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Brothers and sisters in Christ,

By now we should all realize that there is no going back to the status quo following the tragic shooting of Michael Brown. Rightly so! The status quo was not good enough. This tragedy has left a community struggling to cope with anger and frustration that it had repressed for many years. Now is our moment of truth. We can let the anger and frustration spill over in violence, and then be repressed again. Or we can take the opportunity to break the cycle and address the underlying issues that cause the anger and frustration.

But we need to keep in mind the issues here are bigger than Ferguson. They are as deep as the hold of sin on the human heart and as broad as the solidarity of the entire human race. That means we will not be able to fix things quickly. But we have to move forward. And it is not just Ferguson or the greater St. Louis metropolitan community, but the entire country and the whole Church that needs to look at these issues.

Is it not a sad reality that we integrated professional baseball and schools a long time ago, but we have not integrated everyone's heart?

The sin of racism in our cities and our nation must be dealt with, but never with violence. There are small but vocal groups currently threatening violence. I urge anyone who feels the desire to violently lash out to first pause and consider the potential consequences of their actions: Will violence make the situation right? Will it right the wrongs? Or will it only make things worse? The unrelenting desire for revenge is a poison that seeps into our souls and can become contagious carrying with it a commitment to violence.

As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, "Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars...Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that." What's the solution? For all of us to be quick to apologize for our own faults, and as quick to forgive the faults of others as we want them to be in forgiving ours.

We need to come together in prayer and dialogue to address the deeper underlying issues – family breakdown, racial profiling, quality education, abuses of authority, lack of gainful employment, fear of one another, mistrust of authority, black on black violence, and white flight.

In God we are all one family and we need to call upon Christ the Prince of Peace in prayer to give us the strength to sit down together as brothers and sisters.

So, let's ask: what blueprint does God have in mind for us? And let's remember that Christ gave us the blueprint: to love God with all our heart and mind and soul and strength, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. What that means for us is that we must respect the dignity of each other. We show that respect by having a willingness to sit down together and dialogue, by having the humility to admit our mistakes and say we are sorry, and by praying for one another – yes, praying! Praying that God fills our hearts with love for one another, removes the hate we have allowed to fester there, and teaches us how to express our love in concrete ways.

It is no longer the time to ask "What would Jesus do?" It is time to ask "What is Jesus doing?" What Jesus is not doing is adding violence to violence. Remember what he said to his disciples in the Gospel of Luke when they asked if they should call down fire from Heaven to consume a town that didn't welcome him? (Lk 9:54). He rebuked them. Jesus is also not ignoring the problem and hoping it will go away! What Jesus is doing is pleading with us to listen to each other, respect each other, and help each other.

That's the same Jesus who said: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." Christ calls us to promote peace, not provoke violence. Our Lord Himself suffered the most terrible of injustices, because although incapable of doing wrong, He was nevertheless condemned to suffer and die on the cross. And when one of his disciples responded by lashing out in violence he said "Put away your sword!"

Inspired by the example of Christ, I fervently renew my call to everyone in Ferguson and the greater St. Louis community: be an instrument of peace amid the chaos! Work for calm in the turmoil!

If we depart from God's blueprint, the fruit of our thoughts and actions will not be peace but its opposite – force and violence!

It's time to turn to a different kind of power – persuasion and service. It is the way of Gandhi and Blessed Teresa of Calcutta. It is the way of the Lord who is filled with love and mercy. It is the way each of us should be. May the God who suffered on the Cross fill us with love, and guide our thoughts and actions.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert J. Carlson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Robert J. Carlson
Archbishop of St. Louis