, President of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, has encouraged dioceses across the United States to mark a Day of Prayer for Peace in Our Communities on September 9. The **(Arch)Diocese** is pleased participate in the National Day of Prayer in the following ways:

An (Arch)Diocesan-wide Mass on September 9, the Feast of St. Peter Claver

A Mass will be celebrated in **[Church name]** at **[time]**. **(Arch)bishop _____ [or the Bishop Designee]** will celebrate the Mass. All are welcome to gather in solidarity. A flyer and more information will be ready for you soon, so we hope you can help us spread the word! **[An (arch)diocese could encourage every parish to send at least one representative]**

Prayer and Liturgical Resources for Parishes

We know that most people won't be able to attend this Mass. In addition, some parishes may want to recognize this Day of Prayer for Peace in Our Communities with their own Masses for the day. To that end, we will supply prayer and liturgical resources to parishes. Among them, we anticipate that some will be provided by the USCCB. The **(Arch)Diocese** will also provide resources to assist you.

Rosary for Peace in Our Communities

A Rosary will be prayed with the intention of peace in our communities at _____ **on** _____. **[The Rosary could be held in-person and/or include a call-in/streaming video component allowing those who are homebound or unable to attend in person to participate.]**

Ringling Local Church Bells

At **[3pm EST]** we will ring the bells in Churches throughout the **(Arch)Diocese** to commemorate the National Day of Prayer for Peace in Our Communities.

Promotion [Announcement of] Related (Arch)Diocesan Events and Presentations

[An (arch)diocese might plan or promote relevant events or presentations that relate to the issues of race, violence, and peace within the community.]

Ongoing Community Conversations

After having celebrated an **(Arch)Diocesan**-wide Mass and hosted speaking engagements on racial justice, we would like to encourage parishioners to engage in conversations taking place in our communities. **[Insert information, or announce planned conversations]**

(Arch)Diocesan Clergy and Staff Conversation on Race

As we now encourage our parishioners to grow in their awareness about race relations and related issues, **(Arch)Diocesan** clergy and staff will be engaging in dialogues meant to explore how the Church can plan to be even more active within communities that face tension and race-related strife. By surfacing local realities and discussing collaborative approaches, we can ensure that the Church is proactive in building bridges and providing constructive forums for engagement by all people.

PRAYER OF THE FAITHFUL FOR THE DAY OF PRAYER FOR PEACE IN OUR COMMUNITIES

For an end to the violence perpetrated by harsh words, deadly weapons, or cold indifference. May our homes, our nation, and countries around the world become havens of peace, let us pray to the Lord.

For the grace to see every human being as a child of God, regardless of race, language or culture, let us pray to the Lord.

For the wisdom to receive the stories and experiences of those different from ourselves and to respond with respect, let us pray to the Lord.

For the strength to teach our children how to resolve differences non-violently and respectfully, and the courage to model it in our own behavior, let us pray to the Lord.

For our faith community, that we may celebrate and welcome the diverse faces of Christ in our worship, our ministries, and our leaders, let us pray to the Lord.

For our faith community, that we may respond boldly to the Holy Spirit's call to act together to end violence and racism, let us pray to the Lord.

For healing and justice for all those who have experienced violence and racism, let us pray to the Lord.

For the protection of all police and first responders who risk their lives daily to ensure our safety; for fair and just policing that will promote peace and wellbeing in all our neighborhoods, let us pray to the Lord.

For our public officials, that they will strive to work for fair education, adequate housing, and equal opportunities for employment for all, let us pray to the Lord.

For our parish, that we may cultivate welcome, extend hospitality, and encourage the participation of people of all cultures, ethnicities and backgrounds, let us pray to the Lord.

For the courage to have difficult conversations about racism, and for a better appreciation of how our words and actions – or even our silence – can impact our communities, let us pray to the Lord.

For solidarity in our global human family, that we may work together to protect those who are most vulnerable and most in need, let us pray to the Lord.

ORACIÓN DE LOS FIELES POR LA JORNADA DE ORACIÓN POR LA PAZ EN NUESTRAS COMUNIDADES

Por el fin de la violencia perpetrada por las palabras duras, las armas mortales o la indiferencia fría. Que nuestros hogares, nuestra nación y los países de todo el mundo se conviertan en remansos de paz, roguemos al Señor.

Por la gracia de ver a cada ser humano como hijo de Dios, sin importar la raza, el idioma o la cultura, roguemos al Señor.

Por la sabiduría para recibir las historias y experiencias de los que son diferentes a nosotros y para responder con respeto, roguemos al Señor.

Por la fortaleza para enseñar a nuestros hijos cómo resolver las diferencias sin violencia y con respeto, y el valor para demostrarlo con nuestro propio comportamiento, roguemos al Señor.

Por nuestra comunidad de fe, para que podamos celebrar y acoger los diversos rostros de Cristo en nuestro culto, nuestros ministerios y nuestros líderes, roguemos al Señor.

Por nuestra comunidad de fe, para que podamos responder con valentía al llamado del Espíritu Santo a actuar juntos para acabar con la violencia y el racismo, roguemos al Señor.

Por sanación y justicia para todos los que han sufrido violencia y racismo, roguemos al Señor.

Por la protección de todos los policías y socorristas que arriesgan su vida a diario para garantizar nuestra seguridad; por una acción policial justa y equitativa que promueva la paz y el bienestar en todos nuestros vecindarios, roguemos al Señor.

Por nuestros funcionarios públicos, para que se esfuercen por trabajar por equidad en la educación, viviendas dignas e igualdad de oportunidades de empleo para todos, roguemos al Señor.

Por nuestra parroquia, para que podamos cultivar la acogida, brindar hospitalidad y fomentar la participación de personas de todas las culturas, etnias y orígenes, roguemos al Señor.

Por el valor de tener conversaciones difíciles sobre el racismo, y por una mejor apreciación de cómo nuestras palabras y acciones —o incluso nuestro silencio— pueden impactar en nuestras comunidades, roguemos al Señor.

Por la solidaridad en nuestra familia humana global, para que podamos trabajar juntos para proteger a los más vulnerables y necesitados, roguemos al Señor.



PRAYER FOR PEACE IN OUR COMMUNITIES

Let us pray . . .

O Lord our God, in your mercy and kindness,
no thought of ours is left unnoticed, no desire or
concern ignored.

You have proven that blessings abound
when we fall on our knees in prayer,
and so we turn to you in our hour of need.

Surrounded by violence and
cries for justice, we hear your voice telling us what is
required . . .

*“Only to do justice and to love goodness,
and to walk humbly with your God” (Mi 6:8).*

Fill us with your mercy so that we, in turn, may be
merciful to others.

Strip away pride, suspicion, and racism
so that we may seek peace and justice in our
communities.

Strengthen our hearts so that they beat only to the
rhythm of your holy will.

Flood our path with your light as we walk humbly
toward a future
filled with encounter and unity.

Be with us, O Lord, in our efforts, for only by the
prompting of your grace
can we progress toward virtue.

We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.



ORACIÓN POR LA PAZ EN NUESTRAS COMUNIDADES

Oremos . . .

Oh Señor nuestro Dios, en tu misericordia y bondad, ningún pensamiento nuestro pasa inadvertido, ningún deseo o preocupación ignorado.

Has demostrado que las bendiciones abundan cuando caemos de rodillas en oración, y acudimos a ti en nuestra hora de necesidad.

Rodeados de violencia y de clamores de justicia, escuchamos tu voz que nos dice lo que es menester . . .

*“que practiques la justicia y ames la lealtad
y que seas humilde con tu Dios” (Mi 6:8).*

Llénanos de tu misericordia para que también nosotros podamos ser misericordiosos con los demás.
Despójanos del orgullo, la sospecha y el racismo para que podamos buscar la paz y la justicia en nuestras comunidades.

Fortalece nuestro corazón para que lata sólo al ritmo de tu santa voluntad.

Inunda nuestro camino con tu luz mientras avanzamos humildemente hacia un futuro lleno de encuentro y unidad.

Acompáñanos, Señor, en nuestros esfuerzos, pues sólo con el impulso de tu gracia podemos progresar hacia la virtud.

Te lo pedimos por Jesucristo nuestro Señor.

Amén.

1. Introduction

The National Black Catholic Congress convened a conversation amongst invited known African American Catholic leaders in attempt to develop a shared faith filled response to the ongoing violence in America. This conversation was inclusive of young adults, laywomen and lay men, religious, women and men, clergy inclusive of deacons, priests bishops and pastors. A good number of the participants were representatives of diocesan bishops and national organizations of Black Catholics. All conversations carefully began and ended in prayer.

In appreciation for the task force formed by the USCCB to explore the same issue, this group of leaders is offering insights from our two-day conversation in order to support the work of the USCCB. Below are highlights of thoughts we hope bishops will encourage Catholics to actively engage.

2. This is a time to reveal the reach of God's love.

The issues of violence in America are best assisted and resolved by lives rooted in Catholic social teaching as well as existing works created by African American Catholics that have long labored to bring our faith to this fight.

Catholic education and formation can help individuals and communities understand violence as a symptom and seek to address the root causes such as material and spiritual poverty and systemic perpetuations of racism and classism. The voice of the church can become the voice of those who without such advocacy may seek violent responses and companions.

Perhaps most importantly, the gifts of the church can be proliferated to make it plain and clear that the damage done by violence is evil and therefore not limited to parishes in certain zip codes. It threatens the entire community of believers. A death by gunshot requires a response from the One Body formed by creation and communion because there is healing when the church speaks up and out against evil. Silence is not an option.

3. Lost people are knocking on the doors of the church.

The politics of violence require that our response be more than prayer and commentary. The insidious nature of this rugged individualism can be, thank God, challenged by first calling all Catholics to animate the gifts and trust received in sacrament for the express purpose of caring for all of creation, especially children of God and most especially those children born into poverty created by violence.

Our prayer and fasting compel us to move through the wide open doors of the church, to the altar in order to go back into the world as the transformed who

believe that what we have seen and heard in church, must be enacted outside our buildings and in the streets that cry out for the peace of the Lord.

This violence cannot be healed without the hands of the Body of Christ touching it.

The faithful must be called into action and equipped to do something more in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

We believe that the first actions must form us into non-violent Catholics in order for the following actions to be of assistance to our sisters and brothers in Christ Jesus and those with whom we share and respect a common humanity.

In this time, clearly we see the need for this task force, the National Black Catholic Congress and every baptized person who has gone before us and will come after us to be in this conversation and the actions that will follow.

We thank God for all who heed his call and bring his mercy.

4. A March on evil.

We suggest that the USCCB Task Force urge the USCCB to strongly encourage its members to call for local church and parish conversations in order to develop for the whole church an awareness of how evil thrives and a framework of counter-active measures to avoid cooperation with evil.
