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## A Pastoral Note: Bishop McConnell on the Rosfeld Verdict

March 25, 2019

Dear Friends in Christ,

Late Friday night, a jury acquitted former East Pittsburgh police officer Michael Rosfeld of all charges related to his killing of 17-year old Antwon Rose II last summer. Antwon Rose was shot by Officer Rosfeld in the back while attempting to flee. He was found to be unarmed.



Many in our region are frustrated and despondent over this verdict. I am aware that others believe justice was served, given the law as it stands. Yet, surely, *none of us* can ignore what the killing of one more unarmed black man by a white police officer says about our ailing society. The incident evokes the memory of many others nationwide that have been documented in recent years. From the moment the trigger was pulled, to the moment of acquittal, we have been on the familiar road of a national agony: a young, relatively inexperienced white officer; a young black man with apparently little reason to believe the police would not harm him if he gave himself up; a state law riddled with implicit bias; and a local jury that could only apply the law.

All of this points to the systemic illness that continues to infect our society more than a hundred and fifty years after the formal end of chattel slavery in this country, an illness that increasingly puts the heart of our democracy at risk. We must now find ways to break down the barriers of racial inequality and injustice, and with them the walls of mistrust that separate us into multiple factions struggling for power. Nearly 51 years after the death of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., his dream has become a searing question: will we ever *live out the true meaning of our creed: that all are created equal*?

I have been in close contact with several leaders of the African American community and will be in conversation with many of them and other religious and civic leaders in the coming days, so that we may speak with one voice in seeking systemic change.

The reality of racism will not go away through some gradual process of evolution. We must dismantle it. This requires careful work and many partners. It begins with our own souls as we seriously ask the question, *what part do we play in the inequalities and injustices that plague our society?* In this season of Lent, I ask us all to begin there, and work with others to create a different world, that clearly reflects our Lord's own prayer, that the Father's *will be done on earth as it is in heaven*.

In the meantime, please pray for all who suffer in the light of these events. And pray that we may have grace and courage to build together a future without hate or fear.

Faithfully your bishop,

A handwritten signature in dark blue ink, appearing to read 'Dorsey W.M. McConnell', with a large loop at the end.

(The Right Reverend) Dorsey W.M. McConnell, D.D.  
VIII Bishop of Pittsburgh

