

Cardinal Cupich

Press Conference April 4, 2017, 8:30 AM

Thank you, Drew for your hospitality today and for that introduction. Thank you, too to the members of the media for joining us here today.

Some of you may recall that when I arrive at O'Hare to begin my work as Archbishop of Chicago I was asked: "What are you going to do about the violence in the city?" I replied that it seemed to me that the issue was very complex, there are no easy solutions but that I was willing to partner with others, but I also knew I needed others to bring me up to speed on the situation.

I quickly learned that the Archdiocese, through its many entities was very present to areas marked by violence. Yet I sensed that there was a need to find out what exactly was being done, if these efforts were being well coordinated, and also if we were reaching out to form partnerships with organizations of like interests beyond the Archdiocese. So, last year I asked some of our leaders in social service ministries and academic institutions to compile a complete inventory of the things the Church had in place to address the root causes of violence and to make suggestions about how we can increase our efforts but also build

peace through greater partnerships with other organizations in the city.

I invited you here today, to give you some insight into what I have learned about what the various entities of the archdiocese are already doing to build a culture of peace and nonviolence and to outline some new initiatives we will add to those already in place.

The report I received detailed that much is already being done – you have a map of our sites of care – and there are parishes and schools dotting the city as well, most with food pantries and other outreach activities. Their work also revealed that we can not only better communicate and coordinate within the archdiocese but also yield better results by leveraging what we are doing to form partnerships with other groups.

We have set goals for our anti-violence initiative:

- To increase awareness of what is being done each and every day in this city by groups and individuals, civic, religious and business leaders to address the root causes of poverty as a way of encouraging greater civic pride and greater participation by our citizens in joining in the work of peacebuilding.

- To increase the capacity and reach of our current Archdiocesan programs that address the root causes of violence
- To identify and actively seek partnerships with like-purposed groups and individuals who are already doing so much.
- To actively seek out and invest in new approaches to breaking the violence-causing cycle of despair, racism and poverty

As an example of the scope and depth of our current programs let me give you some sense of where the Church is active in the near vicinity of where I stand today.

Let's start with this building – which houses the programs Drew described just now. The Peace Corner is meant to be a beacon on Madison Avenue which is a dividing line between gang territories. The young people who come here need to be careful they aren't crossing gang lines on their way to the building. It is also a block away from one of the most dangerous street corners in Chicago, where men openly deal drugs throughout the day.

Yet, it is beautiful - open and bright by design. It's also LEED certified and has a green roof, teaching children that respecting our common home is an important element in transforming our culture.

The families we serve here and in St Martin de Porres just behind us a couple of blocks and in the other sites of care do not have the luxury of moving to other neighborhoods out of harm's way. They stand at bus stops, trying to get to work, or walk their children to school, never knowing if today is the day a bullet will find them. So we stand here, too.

The Catholic presence in Austin also includes Christ the King High School and Chicago Jesuit Academy. The Academy is on lockdown 4 to 5 times a week – which means a shooting has occurred within two blocks of the school. Nearby on Jackson, Marillac St. Vincent, provides comprehensive programs for more than 500 youth so they can make positive decisions about their own lives, keeping them off the streets, out of gangs and in school.

We are here because the kids are here, because the families are here and they deserve our support.

But, we also are committed to expanding our presence on the west side and partnering with businesses to stabilize communities. The Austin Bank Corporation recently generously donated their 25,000 square foot building on Lake Street and the adjacent property to Catholic Charities. What was once an anchor of commerce will become an anchor of hope for Austin. Catholic

Charities has plans to provide social services there, including counseling, job training and placement, a senior center and a food pantry.

You no doubt are familiar with the efforts on the south side where the faith community of St. Sabina, ably led by Fr. Pflegar, houses a program for at-risk 17-26 year old men called Strong Futures. By February, 22 of the 50 men who started with the program last July had full time jobs, 12 had part time jobs and 5 had internships – the best success rate in the country for such an effort. We are committed to expanding that program to address the high unemployment rate among young men of color.

And we will expand the anti-gang Peacemakers on the Street initiative at St. Sabina where former gang members do direct intervention by reaching out to current gang members and community members on the south and west sides. They have already brought six gangs together to begin to talk with each other and with 6<sup>th</sup> District police officers.

In just a moment Father Scott Donahue will talk about a mentorship program he employs at Mercy Home. We are committed to working with Youth Guidance to adapt this school-based program for use in parishes afflicted with violence.

Broad gestures and sweeping rhetoric will not solve this problem but person-to-person contact holds promise.

That is why we are participating in an expanded round of On the Table talks within our parishes this May. We will explore topics including the impact of racism on our communities. Solving the problem of violence requires that we break the bonds of racism, person by person, heart by heart. We will encourage other faith leaders to do the same or if they like to join in our parish gatherings.

We will also begin the process of holding the first US meeting of the *Scholas Occurrentes* in Chicago next year. The *Scholas* program, now active in more than 100 countries, brings young people together for a week of encounter, discussion and problem solving. The participants will be chosen from schools throughout the two-county archdiocese area. Young people have the greatest stake in building a nonviolent culture and they should have a voice in forming solutions. Pope Francis is personally supportive of this effort and has given it the status of a papal foundation.

This kind of bridge building across our neighborhoods is so important to break down the barriers of segregation that leaves so many isolated and hopeless. As the recent Metropolitan Planning Council report showed, reducing the level of segregation in

Chicago – which is the direct result of racism – to the national average level would reduce the Chicago region’s homicide rate by 30 percent.

In addition, we understand that the many worthy programs, many of them neighborhood based, which are already deployed against violence to often lack resources. I will use \$250,000 of my discretionary funds, which people donate to support my charitable works, to start the Instruments of Peace Venture Philanthropy Fund. We will seek other donors who want to join us in supporting and expanding existing programs and new approaches, but who also want to partner with us in the administration and oversight of this Fund. This is just the start of a long and hopeful journey – we invite you watch it grow and prosper.

In all of this we have not forgotten the power and peace born of praying together and the public witness of working together. On Good Friday, I will lead a walk for peace in Englewood, praying the Stations of the Cross and pausing to remember those who have lost their lives to violence this year. We will recognize the people who are working hard each day to bring security to our city, promote peace and address the causes of violence. By highlighting their efforts, we hope to put the spot light on the many

good things happening here in Chicago and build greater support and a sense of solidarity in the broader community. We want to inspire people to work together, giving them hope that we can do something even if we cannot do everything. That is why we will walk the way of the cross on Good Friday and I hope you will join us.

I intentionally chose this day, April 4<sup>th</sup>, to provide this update on our efforts and announce our goals, as it is the 49<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. My hope is that throughout this year, leading up to the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of that dreadful day when his life was cut short by an assassin at age 39, we will come together as a city, inspired by his legacy, to likewise dedicate our lives to nonviolence and peacebuilding, to make a commitment starting today to do everything we can to end the scourge of violence in our neighborhoods before more lives are cut short, more promise and potential lost, more tears shed.

I am also inspired by the challenge Pope Francis issued in his in his New Year's message for the Word Day of Peace, to make peace building and combatting violence a priority in each one of our lives. He believes that young people especially have an important role to play in this regard, and he also appreciates that



we have a legacy in the leadership of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to inspire us as we take up this work of peacebuilding and creating a greater solidarity.

While I was in Rome this past week, Pope Francis asked to see me. I updated him on our initiatives and he is aware we are announcing this effort on the anniversary of Dr. King's death. The Holy Father told me that he wants to be supportive of what we are doing and offer a word of encouragement as we move forward in building a framework for peace. And so he has written a letter signed in both English and Spanish.

Let me read the English version now

After reading letter – introduce Monsignor Michael Boland of Catholic Charities.