



Conference of Major Superiors of Men

8808 Cameron St. - Silver Spring, MD 20910 - 301.588.4030 - www.cmsm.org

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Media Release

Media Contact: Eli McCarthy
301-588-4030

Paranoia to Metanoia: Courageous Mercy Transforming Violence and Racism

COLUMBUS, OHIO (August 5, 2016). The leaders of U.S. Catholic men's religious orders gathered for our national assembly "Rich in Mercy" August 2-5 in Columbus, OH. In our gathering of prayer and reflection, we sensed the deep pain and division again in our nation, as well as elsewhere. In our response, Jesus is our guide. He says, "This is my commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you." (John 15:12) We are called to love as Jesus loved and to honor those who love in this way: compassionate, empathetic, reconciling, love of friends and perceived enemies, using nonviolent resistance against injustice and violence.

Thus, we are inspired to boldly call for a shift from the response of paranoia, i.e. "small picture," fear, tribalism, and destruction, to that of metanoia, i.e. "big picture," ongoing conversion, seeing the image of God in all people. The responses of paranoia have been clearly manifested recently in different forms of violence. For instance, examples of direct violence include the killings in Orlando at an LGBTQ club, the killing of black men, the killing of police, killing of priests, and the ongoing bombing and killing in Iraq, Syria, Libya, and Nigeria. Examples of cultural violence include the discrimination and rhetoric of de-humanization towards immigrants, refugees, LGBTQ persons, Muslims and politicians. Examples of structural violence include laws or policies that increasingly restrict immigration and the welcoming refugees, mass incarceration of people of color, militarization of our border, and investing in ongoing war.

Acknowledging our human frailties, we confess the role we have played in such actions or enabling conditions for such violence. For instance, we confess the ways we may have discriminated against minority religious in our own communities and our need to work more consciously for racial justice. Many of us also confess our lack of understanding of white privilege. "For instance, whites can go almost anywhere without being challenged about their presence there."

With God's grace we must turn to metanoia. This includes having a "bigger mind and heart" which sees the dignity and the image of God in all persons involved in conflicts. We seek to live into our Eucharistic prayer:

"For though the human race is divided by dissension and discord, yet we know that by testing us, you change our hearts to prepare them for reconciliation. Even more, by your Spirit you move human hearts that

enemies may speak to each other again, adversaries may join hands, and peoples seek to meet together. By the working of your power it comes about, O Lord, that hatred is overcome by love, revenge gives way to forgiveness, and discord is changed to mutual respect.”

Thus, we grieve and we commit to walking with those who suffer, especially the marginalized and oppressed groups. We commit to enabling circles of dialogue as this is central to acknowledging the wounds and identifying sustainable ways of healing and transformation. Yet, Catholic social teaching recognizes that there are times when conflict calls for something more than dialogue. On the one hand, we may need silence and prayer. On the other hand, we may need the courage to use nonviolent methods of non-cooperation (boycotts, strikes, civil disobedience, etc.) to create the conditions where a new message can be heard and dialogue can be fruitful.

In sum, we commit ourselves, and call on other Catholics and all people to 1) take time to weep and feel the pain of these tragedies, 2) take time for silence, deep breathing, and prayer, 3) take time to create dialogue spaces for truth and reconciliation, 4) take time to get training in nonviolent conflict transformation skills, and 5) take time to advocate local, state and federal governments to change the policies of structural violence.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Very Reverend Brian F. Terry, SA". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Very Rev. Brian F. Terry, SA
CMSM President