



## ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF LANSING

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Office of the Bishop  
228 N. Walnut Street • Lansing, Michigan 48933-1577

October 11, 2019  
Feast of Pope Saint John XXIII

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

*“Racism occurs because a person ignores the fundamental truth that, because all humans share a common origin, they are all brothers and sisters, all equally made in the image of God. When this truth is ignored, the consequence is prejudice and fear of the other, and—all too often—hatred,”* *Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love, A Pastoral Letter Against Racism, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.*

On 14 November 2018, I was privileged to formally endorse the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ pastoral letter against racism on behalf of the people, parishes and schools of the Diocese of Lansing. I encourage you to read it. One of the strongest recommendations of this letter was that all of us need to engage others, to dialogue with others, so that “we may walk together humbly with God and with all of our brothers and sisters in a renewed unity.”

Four months later, our Diocesan Task Force on Race in Catholic Schools presented their final report with recommendations as to how the Diocese of Lansing can better understand and serve all families and students within our Catholic school communities. My first duty, and a happy one it is, is to thank Dr. Joan Jackson Johnson and the task force for their conscientious and faith-filled work diligently undertaken over a 12-month period.

The immediate cause of the task force was disagreement between many people of good-will over the decisions by some students at a local Catholic high school to kneel during the playing of the National Anthem. My deeper concern, however, was to help us determine how better to accompany our minority students in our schools so that their human, intellectual, and spiritual formation may be as enriching as possible; to vigilantly guard our school communities against the sin of racism; and to ensure that all students feel both safe and affirmed within our schools.

I am very proud of the students, faculty, and staff of our Catholic Schools and I believe that our Catholic schools make an incredible contribution to our society. But we can always get better, become even more Catholic. In the end we want to be saints and to form saints.

While we still fail and sin, however, we must strive to do better for that is the path of sanctity.

Thus, the task force held listening sessions, researched some academic programs, and received written testimonies as part of its work. Not surprisingly, they found that there was a divide regarding the issue of the anthem: a duty of respectful patriotism verses a right to peaceful protest. Secondly, that we need a greater presence of minority students and staff within our schools. Thirdly, that there is a need for those who feel unheard to have an appropriate outlet for their concerns such that they can be both heard and responded in love and truth. Finally, there was a sense that there needs to be more emphasis on the formation of all students, faculty, and staff in an authentic Christian anthropology such that each becomes more open to the richness of other racial and ethnic experiences.

So where do we go from here? What are our responses to the recommendations made by the Task Force? On the whole, the 10 suggestions made are laudable, sensible and achievable. Indeed, some of the recommendations are already being implemented. For me, there are two key issues to focus on if we are to better foster a local church with a universal heart.

First, our schools need to reach out more effectively, especially to Catholic minority students in terms of enrollment and retention. In doing so, I also hope this enriches our Catholic parishes with more minority families. We also need to seek more Catholic minority faculty and staff and this should be a proactive commitment on the part of our schools.

I am therefore pleased to announce two new scholarships which will be established by the Diocese of Lansing. The first scholarship is aimed at increasing the number of Catholic African American students in our schools. It will operate under the patronage of Venerable Augustus Tolton (1854 – 97), a former slave who became the first black priest in the United States.

The second new scholarship is aimed at increasing the number of Catholic minority teachers among our school staff. Its patroness will be St. Katharine Drexel (1858 – 1955), the great pioneer of educational advancement for Native Americans and African Americans.

The parallel lives and saintly legacy of Father Tolton and Mother Drexel provide a timely reminder that a common humanity and shared faith in Jesus Christ unites Catholics of all ethnicities in a way that should foster ever greater unity while also respecting, indeed

celebrating, diversity. They also us remind us of the Church's long and venerable tradition of conferring pastoral solicitude upon particular ethnic and racial communities.

These two new scholarships are in addition to an already existing Diocesan scholarship program for Latino Catholic students which presently operates only in the Lansing and Flint areas but which we now aspire to make diocese-wide. This scholarship will now be placed under the patronage of Saint José Sánchez del Río (1913 – 28), a young Mexican martyr who was put to death by government officials because he refused to renounce his Catholic faith.

Secondly, we need to provide a program of formation for students, faculty, and staff on the evils of racism and on the proper ways to open ourselves to the grace of conversion, healing, and forgiveness, including of course, prayer and frequent recourse to the sacraments. I am pleased to learn that such programs have already been introduced across our schools. More, however, has to be done. Indeed, more will be done.

None of these actions will have any lasting effect if they are not buttressed by our unceasing prayer, ongoing study, and lively commitment to engage and dialogue with those who are not of our ethnic or racial background. Such encounters are a true blessing, a time of grace and an opportunity for human, intellectual, and spiritual growth.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Earl Boyea", with a small cross symbol above the first letter.

Most Reverend Earl Boyea  
Bishop of Lansing