



## My Response to “Statement from Clergy”

This week, a statement was released that was entitled “A Statement from Clergy of the Episcopal Diocese of West Tennessee” which included signatures from most of the clergy including my own. The primary intent and purpose of the letter was to publicly pledge that the clergy of this Diocese will commit ourselves to a continued dialogue and discussion of the complicated issues of racism and reconciliation as a body of clergy. My signature acknowledges my willingness and commitment to this spiritually important dialogue and discussions.

In spite of having some issues with some of the wording and extraneous statements, out of sincere commitment to the intent of the letter and out of solidarity to the clergy, I included my signature to this document.

Not uncommon to such “agreement documents”, there is often too much said and too little said. I would like to offer and clarify my own position from this clergy statement. First and foremost, I need to uphold my Baptismal Covenant including the last two promises:

- Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?  
“I will with God’s help.”
- Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?  
“I will with God’s help.”

This translates as “All lives matter”! This is my call and commitment to the Baptismal vows that I have made and frequently renew. Included in that primary objective is, of course, that black lives matter! The origin of the Black Lives Matter movement was to bring about a greater awareness and response to the historical and recent tragic abuses toward black lives including injustice, brutality, and lethal abuse. Like any movement that attempts to enlighten others of injustice, abuse, and violence, I am supportive of these efforts. Unfortunately, there are radical and violent groups and individuals that have attached themselves to the Black Lives Matter movement.

To make my own position clear, I am opposed to all forms of violence, regardless of the philosophical, sociological, or political justifications. I am opposed to the radical, so-called “Defund Police” rhetoric but I clearly support systematic policy changes that would protect black and all people from “targeting” and abusive actions including lethal abuse by those in authority. Not all black people are criminals. Not all white people are “White Supremacists”. Not all policemen are lethal abusers. It is, of course, complicated and the discussions are hard ones, but this is what the clergy is signing up for – to engage in these complicated and hard discussions about racism. To be clear, racism at all levels and in all forms is a sin. That is why this topic is not just political but theological and spiritual. As a priest, I am obliged and called to confront sin and to find and offer reconciliation. Reconciliation will be difficult without justice. We pray for our African American brothers and sisters, for our leadership, for our policy makers, for clergy and for all races that they may become instruments of justice, reconciliation, and peace.

I embrace Dean Dimmick at St. Mary’s Cathedral’s prophetic words:

“Let us make this not only an hour of pain but one of promise – out of this darkness, let burn the light of freedom, life and love that shall bring hope to the whole world”.

Let it be so with us!

*Fr. Terry +*