

A National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus (NBCCC) Statement on the May 14th tragedy in Buffalo, NY

During her recent confirmation hearing, Supreme Court Justice candidate Ketanji Brown Jackson was asked “if babies are racist.” Her response should have been “no but they can grow up to be racist.”

Last Saturday, May 14, 2022, the vile specter of racism – which divides and injures the human family by ignoring the truth that we are all created equally in the image of God -- again revealed its ugly face. A young man, only 18 years old, drove 200 miles to Buffalo, NY, intending in his heart to kill people based solely on the color of their skin. We pray for his conversion of heart, and for the souls of all of those affected by his senseless actions in Buffalo. But we also call all people of good will to action.

Racism is not something a child inherits – it is something a child is taught. An African proverb says: “it takes a village to raise a child.” Essentially, we are ALL responsible for developing a child into a productive member of society. That is the positive hope.

Unfortunately, what we saw last Saturday is becoming normal, begging the question: What type of village produces a child that, upon reaching 18, seeks to plan and execute the murder of innocent people because of the color of their skin? Perhaps a village of families, political figures, social media and/or television “news” personalities that have twisted and corrupted him without any regards to the outcome? For as the 2018 United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) pastoral letter against racism says: *Racism can often be found in our hearts—in many cases placed there unwillingly or unknowingly by our upbringing and culture. As such, it can lead to thoughts and actions that we do not even see as racist, but nonetheless flow from the same prejudicial root.* (Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love, page 5).

Why does our Catholic Magisterium – those entrusted with Church teachings -- witness what occurred in Buffalo, NY, and remain silent? Why does it not see the hypocrisy of a “pro-life” Church which is consistently silent about the suffering of Black lives targeted by racism? Why, when we ourselves cry out “Black Lives Matter” do they retort “No, all lives matter.” Tell that to the families of those -- Black and White -- who were indiscriminately gunned down on Saturday because racism was taught while the village remained silent. Like any evil, racism is a fire that burns indiscriminately. Left unchecked, it will burn within our walls and gladly consume the entire village.

We, the National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus, cannot be silent. As the 2018 USCCB pastoral letter against racism says: *Too often racism comes in the form of the sin of omission, when individuals, communities, and even churches remain silent and fail to act against racial injustice when it is encountered* (Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love, page 4). We therefore condemn what occurred in Buffalo, NY -- a site and symbol of freedom for our once-enslaved ancestors who were valiantly led there by Harriet Tubman on the Underground Railroad. We also condemn the systemic racism that continues to produce this strange fruit. We condemn the silence of those who boast politically of being pro-life but who in reality choose not to stand in solidarity with those whose daily lives and spiritual well-being are injured by overt and systemic racism.

Scripture says: *If anyone says, “I love God,” but hates his brother, he is a liar ... This is the commandment we have from God: whoever loves God must also love his brother.* (1 John 4:20-21). In other words, love demands integrity. Therefore, we call upon all people of good will, but especially our Catholic brothers and sisters, to stand firm with the integrity that love demands: if you are truly pro-life, then speak, teach, pray and act against the growing tide of racism in our nation.

Until people grasp the radical evil of racism, and embrace the radical love to which we are called by God, offering “Our thoughts and prayers” will be no more than placing a tiny bandage on a gaping wound.