

The Anti-Racism Committee of St. Anthony of Padua Catholic Church

September 21, 2020

Archbishop Gregory John Hartmayer, OFM Conv.
Archbishop of Atlanta
2401 Lake Park Drive SE
Smyrna, Georgia 30080

Dear Archbishop Hartmayer:

Greetings from St. Anthony of Padua Catholic Church in the historic West End of Atlanta, Georgia. This missive is being sent to you from St. Anthony's Anti-Racism Committee on behalf of our fellow parishioners. In response to the senseless police and white supremacist killing of Black people, primarily Black men, and the misrepresentation of the Black Lives Matter movement, our pastor Father Victor Galier, authorized a group of parishioners to engage our parish community, to determine the impact that racism and the COVID-19 virus were having on our parishioners and their families. We appreciate the support that Father Vic has given us as we have dealt with some very emotional and spiritually difficult matters.

The Anti-Racism committee began meeting in June of 2020 regularly to determine how we should engage the parish members on the topic of racism and the pandemic. We decided to use the Zoom platform to engage in dialogue and listen to our parish members because meeting face-to-face was not an option due to the COVID-19 pandemic and our Black parish community's vulnerability.

As stated above, the committee meets regularly and in addition to our regular meetings, we have had two Zoom meetings with the church community to date. Both were held immediately after our taped mass. To hear everyone's voice, we divided into age-specific groups and then reconvened as one church group. There was an obvious consensus from group to group that racism was real in our society and negatively impacted our parish members. There was also consensus that racism was (and still is) evident in the Catholic Church and in the Archdiocese of Atlanta. Two of the groups we heard from were school-age girls and boys. These young girls and boys shared the racism they experienced in the Catholic schools in our Archdiocese. The adults facilitating the groups were devastated upon hearing the pain our young people experienced, resulting from their Catholic educational setting. This matter must be addressed; otherwise, our children will be scarred for life.

Also, there was consensus among the adult breakout groups that racism was evident in the Archdiocese; in its structure, programs and operation. Parishioners noted that the Archdiocese of Atlanta's refusal to recognize our Black culture has effectively marginalized Black Catholics. We are a people of culture, not a "color".

Our adults also expressed concerns that the Office of Black Catholics had been abolished and questioned the decision and timing. Black Catholics worship through cultural music, dance and self-expression, which is undoubtedly different from those of European descent and other cultures. Through Christ, we know our cultural God-given gifts are overflowing and it is our duty to share them, especially with our church (as stated in *What We Have Seen and Heard*, 1984).

Our committee also gathered information on the impact that COVID-19 has had on Blacks and the broader community. There was consensus among the various groups that COVID-19 was adversely affecting Black peoples due to, in most cases, the by-products of systemic racism that manifests

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itself in jobs, housing, medical care, economics and education. We align ourselves with social scientists, medical doctors, Public Health professionals and scientists. Therefore, we support the wearing of masks, social distancing and not meeting in large groups. It is important that this support to combat COVID-19 is exhibited throughout the city, state, country and the Archdiocese of Atlanta.

Given the current situation in our state, in our country and the Catholic Church, we believe that it is past time for the matters of racism and exposure to the COVID-19 virus to be intentionally addressed by the Archdiocese of Atlanta. We “have come this far by faith” but it is now time that our faith is manifested in an action agenda developed by the Archdiocese of Atlanta. As stated by Pope Francis, “We cannot tolerate or turn a blind eye to racism and exclusion in any form and yet claim to defend the sacredness of every human life”. Therefore, we ask that the Archdiocese of Atlanta acknowledge past sin against Black Catholics and speak repentant truth to start the healing process of systemic racism.

As baptized members of the Body of Christ we are called to help build the Kingdom of God. We are coworkers in the vineyard following the Church and you are our Shepherd of Souls. We look to you to set the tone for the whole Archdiocese. We want to work with you under your leadership and guidance. Please know that we do our work following the fullness of Catholic Social Teaching especially regarding: respecting life; in living our call to family and community, the Rights and Responsibilities of being members of society; looking out for the Poor and Vulnerable; in Solidarity with the Church at large to work for the Common Good.

Since you are the pastor of souls in our Archdiocese, we would like you to provide us with a response to the following items. These will help us understand the tone you are setting for the entirety of the Archdiocese of Atlanta.

1. What concrete actions are currently being done to address racism in the Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Atlanta?
 - a. We recommend offering immediate safe solutions for any students learning in fear.
 - b. We recommend engaging Black educators, parents and current/former students to discuss solutions and action plans for problem eradication and resolution. We have retired Black educators in our parish who are willing to serve as allies and facilitators.
 - c. We recommend updating the curriculum to teach and reflect accurate Black Catholic history, outside of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s holiday and Black History Month.
2. When will you restore the Office of Black Catholics in the Archdiocese of Atlanta and work with us to provide Black cultural programs and catechetical materials?
3. How will you ensure diversity within your immediate staff and positions of authority within the Archdiocese of Atlanta?
4. How will you address racism in the structure, operations, and personnel in the Archdiocese of Atlanta?
5. When will Black Lives Matter be acknowledged and embraced by the Archdiocese of Atlanta with actions and activities to begin the ongoing conversation of racism and healing?
6. When will you and the Archdiocese of Atlanta develop a statement supporting the doctors and scientists advocating the wearing of masks, social distancing and not meeting in large groups because of the adverse impact the COVID-19 virus has had on our community?
7. We request, starting in 2021 at the annual Eucharistic Congress, an ongoing Black Catholic Culture track.

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Thank you for receiving this missive we offer you in love. We look forward to hearing from you on these matters soon. Please respond to our appointed chair, Dr. Joseph Silver. His contact information follows. REDACTED FOR PRIVACY

Sincerely,

The Anti-Racism Committee of St. Anthony of Padua Catholic Church

CC: Father Victor Galier