Ferguson and Beyond: A Window into our Human Quest

Silver Spring, MD (December 10, 2014). As Catholic leaders of men’s religious institutes in the U.S., many of us learn from and serve people on the margins. We see how they are too often devalued, ignored, discriminated, distrusted, and even blamed over and over again. We express our profound sadness at the present manifestation of these habits in Ferguson, New York, and beyond. We affirm our solidarity with anyone working peaceably for racial justice and equality.

Many in these conflicts are again using this phrase “no justice, no peace,” and we stand with people searching for peace and for justice. Impelled by the Gospel and informed specifically by three tenets of our Catholic social teaching, we approach these moments of turmoil mindful of:

- **The life and dignity of the human person.** Created in God’s image, every person is afforded the right to be respected and protected from harm, injustice, or violent attack. This includes law enforcement officials and anyone who may be breaking the law. Efforts to protect ourselves and our society do call for appropriate responses, yet never in an unreasonable, unloving, or prejudiced manner. We trust our police, yet when this trust may be compromised we look to our courts to seek justice.

- **Call to Family, Community, and Participation.** The beauty of our democracy and the sacred ethics that inform it is that our society is grounded in a healthy representation in government. In both the judicial and executive branches of the various levels of government, we entrust our leaders to reflect the values and voices of the people it seeks to serve. We ask our elected leaders to listen to the voices that have been raised to remedy deficiencies in any court proceedings. We ask that restorative justice processes and larger communal healing efforts be employed. A larger Truth and Reconciliation Commission on Race Relations in our society would be a good place to start.

- **Solidarity.** We are one human race. If any of our members hurt, we enter into that pain with empathy, compassion, and a willingness to help advance healing. These events in Missouri and New York are a microcosm of deep, simmering issues of race relations, police accountability, and militarization of our society. For instance, every three or four days a black person is killed by a white police officer, and blacks are about three times more likely than whites to die in a confrontation with police. These statistics do not indicate an automatic racism on the part of white police officers or a proclivity to crime among black people. Rather, it shows the chasm in racial concord in our society. Regardless of our race, each of us aches at this reality.

Our continued prayers for all parties in these conflicts, that healing, wisdom, and heartfelt community arise.

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The **Conference of Major Superiors of Men (CMSM)** supports and offers resources for U.S. leaders of Catholic men’s religious institutes. CMSM promotes dialogue and collaboration on issues of religious life as well as peace and justice issues with major groups in church and society. There are more than 17,000 religious priests and brothers in the United States.