

can impact human issues. Last March 15, we promulgated our Archdiocesan Pastoral Plan for the seven deaneries most devastated by the flooding. It called for postponing the reopening of twenty-four parishes and schools as well as the closing of six parishes. The announced closing of the parishes was based on the recommendations included in a pastoral report developed in the 1990s, *Catholic Life 2000*. Those recommendations were rooted in pastoral deficiencies which it was thought would be remedied best by a merger with another parish to provide better pastoral care.

St. Augustine Parish was one of these with few registered parishioners, inadequate religious education and sacramental preparation, limited pastoral services and serious financial struggles. But soon resistance to this decision, including a sit-in, became framed in racial terms because of past Church decisions which had been experienced as unjustly discriminatory. It became important to seek a resolution that would address the pastoral deficiencies, but also would give the parishioners an opportunity to address them responsibly and satisfactorily. It is my hope that the reprieve will allow this to happen. This incident brought home to me that racial wounds from the past are not yet healed.

## ***Defining Racism***

*“Make every effort to preserve the unity which has the Spirit as its origin and peace as its binding force.” (Eph 4:3)*

I have always been uneasy about using the term racism. It has an emotionally charged meaning for many people. The Church, however, is not hesitant to define racism as both a personal sin and a social disorder rooted in the belief that one race is superior to another. Hence, it involves not only individual prejudice but also the use of religious, social, political, economic or historical power to keep one race privileged. The teaching of the Second Vatican Council, echoed in “The

Catechism of the Catholic Church,” has made clear that “every form of social or cultural discrimination of fundamental personal rights on the grounds of sex, race, color, social conditions, language or religion must be curbed and eradicated as incompatible with God’s design.”<sup>1</sup>

We need to recognize that racism can be both personal and institutional. It is personal when it is expressed in attitudes or convictions that lead to racial slurs or the depreciation of the value and the gifts of those of another race or culture either in word or in behavior (cf. Jas 3:1-12). It can exist even within one race when shades of color lead to unjust discrimination.

It is institutional when the organizations in which we live foster attitudes or practices that lead to unjust discrimination (cf. 1 Cor 12:12-26). Institutional racism exists in our broader society in economic and political life, our educational systems, and our housing or living patterns.

It may be evident in the difficulty experienced by one race in seeking equal economic opportunity, leading to significant gaps in income and wealth. It may be manifested in the difficulties some experience in moving into certain urban or suburban neighborhoods, or in trying to join some clubs or organizations. Those who violate the law often experience significant disparities in sentencing related to race, especially when it comes to the imposition of the death penalty.

Institutional racism is also experienced in the Church. While the Church as the Body of Christ is holy in her Divine Head, the Church in her members can and do sin (cf. 1 Jn 1:8). When members, whether in leadership or not, treat other racial or cultural expressions as inferior or unwelcome, they contribute to an institutional form of racism within the Church – for which we must continually repent and ask forgiveness (cf. 1 Jn 1:9-10).