



**Diocese of Toronto**  
Anglican Church of Canada

Dear Friends in Christ,

Racism is a sin. Martin Luther King Jr. spoke about the three evils that plague society: racism, poverty and war. He went on to say, "...And we must face the hard fact that many Americans would like to have a nation which is a democracy for white Americans but simultaneously a dictatorship over black Americans. We must face the fact that we still have much to do in the area of race relations."

What's going on?

Renaldo “Obie” Benson, a member of the Motown vocal group the Four Tops, was inspired to write a song after he witnessed the violent attack by police on protesters in the People’s Park in Berkeley, California on May 15, 1969. He tried to convince his bandmates to record it, but they rejected the idea because they thought it was a protest song. Benson said later, "I said no, it's a love song about love and understanding. I'm not protesting. I want to know what's going on."

What's going on?

Benson offered the song to Marvin Gaye, who re-worked the melody line and the lyrics to express his own bewilderment and grief of the social ills touching America. He was particularly perplexed by the war in Vietnam and the Watts Riot of 1965 that raged for five days. It was a revolt fueled by police brutality, poverty and systemic racism. The song was released in February of 1971. *What's Going On* is No. 4 on Rolling Stones' list of Best Songs of All Times.

*Mother, mother*

*There's too many of you crying*

*Brother, brother, brother*

*There's far too many of you dying*

*You know we've got to find a way*

*To bring some lovin' here today, eh eh...*

What's going on?

In a week that has been fueled by upset, anger, bewilderment and pain, the song and the question it posed comes to mind for me. The blatant abuse of power and disregard for the sanctity of George Floyd's life is appalling. How a police officer could hold him down with his knee for an interminable eight minutes and forty seconds while Mr. Floyd lay handcuffed and pleading, *I can't breathe*. How can this be? What's going on?

It has been a week marked by protest. Most have been non-violent. We have witnessed moments of tender peace, vulnerability and pleadings from some elected officials, police chiefs and family members to try to find a way. There have been crowds chanting *I can't breathe*. And there have been police officers dropping to take a knee in solidarity with protesters expressing dismay and anger. Protests have erupted in hundreds of cities across the United States, from Minneapolis to New York City, from Fresno to Norfolk and all points in between. And the protests have spilled over in countries around the world.

What's going on?

Four police officers have been charged, one with second degree murder and three with aiding and abetting second degree murder. It is some consolation. Yet, we all know that this terrible moment exposes once again the racism and discrimination inherent in the attitudes of many, present in institutions and society at all levels, and its grip continues to separate, divide and diminish. This moment reminds us that the long arc of racial reconciliation and healing has a long way to go. But... *You know we've got to find a way.*

What's going on?

A border between Canada and the United States cannot separate us, nor keep us from the reality that racism and discrimination is part of the fabric of our society too, inherent in our institutions, and expressed by all of us to some degree or another. In Ontario, and in particular Toronto over the last three decades, there has been a history of racial controversies that have ignited protests and accusations of racism. The practice of carding was ended because of the public's lack of trust in the police. An analysis done by the Toronto Star suggests that between 2003 and 2013, Black people with no history of criminal convictions were three times more likely to be arrested by Toronto police for possession of small amounts of marijuana than white people with similar backgrounds. In 2018, a report by the Ontario Human Rights Commission found that Black people were "grossly overrepresented" in cases in which police have used force, including in seven of ten fatal shootings by police between 2012 and 2017.

And let's be honest: racism and discrimination is in the Church, too. Sometimes we don't see our bias. Sometimes we downplay how our systems and policies treat people differently based on the colour of skin, language and culture. We fail to see how brown and black are treated differently than white. How Indigenous peoples are treated differently. The National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls' final report reveals that persistent and deliberate human and Indigenous rights violations and abuses are the root cause behind Canada's staggering rates of violence against Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA people. We are only fooling ourselves if we can't see it. Yet, when we do see, when our eyes are opened – well, then change can start, reconciliation can begin, healing and peace can come.

On Easter Day, Jesus stood among his disciples and said, *Peace be with you*, and he breathed on them. In that moment, their eyes were opened to the way they were being called to go – toward reconciliation, toward peace, toward justice. They were being called to love neighbour and even enemy. They were being called to honour the breath in all humanity, a reality that was punctuated by the coming of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost.

What's going on?

The College of Bishops is committed to walking in the same way. We pledge to continue to wear the mantle of racial reconciliation and healing, to be leaders in this important ministry. We have work to do. While the Anglican Church of Canada approved a Charter for Racial Justice in March 2004, a policy that supports the Charter has yet to be established. In keeping with the Charter, “Our struggle for racial justice requires new attitudes, new understandings and new relationships, and these must be reflected in the policies, structures, and practices of the Church, as well as in the laws and institutions of society.” One small step that our Diocese will take in the work of dismantling racism will be offering anti-racism and bias training for clergy beginning in the fall of this year. We hope and pray that our efforts might help break old patterns and old ways that keep us from being the love God intended in the first place.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "+ Andrew Toronto". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

The Rt. Rev. Andrew Asbil  
Bishop of Toronto