



11 June, Memorial of Saint Barnabas, Apostle

To the faithful in Memphis and in all of west Tennessee:

This Statement is published on the Memorial of Barnabas, a companion of Paul. As the *Acts of the Apostles* testify, Barnabas was known as an Apostle, one that was “sent” by Simon Peter and the fellowship of apostles, to bring the Good News to those who had not heard of the Gift given, Christ, the true Lord of the world.

I came to Memphis, to live with you and to serve you, as one “sent” for sacred ministry. A month before the first anniversary of my arrival here, you and I were placed in isolation, hoping to thwart a virulent new *coronavirus*, COVID 19, as good citizens and as faithful disciples, remembering the *Golden Rule*. After months of this isolation and the *fasting* from the fellowship of Sunday worship and the blessing of Eucharist, we began to gather together again, carefully, to celebrate the love of God and the love of neighbor, as disciples of the Crucified and Risen Lord.

Even as we slowly emerged from isolation, we saw clearly the devastation this virus and this isolation has brought about, with loss of jobs, loss of housing, loss of hope for so many. This was the mood I sensed: hopeful, but cautious and haunted, with some insecurity and some doubt. Then, in the midst of this economic and cultural crisis, on the 25th of May, Mr. George P. Floyd, Jr. died, after a police officer had his knee on the hand-cuffed man’s throat, for 8 minutes and 46 seconds. Cell phone videos recorded the cry...*I can’t breathe...and Mama*.

I listened, I read. I tried to understand what happened to this man. I watched as citizens of Memphis rallied and protested, to cry out to all about the crime, the injustice, the racism, the anger and the demand for justice. Some quoted Pope Saint Paul VI, that *If you want peace, work for justice*.

In these last two weeks, I’ve commented a bit on social media, about these protests *and* on the racism and broken systems of policing and governing we must acknowledge and attend to as a people. Those few that know my heart know how deeply committed I am, to be an instrument of changing this narrative, of a divided country, a divided city. But, as I read statement after statement from Catholic Bishops and other leaders of faith, I heard the interior voice, to be quiet and to listen, as a newcomer to Memphis. It was in that moment, that I reached out to my brother, the long-serving and beloved Bishop of Memphis, Bishop Terry Steib, S.V.D., to consider offering a Statement about this, another death of a black man at the hands of a police officer, and to offer us a sense of where we are to take our anger and the fragility of the spirit of the common good, Christ’s fellowship within this human family. What follows comes from the heart of our beloved brother, Bishop Emeritus Terry Steib.

Bishop David



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A STATEMENT RE THE DEATH OF GEORGE FLOYD AND PEACEFUL PROTESTERS

June 11, 2020

How many murders and killings must happen to the Black men and women in America before we as a people will know justice? Far too many have happened!

How many times must we say “Black lives matter” and hear “I can’t breathe” before every person in America – black and white, red, yellow and brown – heeds the call for systemic change in race relations?

How many calls and demands for systemic change have we already heard? How many committees searching for police reform did we hear about? How many statements have we bishops, individually and collectively, authored or voted on which pointed to the sin of racism and race relations with our African American brothers and sisters in the United States? Far too many!

What has changed? Far too little!

I am proud that the vast majority of the protests going on during the days and weeks of commemorating the death of George Floyd have been peaceful. Dr. King would want it that way. And although much attention was given to the looters, it was the good people

on the ground floor throughout our country who marched at some risk to their health to voice our call for justice and to demand that change is needed. It is their voice that is being heard. It is their cry to bring Dr. King's dream and our dream to fulfillment so that we can truly say: "free at last!" And may that dream come sooner than all the promises of yesterday!

The decision of the attorney general in Minnesota to bring the former police officers who killed or abetted the killing of George Floyd to trial for 2nd degree murder signals that the people are being heard. This time it is more than tokenism. Mr. Ellison's decision to go to trial signals that our nation is finally awakened and sees the caste systems and inherent bias against black people that is deeply embedded in our American history.

There is a dream in America. That dream is embedded in our Constitution. It says that all people are created equal. The Constitution tells all of us that we are to "promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity." We are that posterity and there is nothing in the prologue to our Constitution that says "our posterity" is limited only to one particular color.

The decision of the Minneapolis officials to bring former police officers to trial for crimes marks another beginning of a movement. Dr. Martin Luther King believed that such a movement calls all of us throughout our country to a completely integrated society, a beloved community of love and justice. Jesus simply says: "Love one another." Jesus' call urges us to see each other – maybe for the first time – through the lens of peace and justice, compassion and kindness, care and concern.

Jesus's call to love and justice urges us to demand that the officials of our cities and towns, our counties and states, as well as our federal officials continue the hard process of effecting systemic change in our society. But let us allow the systemic changes to begin in our hearts and in our lives.

Because police brutality is, at the present time, uppermost in our minds and hearts because of George Floyd's death and the death of so many others, we will begin again to pursue the beloved community of love and justice with police reform. Demonstrations and marches that include silence for 8 minutes and 46 seconds remind us that we can be one when we choose to be. The beloved community of love and justice is closer than it was when Dr. King told us: "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that."

"We the people" have been heard. Let us all walk on the path of love – the love that drives out hate and brings justice to each of us.