



Ad Hoc Committee Against Racism

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“With passion, but without violence”: Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Pope Francis and Nonviolence

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Good morning and thank you for being here.

Let me begin by offering my sincere condolences to families and friends of all the victims of the tragic shooting in Las Vegas and to assure them of my prayers. I know my prayers this morning for everyone harmed by this event are being joined to those of millions of others across the nation. May God hear us and bring his consolation and help.

As always in these situations one finds it hard to say things that don't sound like clichés. This is part of the tragedy. We have too much violence in our society and everything we say is beginning to seem tired and repetitive.

As a society, we all need to stop making excuses and commit to a movement for nonviolence that involves all of us.

But we need something more – something deeper. It requires true conversion. Each of us needs to restore the love that comes with true friendship. A society is more than a set of people making contracts or sharing in exchange. Its more than a set of people who elect officials together and listen to the same music. It is a community. And unless we recover the sense that we are all in this together, because we are one family, I fear we may not be able to stop the violent trends we are facing.

A commitment to authentic community what we might call civic friendship requires a deep personal conversion of heart and mind. A conversion that allows us to see everyone as made in the image and likeness of God, and possessing an inherent dignity that deserves not only our protection but our respect, honor and love. This includes everyone - those with whom we work, stand in line, sit next to in Church or the movies, sign contracts, share neighborhoods and schools – as well as those we too often do not see – those in nursing homes, on street corners, in unsafe neighborhoods or in our prisons or recently released from them.

Pope Francis spoke of the earth as our common home. So it is. And so is a society. It is a home. In order for peace in the home we need mutual care, respect and yes, love.

Pope Francis has repeatedly used the phrase “throwaway culture” to describe much of our modern life. Such a culture is willing to throw people away. It is easy to speak of human dignity, but in the face of so much violence we have to ask ourselves if we really believe it? Or do we believe it selectively – as applying to some people but not to others?

This is deeper than a policy problem. It is matter of our deepest convictions. Do we understand the inherent dignity of *every* human being?

There are signs that we do. As you have already heard, the call to nonviolence in the face of injustice – serious injustice – was at the heart of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King’s vision and work. Nonviolence was a heroic stance in the face of grave sin and it made a difference. Given recent events, it is important to recommit ourselves to this vision.

We have a long way to go, but as a disciple of Jesus Christ, who has taught me the power love has to change hearts and minds, I look to the future, not with facile optimism, but with hope.

Thank you.
