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To: To Clergy and People of the Diocese

Date: June 3, 2020

This coming week we will observe Trinity Sunday. In the Common Lectionary, the first scripture reading this Sunday is taken from Genesis Chapter 1. It is the story of creation and draws attention to our belief in God as the maker and creator of all. After creating heaven and earth, light, darkness, seas and land, plants and animals, in verse 26 we come to the creation of human beings. God creates humanity, male and female, in the image and likeness of the godhead. The ancients who wrote this text were familiar with tribe and nation, with family lineage and varieties of religious practice. There were plenty of ways that they could distinguish who was “us” and who was “them”, yet the primal creation story holds to a common creation for all of humanity. It is something worth remembering this week as our media feeds are filled with the consequences of systemic racism. This is not about what we are witnessing unfold in the United States, this is not about politics, it is about who we believe we are as human beings - a basic fundamental belief in the common humanity of everyone who walks on the face of this planet.

Jesus met some of his greatest opposition when he crossed dividing lines meant to preserve purity, meant to define who was “in” and who was “out”. Though God’s dream is of a place where all nations will gather it seems that the dividing lines of class, race, ethnicity and national identity are still woven deeply into our culture... and church. Yes it is easy to fulminate about the failings we see in others and this may indeed be just, but we have a “log in our own eye” which needs to be removed before we can counsel others as to the error of their ways. The founding of this diocese was tied to the slave trade, both in terms of funding and in the personal choices of some of our earliest leaders. In those days we did not shine brightly in advocating an end to the horrendous business of enslaving human beings nor did we condemn the way that First Nations people were being pushed off of their land. That was just the beginning of a culture in this part of the world which has tolerated racial inequality, whether directed at persons of African ancestry or First Nations persons.

The first step in dealing with any problem is to admit that there is a problem. As Canadians, we have been reticent to make that admission. Five years ago the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission called us, all of us, to action. Those “Calls to Action” also made clear the many ways that discrimination against aboriginal people in this country had been created and supported by our societal institutions. Steps along the path to reconciliation have been slow and halting since then but we are moving and the topic is no longer buried. The broader conversation about racial discrimination is even more difficult. Difficult because of the ways in which it too is woven in insidious ways through almost every aspect of our society. It simply takes silence in order for racism to survive.

Our baptism Covenant calls us to “Seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbour as yourself”, to “strive for justice and peace among all people and to respect the dignity of every human being”. It also calls us to “persevere in resisting evil...” Racism and discrimination are not hallmarks of God’s kingdom and they have no place in the church. They are examples of systemic evil that is so often ignored in favour of concerns about individual sin. So how do we fulfil our baptismal promises?

by paying attention to what goes on around us, the subtle and no so subtle ways that discrimination is applied.

by educating ourselves about the reality of the problem. There are lots of articles and books that tell the honest impact of local, home-grown, racial discrimination.

by adopting an anti-racist stance. Not being a racist is a good thing but it is not enough, silence is complicity.

by advocating on behalf of those who are the victims of racial discrimination.

At the last meeting of the Mission, Outreach, Social Justice Team, early in May, there was a discussion about how we might engage members of the diocese in anti-racism work. Very soon we will be forming a network to inform, educate and promote action against racism.

Unfortunately this is not a new problem but it's not good enough to take refuge in knowing that racism has been a part of our culture for 100's of years. The good news of the kingdom is for all for we are all created in the image and likeness of God.

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One last note this week about the material I circulated last week in relation to re-opening church buildings for worship. I provided these guidelines so that parish leaders could begin the conversation about what would be needed in order to reopen, to acknowledge that worship is going to look substantially different when it does begin to happen "in-person" again and for leaders to begin to recruit they many people who are going to be needed to meet the ongoing restrictions.

I will repeat the first two points I made last week:

- We need to move slowly. In all decisions we need to hold uppermost the care for those most vulnerable to the virus.
- Just because we can, doesn't mean we have to. Parishes may choose to wait longer before beginning to gather for worship.

Please remember these two points when your parish is looking at a time line for re-opening.

Blessings

+Ron

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "+ Ron Cutler".

The Most Reverend Ron Cutler  
Archbishop of Nova Scotia & Prince Edward Island