



## **“Let Justice and Mercy Start With Me!”**

On Thursday, Fr. Steve and I took the first step to express our hearts, to express our desire to impact change, and to express our deep sorrow for what our black community...moms, dads, daughters, sons, grandmas, grandpas, aunts, uncles, cousins, current students, alumnae, friends, neighbors, and visitors...have been painfully feeling. On Friday, Fr. Steve was able to further express our hearts in his St. Mel Moment.

This has been a challenging time in our country and in our community. We did our best to send out a statement on Thursday to acknowledge the pain many in our school and parish community may be feeling, but we fear it missed the mark.

As Pope Francis stated “we cannot tolerate or turn a blind eye to racism and exclusion in any form and yet claim to defend the sacredness of every human life.” Saying that Black Lives Matter does not mean that other lives don’t matter. Black Lives Matter speaks to the disproportionately and systematic inequality black people have faced and continue to face. When one house is on fire, that is the fire you put out. Right now “black lives” is the house that is literally and figuratively on fire.

We understand that the current sadness and anger being experienced is not only due to the tragic killing of George Floyd, but the culmination of systemic, institutional racism, inequality and injustice that continues to plague our country and community. We do believe that Black Lives Matter.

“There comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe nor politic nor popular, but he must take it because his conscience tells him it is right.” – Martin Luther King, Jr.

To all of our black students, families, alumni and staff we stand with you in solidarity. We are listening. We hear you. We are calling on our community to come together to dispel any division within our school and community. We know we do not have all the answers today. We do know the time for change is now. We also know that we need to look within to evaluate areas for improvement. We are gathering and listening to a diverse group of leaders in our community to assist us in implementing policies and practices to ensure St. Mel is a place where our families feel safe, respected and celebrated. We will be working diligently to develop a plan to include diversity into our curriculum and environment.

If you truly know my heart and Fr. Steve’s heart, you know that all those feelings were there from the start, from the moment George Floyd took his last breath and from the instant Ahmaud Arbery was murdered while simply going out for a run. We have felt anger and pain

and sorrow. But by taking some time, it enabled us to understand that our anger, pain, and sorrow cannot and will not ever compare to that which is felt in the hearts of our black community. We needed time to read and reflect on the history of the Black Lives Matter Movement, time to understand the impact racism has had on our black community, time to sit down with members of our black community...to listen to Mrs. Danielle Vappie, Mrs. Priscilla Traylor and Mrs. Erin Earls, express their story, their experiences with racism and injustice, and their love and commitment to St. Mel and desire to improve and impact change here. Time to dialogue with Mr. Bernie Crowley, former School Council Chair, alumni grandfather, and confidante. Time to dialogue with St. Mel Alumni and discuss the petition that has been circulating amongst alums of St. Mel. Time to discuss opinions and thoughts with the faculty and staff. But most importantly time to pray and center our hearts...recognizing we are the leaders of a community that must listen especially, right now to the members of our family who are hurting and angry and heartbroken.

If we didn't take this time, we wouldn't be exactly where we needed to be...right here, right now. Are we uncomfortable and uneasy about all of this? Yes! But, we have to be, if we want to improve and impact change.

The petition signed by alumni and distributed to many high schools and St. Mel made many strong demands, including request for diversity to the staff and curriculum. In response to the petition, a parent of St. Mel wrote a letter that contained hurtful and insensitive comments. We completely disavow the divisive statements made in the letter and the pain it brought to members of our school community. This letter does not adhere to the values of St. Mel and was not representative of St. Mel School, Parish or staff. We do not condone nor support any of the negative statements made in the letter and we addressed this immediately, directly with the parent.

Last night we watched the Vigil held in the courtyard of the LAPD Headquarters, with various religious leaders and the Chief of Police. The first religious leader to pray shared these words, "If there is no justice, there is no peace. If there is no peace, there is no trust." We have work to do...work that will change lives and lift hearts...the type of work that can build up trust. We can do better. Let's do better!

Love and Hope,

**Fr. Steve Davoren**  
Pastor

**Mrs. Mary Beth Lutz**  
Principal