



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Erie, PA -- **Erie's Catholic Sisters Express Support for Resolution on Racism**

In a joint statement, Erie's Catholic Sisters expressed support for Erie County Council's resolution, which declares racism a public health crisis. The resolution also states council's intent to address the health, education, housing, and economic disparities that exist in Erie County.

Members of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie, the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, and the Sisters of St. Joseph of Northwestern Pennsylvania are grateful to County Executive Kathy Dahlkemper and Council Chairman Andre Horton for bringing this resolution to a vote. Passage of this resolution represents a significant step forward for our community and opens the door to exploring strategies and solutions that can help bring an end to systemic racism in Erie County. We look forward to being involved in those efforts.

The ravages of COVID-19 have helped unmask the role of white privilege in maintaining systemic racism. Also, the killing by police officers of so many Black people has brought us face-to-face with our responsibility to speak out and to learn how we often unknowingly perpetuate these unjust systems. As Catholic women religious, we commit ourselves to Gospel values and encourage those who share our values to recognize their complicity in maintaining racist structures. Only together can we make Erie County a healthier and more equitable home for all residents.

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“Through our inner-city and other ministries, and the prayer and hospitality we offer at our monastery, we commit ourselves to be ‘a healing presence and prophetic witness for peace and justice’ as our Corporate Commitment states,” said Sister Stephanie Schmidt, OSB, prioress of the Erie Benedictines. “We, too, like many others throughout our city and nation, have a new resolve to transform systems that perpetuate injustice in favor of those that promote the good of all.”

“Racism is an evil that affects us all,” said Sister Patricia Whalen, RSM, a member of the Sisters of Mercy New York Pennsylvania West Leadership Team. “We work to mobilize sisters, associates, and the community-at-large to recognize and dismantle institutional racism in order to become an anti-racist, intercultural community. We advocate for upholding the voting rights of marginalized Americans, for a fair criminal justice system, and for pointing out racism wherever it exists.”

"As Sisters of St. Joseph, we fulfill our mission of unity of neighbor with neighbor and neighbor with God through our constant response to the ever-changing needs of the world," said Mary Drexler, SSJ, President of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Northwestern Pennsylvania. "In light of the current racial division in our country, County Council has taken a positive step in response to the changing needs of our community. We hope that strategies to address the underlying injustices will present opportunities for us to further our mission of unity and diversity in the Erie area."

The Benedictine Sisters of Erie, the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, and the Sisters of St. Joseph of Northwestern Pennsylvania and their networks of committed agregées, associates, oblates, ministry staff and volunteers represent more than 1,000 persons in the Diocese of Erie who dedicate their lives and ministries to compassion, peace, and justice.

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