

A Black Catholic's Perspective on the Church's Response to the Black Lives Matter Movement

The Black Lives Matter is a movement that has emerged out of recent racially charged tragedies, where black men and women have suffered unjustly death and injury at the hands of the white majority. The killing of black sons and daughters with no justice by the American court system has become normalized. The civil unrest that inevitably follows mirrors some of the same catastrophic protests that our elders witnessed and experienced during the Civil Rights Movement.

In November 2015, the Institute for Black Catholic Studies at Xavier University in New Orleans, LA hosted the Black Lives Matter Symposium. This two-day event brought close to (if not over) 1000 guests and included a live stream of the events and workshops to an online audience. Workshops and panel discussions addressed topics like, the effects of mass incarceration on the black families and understanding white privilege. A keynote presentation from Father Bryan Massingale, urged the Church to see the Black Lives Matter movement as a movement that unites parishioners, rather than as one that separates them. He emphasized that embracing Black Lives Matter does not insinuate or assert that Asian, Latino or White lives are less important; but that Black Lives Matter has surfaced out of the gross negligence, disdain and lack of value for the black body. The movement has risen to express to society that black life has relevance and value just as the bodies of our majority counterparts have relevance and value.

1 Corinthians tells us that each of one us – whether we be Black, White, Asian, Native-American or Latino represent the Body of Christ; and that if one part suffers, every part suffers with it. Black lives are suffering, but it does not seem as though the Church has collectively acknowledged and concentrated their efforts on addressing and working to resolve racial disparities. However, this is indeed a moral and social justice issue that desperately needs the Church's attention and guidance. Ignoring or placating the Black Lives Matter movement will not force massive injustices to go away or die down. The Church has a responsibility to act on the behalf of their Black congregation. We tithe to our parishes, we pledge funds to our Dioceses and we serve our parish communities. Yet we do not have the church's attention on this matter. What kind of message does this send to Black Catholics? It sends the message that we have no right to expect reinforcement from our Church.

Black Lives Matter is a movement that literally means *all lives matter*. One life is not more important than the other, but we cannot sit idly by and allow for injustice to continue plaguing our people. Too many black sons, black daughters, black wives, black mothers, black husbands and black fathers have been lost to the infected hands of bigotry, with no end to these atrocities in sight. Supporting Black Lives Matter does not denote that other causes are of less importance. Rather, the Black Lives Matter movement affirms that we need our cries for justice answered also.

Andrea Marissa Auguster
Consultant, Subcommittee on
African American Affairs