



Pastoral Letter

The Rt. Rev. Carlye J. Hughes, XI Bishop of Newark

To be read in all congregations of the diocese, or otherwise made available to all members by email or other distribution.

June 2, 2021

“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me if you have understanding.”
Job 38:4

Dear Companions on the Journey,

The road out of pandemic has been, and remains, complicated by an ever-increasing level of violence and hatred. While some of it was anticipated because of the growing racial tension in our country, we had been lulled into a sense of security by the reduced activity during the pandemic, which led to fewer mass shootings. This lull has ended, however, and racially targeted violence seems to have gathered strength and to be growing rapidly. Reports of racially motivated killings and violent attacks against African Americans and Latin Americans continue and we increasingly become aware of similar attacks toward Asian Americans. Anti-Semitism and hate-based attacks towards Jewish people in this country have increased in the midst of the increased hostile actions and tension between Israel and Palestine.

None of this violence and hatred is what we hoped for the ending of the pandemic. We hoped for a joyful future after pandemic. We had begun to ask ourselves what we learned to value in the midst of pandemic and how our lives going forward might change to accommodate a new sense of what is important and what matters most to us. In our reflecting on this past year and discerning about the coming year, we may have at the same time, developed this false sense of security.

We underestimated the narrative of fear that so thoroughly gripped the spirit of many people in our country and fueled a gun-buying spree that has outpaced all previous records. While gun sales remained flat for the last ten years, sales in the last 12 months have continued to grow with no end in sight. Alongside the growth in gun sales has been growth in homicides and mass shootings.

There have been 239 mass shootings in the first five months of 2021. In the month of May alone, 69 mass shootings occurred. We can expect this trend to continue. These are hard and harrowing facts we face, in some ways harder to deal with than the virus that disrupted the world. Yet, as the people of God, we must deal with all of it.

How shall we start?

Remember who we are and whose we are. In God’s own image we are created (Genesis 1:27). It is with God’s eyes that we see and with God’s ears that we hear. God’s heart gives us compassion for those who have been harmed or are at risk, the courage to respond to terrible acts and the wisdom and fortitude to counter the contempt which begets intolerance. *The strength needed to end violent hatred comes from God.* We are uniquely and marvelously made to serve God and all of God’s people at just this time. When we feel inadequate for the task at

hand, it is even more important to remember that the God of all creation guides us and gives us what we need to meet every challenge.

Study history, face facts, and speak the truth. Opinions, disinformation, and disputes over facts have clouded discussion for the last five years in particular. We have watched as lies repeated often and loudly have taken hold and done damage to the ability of our nation to unite in crisis. Just as dangerously, lies have been a breeding ground for hate. Hate has led to relentless violence based on race, gender, sexual orientation, and religion.

To complicate matters, a growing movement has begun to avoid those parts of our history that could lead to discomfort. Be assured that regardless of skin color, gender, or ethnic identity some parts of our nation's history will make you proud and other parts will leave you in a profound state of discomfort. It is hard and important to learn about suppressed or ignored parts of our history. These untold parts of our history were a portent of the troubles we now face. We cannot learn from a history that we do not know, and, strangely, that same lack of knowledge leads to an increased potential for further harm to people, institutions, and the nation.

It is not unusual for clergy to speak the truth about complicated issues. Inevitably, some feel the need to respond that it is not the role of clergy or the church to speak about racism, oppression, justice, or social issues that tear at the fabric of our communities and nation. People who think this way are *almost* correct. We need to add one word to their thought: *alone*. It is not the role of the clergy *alone* to speak about these issues.

All followers of Jesus are called to speak the truth about racism, oppression, justice, and social issues. And the truth we are called to speak begins with God's love for all people. To some, this will sound political. The Beatitudes sound political. The Greatest Commandment sounds political. The Ten Commandments sound political. God's love of all people will always sound political to some people. And still, we speak this truth.

Pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Our spiritual lives have grown, deepened, and developed in pandemic. Many of us learned how to lead others in prayer, to pray our own words, have written prayers, and/or have increased our capacity to pray. We have also learned that God answers our prayers and that praying changes us. We are more able to trust God, to see God's presence, and to wait on God's response.

Our prayers are needed now. Pray daily for the people you love, for the troubles of these times that worry you, and for healing of all the issues that trouble us. God will guide your prayers and the *Book of Common Prayer* is a treasure trove of prayers, truly making it a prayer book for daily use.

Get involved. Many of our parishes have ministries devoted to looking at issues of justice, race, hunger, homelessness, and/or housing. Pandemic led us to begin asking how we get to the root causes of these issues. Several groups have been formed in our diocese to support the ministry of parishes and to unite the efforts of the diocese. The co-chairs of these groups will welcome your involvement; please use this link to contact these groups:

<https://dioceseofnewark.org/form/contact-diocesan-justice-groups>

- **Commission for Justice and Peace**

Co-leaders: Jody Caldwell, Redeemer, Morristown and the Rev. Deacon Diane Riley, Grace, Madison

The commission will focus on supporting parishes and developing diocesan advocacy and responses to issues such as environment, affordable housing, gun violence, hunger, gender equality, and homelessness.

- **Racial History Committee**

Co-leaders: Ken Bledsoe, St. John's, Ramsey and the Rev. Willie Smith

This committee will explore, collect, and determine how best to chronicle the racial history of our diocese. The committee will also advise parishes on ways to discover the racial history of their church.

- **Racial Justice and Healing Commission**

Co-leaders: E.V. Janopaul, St Peter's, Mountain Lakes and the Rev. Michelle "Chellie" White, Christ Church, Teaneck

The commission will look at issues of racial justice and healing within the diocese and in the larger community and world. Their focus will include teaching, updating, and guiding our responses to the myriad issues we face around the construct of race.

We may never understand the forces of chaos, confusion, and catastrophe experienced during this time. How are we to ever understand what motivates those who unleash violence at every turn? While we may never understand, if we remember who we are and whose we are, if we learn all we can about the factors leading to the challenges we face, if we pray for God's guidance, and walk in that same guidance once received, then we have done what we are called to do.

We are not alone on this journey, nor are we the first to grapple with unchecked violence, racial hatred, and religious attacks. Every generation faces a time when it must stand with courage to speak truth, protect the vulnerable, and uphold respect and dignity for all of God's people. This is our time and God will be with us every step of the way (Matthew 28:20b).

Grace and peace,

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