



I DON'T CONDONE VIOLENCE, BUT I UNDERSTAND

A Pastoral Statement on Recent Events

June 5, 2020

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On November 5, 2019 over 75% of Rochester voters approved a referendum that established the Police Accountability Board (P.A.B.). The P.A.B. could issue subpoenas, impose discipline on police officers based on a matrix, and recommend policies that would improve the Rochester Police Department. After decades of mistreatment at the hands of police officers, residents had a real mechanism to address police misconduct. However, on May 2, 2020, the courts ruled the P.A.B. cannot discipline officers.

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In 2015 the Rochester-Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative (RAMPI) was created. With tremendous fanfare, RAMPI promised a 50 percent reduction of poverty in 15 years and received over two million dollars to reach this aim. RAMPI also hired one of Rochester's sharpest minds to lead this initiative but beset him with unrealistic expectations, behind the scenes friction, and nonprofit pimps who saw RAMPI as another means to enrich their own pockets. Half a decade into this process Rochester remains one of the poorest cities of the top 75 U.S. metropolitan areas.

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In 2012 the Democrat and Chronicle launched Unite Rochester to raise awareness of racism and create solutions. In 2013 the Facing Race, Embracing Equity (FR=EE) Initiative was created to confront structural and racial inequalities. In 2014 Person2Person was created so leaders across racial and ethnic lines could discuss racial disparities in areas such as health and education. But even with these initiatives over 75% of RSD teachers remain white while over 80% of the students are black and brown. The heroic deeds and achievements of black and brown people remain erased from our school curriculum. Black communities still have more access to weapons sold in corner stores than fresh food. Our school district still has the lowest graduation rates of the five major school districts in New York. And the list continues on and on.

I don't condone violence, but I understand. I understand. I understand the frustration. I understand the pain. I understand the resentment. I understand the emotions of unfulfilled promises, shattered hopes, and dashed dreams. I understand.

Since the events of May 30, 2020, numerous white individuals and institutions in the Greater Rochester Area have issued statements that denounce racism. "I support Black Lives Matter!"

“Racism must End!” But will these same white individuals and institutions address structural racism and enact laws and policies that value black lives when the smoke settles and the dust is clear? Will these same white individuals and institutions hire, promote and value black persons who are often the last hired and first fired? Will these same white individuals and institutions invest their resources in black communities? Will these same white individuals and institutions stop their attempt to make the Board of Elections and other Monroe County positions white again? Will these same white individuals and institutions stop their attempts to silence black voices as SUNY Brockport did with Dr. Cephas Archie? Will these same white individuals and institutions continue to provide silent consent to Mike Mazzeo and Adam Urbanski who wreak havoc on black and brown people? Will these same white individual and institutions use their voice to ask the court to overturn their decision to strip the P.A.B. of the power to impose discipline on police officers? Will black lives matter to them?

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