

From the Bishop

6 August 2019

Dear Friends in Christ Jesus,

The events in our nation in the past two weeks reveal a profound need for reconciliation and healing. I am reaching out to you to share a word, to offer some resources, and to encourage your own faith community's action and prayer.



When the president insulted Baltimore, Maryland, with overt racist language, the Washington National Cathedral responded with a decisive word denouncing such language, and calling upon the president, and all of us Americans, to decency and civility. I believe the letter compels other religious leaders to speak, and to work together for reconciliation. We all know that our language shapes our attitudes, and our attitudes shape our behavior. I suppose that's why many of us are no longer surprised that 250 mass shootings have occurred in this calendar year; Gilroy, El Paso, Dayton, and Chicago now join a long list of communities who know first-hand the scourge of hate and white supremacy. Here in Maine, it was reported that several of the asylum seekers who are temporarily being housed at the Portland Expo have been exposed to the chickenpox virus. Unfortunately, online reactions to this report have fueled hatred, as well as call to abandon efforts to welcome them as our permanent neighbors.

As I listen to your hopes for how we in the Diocese of Maine will be Christ's faithful disciples in our third century, I'm aware that you have called me to speak to issues that are fundamentally aligned with the teachings found in the gospel of our Savior. God has given us ears to listen, and voices to speak. I endeavor to come alongside you as one who listens **and** one who speaks. In this moment for any of us to remain silent may be construed as complicity. Whether we are talking about gun safety, immigration or racism, health care, creation care, LGBTQ rights or any human matter, I will stand with you and join you in declaring peace and mercy.

Pray and Act

Prayer matters! I applaud and encourage your efforts to host prayer vigils, and to engage other religious communities in gathering people. Action matters! Some of you are writing and calling Senators Collins and King, and Representatives Pingree or Golden to say, "Please enact gun control legislation now!" When we integrate our prayers and our action we embody what I think Jesus meant when he preached the Sermon on the Mount, "to feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, visit the sick, ransom the captive, and bury the dead". When we integrate prayer and action we bear patiently those who wrong us, we forgive, we comfort the afflicted, we pray for the living and the dead.

Use and develop prayer resources

I encourage your creating and using liturgical and preaching resources that are found beyond The Book of Common Prayer. In particular I commend <http://bishopsagainstgunviolence.org>. In addition to corporate prayer, cultivate one another's personal discipleship; anything that strengthens our faith will strengthen our capacity to respond. I have found this collect by the late and great Theodore Parker Ferris to be a talisman in these days:

"We thank you, God, for the ideals and standards by which we try to live, and for the ordered way of life in the fellowship of your church. Grant that we may never be so immersed in that way of life that we become immune to the life of those are groping their way through the shadows and thick darkness, trying to find happiness and freedom. Help us to remember Jesus Christ who came not to call the righteous, but the sinner into his commonwealth of love."

Be encouraged

Trust your instincts and wisdom. Whatever response you and your faith community make will say to people in Maine that we are listening, we are praying, and we are speaking. Be encouraged and *"declare these things; exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one look down on you"* (Titus 2:15). May God bless your ministry and witness, your continued commitment to pay attention, and your faithfulness to the Gospel.

Faithfully in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Thomas J. Brown', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

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