

Contextual Notes to The Basilica of Saint Mary: EDI Position Statement

The Contextual Notes provide insight into Scripture and Catholic Social Teaching that guides and strengthens us in doing this work, the thought process of the EDI Leadership Team in the creation of the EDI Position Statement, and comments and feedback from Parish Leadership and staff on the EDI Position Statement.

The format of the Contextual Notes is presented with the sentences or paragraph of the EDI Position Statement in bold font. The contextual notes follow the sentences or paragraph.

The Basilica of Saint Mary is a Catholic community rooted in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Our faith calls us to uphold the absolute dignity of all people. *All are beloved children of God.*

Our opening sentence is taken from the mission statement of The Basilica of Saint Mary. As affirmed in its 2018 – 2023 Strategic Plan, its mission is: The Basilica of Saint Mary is a community rooted in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As disciples of Jesus Christ: we practice biblical stewardship, share our faith with others in word and deed, pursue ecumenical and interfaith relationships, extend Christian hospitality and rejoice in rich diversity. As a co-Cathedral of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis, we are committed to provide inspiring liturgies and sacred arts, transforming life-long learning opportunities, and engaging service to one another and justice for all.

One of our Catholic Social Teaching tenets is Human Dignity – We are all made in God’s image; therefore, we are called to defend the dignity and worth of every human being.

With Minnesota “having some of the highest racial disparities in the nation despite being ranked one of the best places to live”¹, we need to recognize our complicity in enabling racism to persist in our community.

As Christopher Ingraham writes in “Racial inequality in Minneapolis is among the worst in the nation” a May 30, 2020, article in the *Washington Post*. “A city known as one of the most livable places in the United States is also home to some of the biggest racial disparities. The typical black family in

¹ Ingraham, Christopher; “Racial inequality in Minneapolis is among the worst in the nation”; *Washington Post*; May 30, 2020. Schafer, Lee; “So many rankings put Minnesota near the top, but this one finds a quandary”; *Star Tribune*, March 1, 2020. Eligon, John and Julie Bosman; “How Minneapolis One of America’s Most Liberal Cities, Struggles with Racism”; *New York Times*; July 21, 2020

Minneapolis earns less than half as much as the typical white family in any given year. Home ownership among black people is one-third the rate of white families. As a result, many black families have been effectively locked out of the prosperity of the city's overwhelmingly white population enjoys."

Ingraham continues: "Of the nation's 100 largest metropolitan areas, only Milwaukee in neighboring Wisconsin has a larger gap between black and white earnings."

As Christians and as members of the Catholic Church we are called to both speak up and take action in the face of this injustice. Silence and inaction make us complicit in the perpetuation of these inequities and in the propagation of racism.

The 2018 Strategic plan makes it clear why The Basilica made Inclusivity one of its three stated "themes." At the same time the plan gives a clear description of the desired path and outcome for this theme.

Reason for Choice

The Basilica has worked toward greater inclusion and toward reconciliation in a number of ways. Examples of this work include the initiative for Racial Reconciliation, the Transfer of Memory Exhibit and the New Hope International Music Exchange Tour. This theme was chosen in recognition of both prior work but also the vast amount of work that remains to be done in creating a truly inclusive community, healing divisions and welcoming those who have been marginalized.

Goal

The goal is to build upon previous work while broadening and deepening its scope. The Basilica will promote inclusivity as an institution by: addressing cultural and religious divides; by supporting and welcoming all who we encounter, especially those who have been marginalized; and by seeking interventions in the systems that perpetuate marginalization. Recognizing that The Basilica is a platform for religious connection and inclusivity, activities and programming will aim to engage the community and meet people where they are to heal divisions and break down long standing barriers to inclusivity.

The Basilica will also look internally to address barriers to inclusion present in our community, space, programs and practices today.

In acknowledging racism as America’s original sin, as Catholics and a Catholic community, we confess our sin with the purpose of making atonement.

“Racism is a sin; a sin that divides the human family, blots out the image of God among specific members of that family and violates the fundamental human dignity of those called to be children of the same Father. Racism is the sin that says some human beings are inherently superior and other inherently inferior because of races. It is the sin that makes racial characteristics the determining factor for the exercise of human rights. It mocks the words of Jesus: “*Treat others the way you would have them treat you.*” Indeed, racism is more than a disregard for the words of Jesus; it is a denial of the truth of the dignity of each human being revealed by the mystery of the Incarnation.”²

Father Prentice Tipton, Jr., ³guest homilist at The Minneapolis and St. Paul Archdiocesan Day of Prayer and Fasting Against the Sin of Racism on December 2, 2020, speaks of racism as a spiritual problem and he said: “The Gospel penitential moment is reconciliation. Times for rendering to God for what people have done, what they have failed to do and what the nation has allowed.”⁴

Father Tipton continued: “The evil of racism festers, in part, because as a nation, there’s been very little formal acknowledgement of the harm done to so many. People must recognize it is a spiritual problem, not simply political, economic, or social. And God intends to bring together in the Church ‘that face of Jesus that’s black and that face of Jesus that is white – so that these two faces of Jesus Christ might become his one face in the Church.’”

Father Tipton believes “. . . the Church is the venue for ‘a new thing’ God wants between the races in America. ‘And if the Church were to get this right, all of America, and I believe the whole world, will come to her knees because the Church has found an answer, a remedy to the sin that has grieved a great nation for many, many centuries.’”

² U. S. Catholic Bishops; “Brothers and Sisters to Us”; 1979

³ Father Prentice Tipton, Jr., an African American, is an alumnus of The St Paul Seminary School of Divinity of St. Paul. He was ordained a priest for the Diocese of Saginaw, Michigan, in 2008. He is rector of the Cathedral of Mary of the Assumption and pastor of Holy Family, in Saginaw.

⁴ Umberger, Barb; “Archdiocesan Prayer Services Focuses on Healing Racial Division”; *The Catholic Spirit*; December 17, 2020

The Catholic Church and Christianity comes to this work with a lot of institutional baggage. Historically, the church has justified discrimination based upon race using scripture and theology thus solidifying societal and institutional racism. We helped build a case for the sin of racism. We promoted and participated in the sin of racism. And we institutionalized the sin of racism.

Now we must work hard to identify and to eradicate all forms of racism that are tearing apart our society and are an assault on our shared humanity. And we must build a world and church that is equitable and just; a world and church where all are recognized, welcomed and celebrated as children of the same God; the kind of world God has imagined for us.

The Basilica will work to eliminate racism within the parish and the broader community. The Basilica will not be neutral in the face of any kind of injustice.

Equity, diversity, and inclusion is broad and multi-faceted. The EDI Leadership Team in selecting an area of focus to start this work agreed on racism. In saying that, we recognize this work will not be done in isolation and will evolve over time and with experience. In visioning how this work will evolve and the possibilities of engaging with other Basilica ministries and community collaborations, Sarah Bellamy speaks of intersectionality.

The term intersectionality was created in 1989 by Kimberle Crenshaw in two civil court cases defending Black women to describe multiple identities. In essence, “Our identities are like traffic flowing at an intersection – one identity may flow in one direction while another identity is flowing in a different direction.”

“Since then, the study of intersectionality has grown to include all our intersections and identities. In 2013, the Oxford Dictionary of Social Work and Social Care broadened Crenshaw’s conceptualization of the term, defining it as the combined effects of one’s multiple identities, which includes identities such as race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and employee status.”⁵

We will do this work to understand how institutionalized racism is present within The Basilica organization. Relying on established Catholic Social Teaching principles⁶ to guide us, we will

⁵ Flowers, Hillary; “Intersectionality Part One: Intersectionality Defined;” *EDI 365*; July 18, 2019

⁶ The tenets are **Human Dignity** (We are all made in God’s image and; therefore, are called to defend the dignity and worth of every human being), **Common Good and Call to Community** (The well-being of each person is connected to the good of others. As human beings we only truly flourish in the context of community. How we organize our society – in

work towards healing and reconciliation in our own parish. We need to build trust with all members of our parish community so that our words, actions, and thoughts are reflective of the total body of Christ.

We, as a community have inherited our Catholic home, our Basilica home.

Our forebears left us with The Basilica, a building that looks so beautiful yet poses problems. Its roof had to be replaced because it was leaking and the walls continue to need tuck pointing to keep the water out. Had we not intervened with urgency the building might have collapsed. We did not build The Basilica so we may not be directly responsible for its problems; but we are responsible for its upkeep and we must assure that this does not happen again in the future.

This is such a poignant metaphor for our faith community. There is so much beauty and yet, there are ugly cracks and gaping crevices which need our immediate attention. Like with the building we may not be the immediate cause of the problems plaguing our church today. Nevertheless it is time to recognize that we are responsible for them now and we must address them honestly and urgently if we want our community to flourish in the way God intended.

In the past the Catholic Church used the Bible and Tradition to justify racism. Much damage has been done, generations of people have been hurt and we have caused lots of pain and anger. Today, the Catholic Church calls us to work against racism offering us Sacred Scriptures and Catholic Social Teaching as a foundation.

At The Basilica we commit ourselves to engage Scripture, continuing education in Catholic Social teaching, liturgical celebrations, sacred art exhibitions and concerts to shed light on our complicity in racism in the past; to lift up the ugly reality of racism today and illumine our calling to a more equitable, diverse and inclusive future freed from all shackles of racism and discrimination.

In service to all, we will do this by:

economics and politics, in law and policy – directly affects the capacity of individuals to grow in community.), **Option for the Poor and Vulnerable** (In a society marred by deepening divisions and inequality, our tradition instructs us to put the needs of the vulnerable first.), and **Solidarity** (We live and work in solidarity with our sisters and brothers who face the sin of racism each day.)

- **Nurturing an environment within our parish that provides equity, diversity, and inclusion for all through opportunities to engage in dialogue, education, and compassionate solidarity**
- **Identifying where institutionalized racism is in our parish while embracing an openness to reform our policies, practices, and procedures**
- **Providing opportunities for personal transformation, while working toward systemic change**
- **Working in collaboration with others in our community to deepen our impact both within our parish and within our larger community**

Just as we speak of racism or of being racist, we speak of the opposite as being anti-racist. In asking Sarah Bellamy what it means to become anti-racist she said:

“That is a complicated question, but the simplest answer is that to be antiracist we must be actively and sustainably engaged in undoing the interlocking systems that endanger the lives and threaten the livelihoods of people of color.

Being antiracist is an active resistance versus a passive lament. It means you are on a path that is constantly self-reflexive, willing to learn, willing to stand up against injustice, willing to be uncomfortable situationally, psychologically, physically, and to put resources behind the effort.

Being uncomfortable does not necessarily mean being in danger or feeling pain. It does mean that anyone who is currently comfortable with the world as it is, rife with the viciousness of disparity that people of color currently experience in sector after sector, must question that comfort and realize that is inextricable from racial privilege that exempts them from feeling acute disparity. Antiracism means that people with racial privilege sacrifice those comforts that come at the expense of others suffering.”

The approaches identified above “In service to all . . .” is a path forward for each of us and our parish as we undertake this journey and vision of becoming anti-racist.

In the words of Pope Francis reflecting on the killing of George Floyd: “*We cannot tolerate or turn a blind eye to racism and exclusion in any form and yet claim to defend the sacredness of human life.*”⁷

⁷ O’Connell, Gerard; “Pope Francis on the death of George Floyd”; *America The Jesuit Review*; June 3, 2020

The Sacredness of human life and the dignity of every human being from conception to natural death are foundational to our Catholic Social Teaching. Living life with dignity means that everyone should be assured access to the just and equitable living conditions. Living life with dignity means having access to the basics of clean water and air, assurance of safe and adequate housing, food security, equitable educational opportunities, and equitable health care.

The killing of George Floyd in May, 2020, and the resulting protests and riots nationally and globally, made Minneapolis the epicenter of racial injustice. Not only did the economic and health impacts of the pandemic exacerbate the already devastating effects of racism for our First Nation, Latinx, Asian American, and African American sisters and brothers. The killing of George Floyd, and the resulting public outcry and demonstrations shed light on the ever deepening racial and ethnic inequities and divisions that exist today.

If we are true to our foundational Catholic teachings about the sacredness and dignity of human life then we cannot be silent any longer. It is our Catholic duty and responsibility to help eliminate racism from our church, our community and our world. It is our calling to effect positive, sustainable change in our lives and in our society. We must defend the sacredness of human life and make sure that the human rights and dignity of each person are protected and honored.

Both within our parish and our city, The Basilica will set an example of living out the Gospel of love. Others will feel compelled to follow this example because of how determinedly we strive for justice and peace.

“We are one human family, whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. We are our brother’s and sister’s keeper. As Christians, we are as St. Paul reminds us one body. Love of neighbor has global dimensions in our rapidly shrinking world. At the core of solidarity is the pursuit of justice and peace. Peace is more than a lack of conflict. Peace, or in Hebrew Shalom, means literally “*right relationship*.” The gospel calls us to be peacemakers: that we live in right relationship with ourselves, others, and God. Pope Paul VI taught: “*If you want peace, work for justice*.” Our love for our entire human family demands that we work for justice and for peace, that we promote God’s Shalom in our world.”⁸

⁸ United States Catholic Conference of Bishops; Catholic Social Teaching Scripture Guide; USCCB; Copyright 2010

This work is ongoing. We recognize we will fall short, and we need to build a culture of accountability. Attaining this integrity will enable us to turn this work outward to the community at large.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is a Gospel of Love. It is an invitation to the followers of Jesus to do what he did: love others even to the end. After he washed his disciple's feet and before he was led away to be crucified for our sake, Jesus summarized all he said and did in this one sentence: "*This is my commandment, love one another as I love you*" (John 15:12) This is what he commanded us to do: love one another; love everybody without distinction.

The early Christian community took this commandment to love one another very seriously. "*They were one of heart and mind*" (Acts 4:32a). Those who had many possessions sold them and the money was shared with those who were lacking. And "*no one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they had everything in common*" (Acts 4:32b). They shared everything in common. There was no us and them, there was only us.

By contrast to this very communal theology our world and our society promotes a much more individualistic and personal philosophy. Everyone is said to be responsible for oneself and takes little or no responsibility for others. As a matter of fact, the way we promote our own well-being is often to the detriment of others. Rather than all of us being in this endeavor together we pit ourselves against others, sometimes knowingly, often not.

This individualistic way of life cannot be our way if we are truly followers of Jesus. We are to love one another, no matter who they are, and even most especially those who are most in need. And we will be held accountable for what we did or did not do. Remember Jesus' words in the parable of the sheep and the goats in the Gospel of Matthew: "*for whatever you have done to the least of these brothers and sisters you have done unto me*" and "*whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me*" (Matthew 25: 40, 45).

So, like Jesus, let us love one another. Like Jesus, let us nurture one another. And, like Jesus, let us help one another to grow into the fullness of our human potential. To that end, let us "*no longer judge one another, but rather resolve never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of another*" (Romans 14:3). And let us "*pursue what leads to peace and to building up one another*" (Romans

14:3). *“For in the end, each of us will be accountable before God for what we did or did not do.”*
(Romans 12:12)

Come Holy Spirit, give us strength, courage, and guidance for this journey and vision. Amen.