

The Need of the Church - and of Us as Members - to Respond in this 21st Century

“Once you know all these things, blest will you be if you put them into practice.” (Jn 13:17)

The action plan proposed later in this pastoral outlines a strategy for moving forward as a Church and as a post-Katrina community. It is important for us to take concrete initiatives in order to make up for abuses or disadvantages in the past. We should never, of course, promote unqualified people to assume positions they cannot handle. We should, however, spread the net wide when we are looking for the best qualified people to lead and serve. Compensating for the past by increasing opportunities in the present is just.

It is also important, as we move forward, to clarify that racism is not the same as fear, although fear can feed racism. As human beings, we have a natural anxiety and sometimes fear of people with different cultures or language. We may fear violence. We may fear economic loss. Fear in itself is not the equivalent of racism. The way in which we handle our fears can, however, lead us either to overcome them or to succumb to behavior that contributes to racial disharmony.

One of the phenomena of the recent past which we need to look at very realistically is the significance of white exodus from the inner city and the toleration of poverty resulting in inferior schools, housing and healthcare for those who are racially and culturally different. Today, post-Katrina, African-American children and their parents seem to experience more difficulty in returning to the area. We also need to acknowledge that in rural and suburban areas racial and ethnic tensions exist as well. Sometimes it is very difficult to mobilize us Catholics

The Catholic Campaign for Human Development has assisted low-income communities to learn how to address crime, drugs and employment issues. Christopher Homes has offered housing with dignity across racial lines for seniors who are in need. The Catholic and civic black leadership in this Archdiocese is largely composed of graduates of our Catholic schools. Archbishop Schulte insisted that inner-city Catholic schools remain open and offer the opportunity for quality academic and religious education to children who might otherwise be trapped in failing schools. Bishop Morin first came to New Orleans to participate in the Summer Witness program and has continued to promote racial cooperation in both Church and the wider community.

Post-Katrina, Father William Maestri, the Archdiocesan School office, Catholic school administrators and teachers have spearheaded the return of education to Orleans Parish. Our schools were open to everyone, whether previously in Catholic schools or not. Catholic Charities was responsible, through the Second Harvest Food Bank, for the distribution of almost 40 million pounds of food to the hungry in the first four months of recovery. They have established 12 community centers strategically located to serve the most vulnerable with the basic necessities for survival. They have provided for volunteer cleaning and gutting of over 1,000 homes of the poor, for basic healthcare for over 3,000, and for personal outreach to over 700,000 people to help them access available services. Christopher Homes has returned over 1,300 seniors to their apartments. The Providence Community Housing Coalition has brought together Anglo, African, Latin and Asian American expertise in the planned development of an initiative for mixed-income, interracial and multi-ethnic housing for 7,000 families.