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July 9, 2021

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

In Chicago, in the metro area, and even more widely across our nation, we face a profoundly painful moment in our life together. So many families are grieving the loss of loved ones to violence, and those loved ones include babies and small children. The grief is compounded by the senselessness of the loss. Fear accompanies many of us as we go about our daily lives. We are afraid of becoming a victim of gun violence, or a carjacking, or an assault. And we are afraid not only for ourselves but also for the people we care for.

As we recover from the pandemic and embrace a more familiar way of life, the comfort of normalcy we had hoped for is being spoiled by a menacing violence that threatens all of us.

Understandably, we want this horrifying situation resolved without delay. Government leaders and community activists have offered many ideas, for example: more effective policing, reforming the criminal justice system, stemming the flood of illegal guns, dismantling gangs, investment in historically disadvantaged neighborhoods, strengthening education and shoring up family life. I cannot claim special expertise in all these matters. But as a pastor, I can point to the underlying spiritual crisis that this violent and unstable situation has provoked.

When violence prompts grief, fear, and a loss of hope, as it always does, people feel alienated from one another. On one level, the fractures appear to be along the lines of race, ethnicity, economic class, and political affiliation. But it runs much deeper than that. We seem unable or unwilling to comprehend that we are inextricably connected with each other. Yet we truly are *fratelli tutti*, as Pope Francis put it — all brothers and sisters to each other. If we lose that sense of interconnectedness, we also lose our sense of compassion, empathy and responsibility for each other. And that counts as an incalculable spiritual loss, with profound consequences for how we live together as neighbors, as members of the same human family. In this light, I recall the prophetic words of Dr. Martin Luther King in 1964: “We must learn to live together as brothers [and sisters] or perish together as fools.” (St. Louis, March 22, 1964)

The challenge, especially for believers, rests at the very center of the Church’s identity. At the beginning of the Second Vatican Council’s *Constitution on the Church*, we see powerful and defining words: the Church is in the manner of a sacrament, that is, an effective sign of the unity of all humanity in God. If we, the people of God, are to remain faithful to our identity and



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our calling, we must respond to the challenge to human solidarity that violence has provoked. At the same time, we can legitimately ask ourselves: What can we do? What difference can we make? How can we bridge the divides that separate us?

Faith does not give us ready-made solutions to complex problems. Faith does give us hope that with God's help we can move forward, and that we *ought* to move forward as best as we can. With that in mind, I want to propose to Catholics and to all people of good will five steps that we can take:

1. **Ask questions:** Explore our experience and seek understanding, but in asking questions, also be prepared to authentically listen, even when what we are hearing proves painful.
2. **Dialogue:** Seek honest exchanges with people of different backgrounds. No one person or group has all the answers, and when we speak with and listen to those who have experiences and expertise that differs from our own, we begin to move toward understanding. We cultivate empathy.
3. **Pray:** Ask for enlightenment, place struggling people in God's hands, and imagine Jesus walking with us, because he is.
4. **Follow the prompts:** If we truly open ourselves to God and to each other, and if we remain attentive, we will begin to identify where God is leading us. This is discernment.
5. **Stay connected:** The great temptation during a time of crisis is to retreat to what we consider a safe space. In fact, what we most need is to go out of our comfort zones and accompany one another, even when that calls for effort and even some risk.

For people of faith, no matter the severity of the crisis, the last word is trust in God. The stirring words of Psalm 91 have consoled me and strengthened my resolve these days:

*He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High
and abides in the shade of the Almighty
says to the Lord: "My refuge,
my stronghold, my God in whom I trust."*

*It is he who will free you from the snare
of the fowler who seeks to destroy you;
he will conceal you with his pinions
and under his wings you will find refuge.*



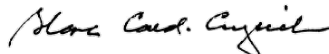
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*You will not fear the terror of the night
nor the arrow that flies by day,
nor the plague that prowls in the darkness
nor the scourge that lays waste at noon.*

*A thousand may fall at your side,
ten thousand fall at your right,
you, it will never approach;
his faithfulness is buckler and shield.*

And finally, in the words of Pope Paul VI: "If you want peace, work for justice."
God bless you and your loved ones and keep you safe.

Sincerely yours in Christ,


Archbishop of Chicago