News



Philadelphia Archbishop Nelson J. Perez, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee for Cultural Diversity in the Church; Salt Lake City Bishop Oscar A. Solis, chairman of the USCCB's Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Island Affairs; and Bishop Shelton J. Fabre of Houma-Thibodaux, La., chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee Against Racism, are seen in this composite photo. The three chairmen released a joint statement May 5, 2020, expressing their deep concern about incidents of racism and xenophobia against Americans of Asian and Pacific Island heritage amid the coronavirus outbreak. (CNS composite photo/Sarah Webb, CatholicPhilly.com; J.D. Long-Garcia, The Tidings; Bob Roller)

by Catholic News Service

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The chairmen of three boards of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops have issued a joint statement expressing their deep concern about incidents of racism and xenophobia against Americans of Asian and Pacific Island heritage amid the coronavirus outbreak.

The May 5 statement was released by Archbishop Nelson J. Perez of Philadelphia, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee for Cultural Diversity in the Church; Bishop Oscar A. Solis of Salt Lake City, chairman of the USCCB's Subcommittee on Asian and Pacific Island Affairs; and Bishop Shelton J. Fabre of Houma-Thibodaux, Louisiana, chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee Against Racism.

"The pandemic resulting from the new coronavirus continues to sweep across the world, impacting our everyday behavior, practices, perceptions, and the way we interact with one another," the statement said.

"While we have been heartened by the countless acts of charity and bravery that have been modeled by many, we are also alarmed to note the increase in reported incidents of bullying and verbal and physical assaults, particularly against Americans of Asian and Pacific Island heritage," the bishops said.

They pointed out that "a high percentage of Asian Americans work in the health care sector — risking their own health to save lives" and that "some have experienced rejection and requests to be treated 'by someone else.'"

The bishops also emphasized that "way before state and local ordinances brought to a halt almost every economic sector in the country, communities across the country — from Oakland, California, to New York City — reported a sharp decline in the patronage for businesses owned and operated by Asian Americans," adding that these are only "a few painful examples of the continuing harassment and racial discrimination suffered by Asians, Pacific Islanders and others in our country."

The bishops said they find these actions unacceptable and called on Catholics, fellow Christians and all people of goodwill to help them combat such acts of racism and xenophobia.

"They are attacks against human life and dignity and are contrary to Gospel values," the statement said. "As we wrote in our (2018) pastoral letter 'Open Wide Our Hearts,' racism is 'a failure to acknowledge another person as a brother or sister, created in the image of God.'"

They called for a firm rejection of racial categorizations or presumptions, racially based verbal assaults or slurs, and for an end to all forms of violence.

"We ask our elected officials and public institutions, as well as all public figures, to do all that they can to promote and maintain peace in our communities," the statement continued. "We encourage all individuals, families and congregations to assist in promoting a greater appreciation and understanding of the authentic human values and cultural contributions brought by each racial heritage in our country."

The bishops also said they would continue to pray for an end to the pandemic caused by the COVID-19 virus.

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