

Bishop Burbidge's Statement on Violence in Charlottesville

Seeing the violence in Charlottesville was saddening and disheartening. The more we read about the demonstration of racism, bigotry and self-proclaimed superiority made it seem as though we were living in a different time. So much progress has been made since the Civil Rights Movement. And yet, there are some who cling to misguided and evil beliefs about what makes American unique and remarkable.

Any discussion of this sensitive topic must begin by condemning all forms of bigotry and hatred. For Christians, any form of hatred, no matter who it is against, is an offense—a sin—against the Body of Christ. Each person is created by God and bestowed with his unyielding love. Anyone who treats one of those creations with disrespect, disdain or violence, has offended not just that person, but also the creator of that individual. When we witness destructive behavior, such as racism or hatred, we might naturally respond with righteous anger, but we must not respond with our own form of hatred. Hating those who hate us offers no possibility of authentic conversion or growth as sons and daughters of God.

We should be grateful to live in a country where the freedom of speech and assembly is cherished and protected in a constitution. This right protects religious expression, for example. At the same time, these rights also open the opportunity for those with evil intent and backward thinking to demonstrate and share what they believe as well. The question we must ask, especially after seeing our rights misused to the point that violence erupts leaving many injured and a young woman dead, is: what do we do now?

We must find unity as a country. Unity does not mean we all believe the same things. Likewise, the freedom to express differing views or opinions does not mean we reject our unity as God's family. The Catholic Church is rooted in fundamental principles that make us authentically Catholic—but apart from them, there are issues that allow for debate and discussion, which is normal within any family. Our country is the same in many ways. We must be united by a shared interest in freedom, liberty, and love for our neighbor. Beyond those unifying principles, there will be disagreements and differing beliefs. But our unity is in our shared values and, and perhaps more importantly, the respect we show to one another. Without respect for each other, even when we adamantly disagree, we will see more violence and discord in this great nation.

At this time, I call upon all Catholics in the Diocese of Arlington to turn to the patroness of our nation, Mary under the title of the Immaculate Conception, and Saint Michael the Archangel, and pray for unity, respect, and peace in our communities.