

Police, Black People and Racial Justice
Catholic Association for Racial Justice, 3 June 2020

May George Floyd rest in peace, and may his family see justice done. We are shocked but not surprised to see protests breaking out across the USA and in other parts of the world – including here in the UK.

More than forty years ago, our predecessor – the Catholic Commission for Racial Justice (CCRJ) – issued a paper on ‘The Police and the Black Community in the Metropolitan Area’. They said in that paper that they felt the problem between the police and the black community was ‘of such seriousness that it should be brought to the attention of the Catholic community.’

In 1981, disturbances involving the police and black communities in Brixton, Toxteth and Moss Side led to the Scarman Inquiry; and similar disturbances at Broadwater Farm Estate in Tottenham in 1985 led to the Gifford Inquiry.

On 18 October 1986, CARJ organised a Conference on Police/Community Relations. The Conference was organised to follow up issues raised in the Gifford Report – the report of the independent inquiry on the disorders at Broadwater Farm Estate in Tottenham in 1985.

In 1991, the Bishops Conference was invited to make a submission to the Royal Commission on Criminal Justice. The Bishops’ Committee for Community Relations prepared a submission focusing on the experience of black people with the police.

The murder of Stephen Lawrence (1993) was eventually the subject of the Macpherson Report (1999) in which the police response was judged to have been inadequate; and the issue of ‘institutional racism’ was finally addressed

In our Submission to the Lammy Review (June 2016), we concluded: ‘Despite real improvement over the years, the legacy of this history is still in place today. People from BAME communities are over-represented in almost all areas of the Criminal Justice System. They are more likely to be the target of ‘stop and search’, more likely to be arrested and more likely to receive a prison sentence.’

Mrs Yogi Sutton, Chair of CARJ, has commented on the death of George Floyd

‘I am appalled that year after year, brutality on our fellow beings still occurs because of racism. The latest death of Mr Floyd will also simply become yet another statistic. There will be widespread protests and then Silence Nothing will change. I do not condone violence, but peaceful protests are very important. How else are people to show solidarity. However, history shows, the protests are not sufficient means to bring about change.

I want to call on people around the world, especially Catholics because we believe and profess that we are ALL made in the image and likeness of our Creator, that we are all Sisters and Brothers in Christ, to speak up for justice by acknowledging racism in all its forms. Any addict will tell you that there is no cure until one accepts that one is an addict. In the same way, we must acknowledge that we are racist. If and when we genuinely understand and accept this, then we will face the road to solutions.

This is what I would pray for:

I am generally one who prefers the circular movement for change, asking everyone to do his/her bit, this time I would start at the top and implore Governments to take a stand. Not to speak of zero intolerance of racism but to practice the same. No Minister should be allowed to stay in his/her position should they make any racist statement or behave in any racist manner. Coming from the top in every organisation in the media, in business, in education, in the workplace, anywhere and everywhere. If the punishment was the same universally, for all, immediate and transparent, the message would soon get through and be learnt. No one would put a hand in the same fire after being burnt.

Antiracist training should become part of every profession, administration, everywhere. It should be part of the curriculum in schools. We should learn how to respect, accept and live with and alongside one another in joyful, peaceful harmony.'

CARJ, 9 Henry Rd, London N4 2LH. 020 8802 8080. Info@carj.org.uk. The Catholic Association for Racial Justice (CARJ) is an independent charity committed to working with others of diverse backgrounds and beliefs to bring about a more just, more equal, more cooperative society. CARJ Briefings are primarily intended to give readers accurate and relevant background information on current issues. Occasionally, a position or argument may be put forward provisionally for reflection and further discussion.

