



DIOCESE OF ST. AUGUSTINE

Office of the Bishop

James K. Ellis
Supreme Knight and CEO
Knights of Peter Claver
1825 New Orleans Avenue
New Orleans, Louisiana 70116

Dear Mr. Ellis,

I thank you for your letter of June 22 and its well wishes in these difficult times. Our Nation is facing many crises currently, not the least among these the sin of racism. We have been plagued in the past with this issue and it still haunts us today in the actions of some who would senselessly take the life of a man as we saw with George Floyd. You are quite right in saying that this is not only a social justice issue, it is a respect for the life and dignity of all God's people issue.

Long before these recent tragedies, the Diocese of St. Augustine was embarking on how best we could address the sin of racism. I asked our Office of Formation to organize and execute 3 listening sessions throughout our diocese focused on, *Open Wide Our Hearts*. These were held in January, 2020. Each session consisted of:

- a brief overview of the Pastoral Letter
- 2 testimonies of people who had experienced racism (we heard many more)
- an "open mic" that allowed participants to make suggestions on what actions the Diocese could take that we make an impact

During each of these sessions, I sat and listened to the people as they gave testimony of their pain and suggestions for a better future. Volunteer scribes wrote down the testimonies and suggestions of those gathered. There was also a chance for people to make comments to me on cards provided. A translator was provided at each session for our Spanish communities.

At the beginning and the end of each of these listening sessions, we provided not only prayer resources from the USCCB, but also print copies of the Pastoral Letter, print copies of the study guide, and print copies of a set of resources gathered by the Office of Christian Formation.

The suggestions gathered from the listening sessions were tabulated and summarized into a one -page action plan for the diocese. We published this in our diocesan

magazine, *The St. Augustine Catholic*, in recent May/June issue. Copies of the plan of action were distributed prior to the publication of the magazine to our priests and deacons. Many of them have used pieces of the resources provided as content for homilies as our parishes here reopened in mid-May. I, myself, have used the topic of racism in my own homilies as I have celebrated Confirmations, Ordinations, and Graduation of our lay leaders over the past month. Our Catholic Schools and Parish Schools of Religion have been provided with many resources to be used with the children and youth. Racism is a topic that continues to be at the forefront of our work here in the Diocese of St. Augustine.

Currently, our diocesan website, on the top of the main page, has a dropdown icon entitled, "Addressing Racism." The link is <https://www.dosafl.com/> Among the resources we have posted there are:

- Open Wide Our Hearts
- Parish Resources provided by the USCCB, including bulletin announcements and homily helps
- Our local plan for addressing racism and our resource packet
- Practical steps for eradicating racism published by the USCCB Subcommittee on African American Affairs
- All the public statements made by the USCCB regarding George Floyd, including videos

I share your deep concern and I will continue to strive to find new ways to better form not only this generation but future generations. One thing that I heard quite clearly in the listening sessions was the need for better understanding among peoples starting with the very young.

I pray, "so they all may be one," (John 17:21) the theme of our diocesan strategic plan based on my Pastoral Letter of the same name.

Sincerely yours,



Most Reverend Felipe J. Estévez, S.T.D.
Bishop of St. Augustine