

## VIEWPOINT | Church leaders of all denominations must address the sin of racism

Grounded in Church doctrine, we can emphatically say that Black lives matter, despite 'profound differences' with movement

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While reading the book "Spiritual Care in an Age of #BlackLivesMatter" edited by Danielle J. Buhuro, I was struck by a question: Do Black lives matter in the Church today?

As a child, it was common for me to see priests, nuns and preachers alike walking the streets in my community. At one intersection in my neighborhood, there was a church of a different denomination on each corner (Baptist, Church of God in Christ, Catholic and AME). My community was steeped in the fact that there was a God, He cared about you and the ministers of His Church cared about you as well. When issues arose in the community, the Church was front and center in telling you how you should feel and what you should do about any given situation. This was especially evident during the civil rights movement.

I am frequently asked where the Catholic Church stands on the Black Lives Matter movement. Sometimes a statement is made rather than a question, with the statement being "all lives matter." Before answering, I often respond with a question such as, "What do you know about the Black Lives Matter movement?"

Invariably the answer is that it is an organization that is bringing awareness to the plight of African Americans, specifically the plight of African-American males at the hands of white police officers. After thanking them for reaching out to me, we begin to dialogue. By the end of the conversation, both parties have learned something.

Catholic social teaching that tells us "the measure of every institution is whether it threatens or enhances the life and dignity of the human person," [as explained by the U.S. bishops](#).

In his pastoral letter, "[The Black Lives Matter Movement: The Racial Divide in the United States Revisited](#)," Bishop Edward K. Braxton acknowledges that there are "profound differences" in the Church's teachings and the Black Lives Matter movement. He acknowledges that conversations, as difficult as they might be, can be had. I have found this to be true, yet I have also found that our shepherds have not had these conversations, thus we are confused.

In a speech at Illinois Wesleyan University in 1966, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. stated that people of his generation might have to repent, not only for the actions of bad people "but for the appalling silence and indifference of the good people who sit around and say 'wait on time'".

As Christians, we need to right wrongs. Black Lives Matter did not start because people sat around a table and decided to launch a movement. A young woman, outraged after hearing yet another Black life had been snuffed out by a white police officer, tweeted the hashtag #blacklivesmatter. As a Black woman, I can understand that desperation — that cry to anyone that will listen, that cry that says "look at me, I am not invisible, in all that is Holy, my life matters." Yes, I know that my sister's life matters, that my brother's life matters, that blue lives matter, but they are not the ones hurting now.

What is sad is that the Black Lives Matter movement took off because Church leaders were silent. Church leaders were not walking in their communities to see what the neighbors were doing. Too few Church leaders were denouncing senseless violence from the pulpits. Church leaders were not vocal enough. Thus, the movement did not look for a Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King or a Cardinal Joseph Ritter. The movement took to the streets and disassociated itself from the Church. And therein lies the schism.

We all know that all lives matter, and we also know that Black lives are in trouble. How do we come together to effect change? How do we come together so that violence in all its forms may be eliminated?

Church leaders of all denominations must come together and look at the issue of the sin of racism, which is the root cause of racial inequities and police brutality. They must dialogue with the laity to hear and understand the cries of the people. The people must gird themselves with the knowledge that the Church is making progress, albeit slowly.

Black lives absolutely matter in the Church today and as Catholics, grounded in Church doctrine we can walk hand in hand with others and emphatically say so.

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