

# All must stand against racism, violence

"There is an immense task incumbent on all people of good will, namely, the task of restoring the relations of the human family in truth, in justice, in love and in freedom ... This is a most exalted task, for it is the task of bringing about true peace in the order established by God."  
— John XXIII

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

These words of Dear Pope John XXIII — written 29 years ago in his encyclical letter *Peace on Earth* — describe a task no less urgent today than it was in 1963.

Our See city, like many other urban areas around the country, was shocked last week by the violent aftermath of the verdict in the Rodney King case. The frustration that sparks such outbursts is understandable given the graphic videotape that most people found so appalling and a verdict that seems incomprehensible to so many, including me.

And yet the violence that followed the verdict cannot be justified. Rather than heal wounds, such activity only causes new ones and extends the tide of violence in which it seems we can so easily be trapped.

I certainly do not know the answer to all of the problems that contribute to such a vicious phenomenon in our society. What I do know is that all of us in the Catholic community need to stand together in total opposition to violence and racism. Both are sins against the God of life.

They assault the spirit of their victims and harden the hearts of those who cause such



## A LONG THE WAY

damage. And because they breed fear and bitterness, they diminish our capacity to build a human family bound together in truth, justice and love.

Our National Conference of Catholic Bishops put it this way, "Racism is a radical sin: a sin that divides the human family, blots out the image of God among specific members of that family and violates the fundamental dignity of those called to be children of the same father" (*Brothers and Sisters to Us*, 1979).

*Brothers and Sisters to Us* acknowledged that the evil of racism is not something abstract, nor is it an evil existing only among those who publicly and explicitly ferment hatred toward racial or ethnic minorities. Rather, the document states, "Racism is

an evil which endures in our society and in our Church."

But the bishops recognized that it is not enough simply to name the sin. We also called the community to action in these words: "The Church cannot remain silent about racial injustice in society or in its own structure. Each of us Catholics must acknowledge that we have been subject to irrational fears and attitudes susceptible to injustice. Many of us show profound adherence to the Gospel while remaining indifferent or closing our eyes to the racism it condemns. But past mistakes must not hinder the Church's response to the challenge of the present. The church today is not just European and American, it is also African, Asian, Indian and Oceanic."

To signal the commitment of our Catholic community to racial harmony and non-violent solutions to our problems, I am convening a diocesan Task Force on Societal Injustice to address the underlying issues of racism, poverty and urban neglect.

This group will include members of our urban and social ministry staffs, parish ministers and others with relevant expertise. It will explore ways in which our parishes and agencies can work together with other churches and organizations toward one community with peace and justice for all.

I ask you please to support this effort in your prayers and by a renewal of your personal commitment to non-violence and racial harmony.

Peace to all.

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