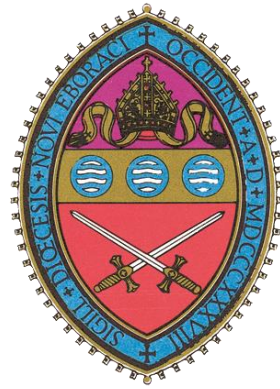


**Diocese of Buffalo**



**Diocese of Western New York**

The Season After Pentecost – June 14, 2015

To Our Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Six months ago, we issued our first joint pastoral letter on the Renewal of Western New York, in which we praised the economic renewal of the City of Buffalo and urged that efforts be made to extend that new prosperity to all people of Western New York.

Too many of our citizens still struggle with income inequality, racial and gender discrimination, hunger and lack of opportunity for training, employment and advancement. This is unacceptable. All our lives are enriched when we live in a region of shared prosperity, generosity and justice.

We have been pleased with the positive response to our letter. We are gratified that so many people have told us they share our views and are glad that our two churches have taken the pioneering step of speaking out jointly on a matter of importance to us all.

We have survived a brutal winter that underscored the importance of looking out for our neighbors. We have witnessed civil unrest in Ferguson, New York City, Cleveland, Baltimore and many other areas. Incidents near and far have shown us how much work remains to be done to heal racial wounds here and around the country.

The subject of income inequality has found its way into Americans' daily conversations. It is a topic likely to be a central theme of the 2016 presidential election campaign.

Equality must be a focus for all who claim the name of Christ, whose first concern was always for the poor, the hungry, the sick, and the marginalized. When we ignore them we ignore Christ. We need to focus our vision to see his face in those people too easy to ignore or forget.

The Holy Spirit enabled the disciples of Jesus to see the world in a new way. It was the Holy Spirit that empowered them to go into all the world, carrying Jesus' message of healing, abundance, hope and reconciliation to all people. It was the Holy Spirit that enabled them to speak in many languages so all could tell and hear the Good News. The contemporary Scottish hymn writer, John Bell, describes the Spirit as "the enemy of apathy," an image we find particularly appropriate at this time in our common life. It is time for each of us to embody that enemy of apathy, to model the behavior of the disciples, to be inspired by the Holy Spirit and go into the world and act. It is time to move beyond talk about the ways in which our world is broken.

In the six months since we issued our first joint pastoral letter, people have asked: What can we do? What steps can each of us take to move our region toward inclusivity and equality? Today we offer some concrete suggestions.

First, like Jesus' disciples, we seek to change the world by changing ourselves and the way we view the world.

- The economy of the City of Buffalo, Niagara Falls, and some of our major tourist centers drives the economy of the region. Prosperity then ripples out to the rest of the region. Each of us can do something to improve the economy. We call on everyone in our two dioceses to spend \$20 this summer investing in our future. Dine out at a local restaurant in Buffalo or explore the new waterfront; take a day trip to Niagara Falls; visit the villages along Chautauqua Lake. As little as \$20 will provide a big boost that ultimately benefits the economy wherever you live. Each of us can make a difference.
- We know that transformation begins when we walk in another's shoes and see the world through different eyes. Therefore we call on our parishioners to attend an event this summer where you are not in the majority. Step outside your comfort zone and try different food; listen to unfamiliar music; visit an ethnic neighborhood festival; attend church where the parishioners worship in a different language.
- We know that it is through prayer that we draw ourselves closer to Christ and bring the needs of our world before God. Therefore, we call on everyone in our two dioceses to pray: pray for our region; pray for our leaders; pray for our nation; pray for someone from a different race or gender, by name, every day.

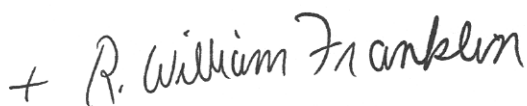
Second, we ask all of our parishioners to join with us in calling on the leaders of the public and private sectors to realize that they have the power to make broad changes that will improve the long term economic health of our region and the lives of thousands of our neighbors. This can be accomplished by:

- Providing job training and support that will create the pools of skilled, reliable workers they need.
- Increasing employment opportunities for people living in poverty, people of color, refugees and people re-entering our community after incarceration. This is how we break the cycle of dependence and hopelessness.
- Reforming the criminal justice system to address the disproportionate number of people of color who are imprisoned.
- At the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus, we urge that neighborhood residents have access to job opportunities and that their voices be heard.

We are more persuasive by how we act than by what we say. In prayer, may we ask ourselves how do we treat our neighbors? How do we use the gifts and powers with which God has blessed us?

This summer we encourage everyone to take the next steps on the path of transformation of ourselves and our communities. In Mark's Gospel Jesus tells us that "those who do the will of my Father" are his family. We call on each of us to show the world what it means to be a member of the family of Christ.

Yours in Christ,



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