

Archbishop Lori announces statewide Maryland task force on racism

Baltimore Archbishop William E. Lori, the chairman of the Maryland Catholic Conference, announced Sept. 27 the creation of a statewide task force on racism.

A **news release** from the Archdiocese of Baltimore described it as “an effort to better improve race relations and to address the sin of racism that continues to be a divisive force in our country.”

The group, which is co-chaired by Bishop Denis J. Madden, auxiliary bishop emeritus and urban vicar of the Baltimore Archdiocese, and Bishop Roy E. Campbell Jr., auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Washington, held its first meeting in Baltimore Monday.

According to the news release, the workgroup includes leaders from the state’s Catholic African-American and Latino communities, legislators, historians, academic scholars and others who will “bring a diverse perspective to the important work of the task force.”

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops created a Task Force on Peace and Unity last year in response to heightened racial tensions around the country, including the riots surrounding the April 2015 death of Freddie Gray in Baltimore City.

Archbishop Lori led a prayer for peace at the start of the Baltimore City Council meeting Aug. 14, two days after white supremacists marched on Charlottesville, Va., and a counter-protestor died in the ensuing violence.

“The dreadful spectacle of violence and racism displayed in Charlottesville by various white supremacist groups is a shocking reminder of how much work still needs to be done to eradicate the sin of racism in our country, our state, and our local communities,” Archbishop Lori said in the Sept. 27 press release.

“While many good efforts are ongoing within the Catholic Church here in Maryland, we know that we are far from where we need to be in fostering a truly loving, diverse community where all are welcomed and embraced, regardless of the color of their skin, the language they speak, or their country of origin.”

The task force’s first meeting came the day after several Baltimore Ravens took a knee during the National Anthem of the team’s Sept. 24 game in London, in response to President Donald Trump’s call for the firing of players taking such an action, done originally to protest police brutality. The players, and the team, have since faced a severe backlash from tens of thousands who objected to their protest.

In September 2016, Archbishop Lori joined a march for peace at St. Peter Claver, not far from where Gray sustained injuries while in police custody in April 2015. Two months later, the U.S. bishops’ annual fall assembly in Baltimore included a Mass at the church.

“This effort,” Archbishop Lori said in the Sept. 27 news release, “will require the courage to take an honest look at our past, the humility to repent of the ways we have actively caused pain or turned a deaf ear to those who suffer from the evil of racism, and a firm faith in the power of God’s love as we begin the path to reconciliation.”

The U.S. bishops recently formed an ongoing Ad Hoc Committee Against Racism, to which Archbishop Lori has been named a consultant.

Jesuit Bishop George J. Murry, chairman of the committee, said it will “listen to the needs of individuals who have suffered under the sin of racism and together find solutions to this epidemic of hate that has plagued our nation for far too long.”

Local bishops were invited to examine the issue and promote ways of addressing racism in local dioceses.

“We ask for the prayers of Maryland’s Catholic community and all people of good will as we turn to this work with renewed zeal and urgency,” Archbishop Lori said. “May St. Peter Claver inspire and bless our coming together as we journey ever closer toward building the kingdom of God.”

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