Blog



The Rev. Al Sharpton introduces the family of Tyre Nichols during his funeral service at Mississippi Boulevard Christian Church in Memphis, Tenn., Feb. 1. Nichols died in a hospital Jan. 10, three days after sustaining injuries during his arrest by Memphis police officers. (OSV News/Andrew Nelles, pool via Reuters)



by Dan Stockman

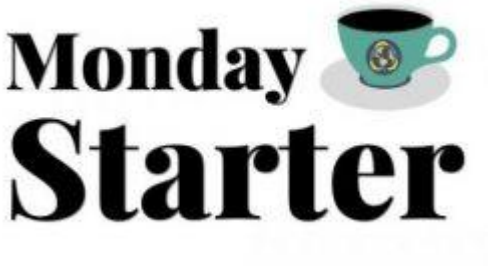
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Global Sisters Report's Monday Starter is a feature from GSR staff writers that rounds up news from or about women religious that you may otherwise have missed.



The National Black Sisters Conference is calling on religious communities and the entire church to demand justice, police reforms and an end to police brutality.

The statement, dated Jan. 30, came two days before the funeral for Tyre Nichols, who died Jan. 10, three days after he was brutally beaten by Memphis police officers who have since been fired and charged with murder. Nichols was 29.

The Adrian Dominicans, Springfield Dominicans, Sisters of Mercy of the Americas and Network Catholic Social Justice Lobby all issued statements supporting NBSC's call for justice.

"Violence against African Americans has been a fact of life in this country since the first slave patrols were created in the 1700s to apprehend runaway slaves. Historically, the system was designed to institutionalize terror against Black people," the NBSC statement says.

"The five Black police officers who brutally took Tyre's life as he cried out for his mother were indoctrinated into a corrupt system and freely chose to perpetrate violence against other Black people in the name of institutionalized racism."

The statement goes on to ask a series of questions regarding violence toward Black people:

"When will we wake up as a nation? How many lives will it take? How often must we bear witness to the senseless killing of African Americans by the police? Where is the collective voice of our religious communities, African American organizations, and church? … As we move into Black History Month, how will we answer a mother's

prophetic words on the sad occasion of her son's death? What will we remember? How will this modern-day Black genocide be eradicated? Where do we go from here?"

The NBSC calls for:

• Immediate congressional passage of the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act of 2021;

• More oversight and accountability of police departments by the U.S. Department of Justice;

• Local and state police reform;

• The end to police brutality that continues to plague Black and poor communities.

"Finally, we call on our Church to speak out in the name of the Gospel," the statement says. "This killing is a pro-life issue that is just as important as protecting the life of the unborn."



A man speaks through a bullhorn during a protest in Memphis, Tenn., Jan. 27, on the day of the release of the video showing police officers beating Tyre Nichols, the young Black man who was killed as a result of a traffic stop by Memphis police officers. (OSV Newso/Alyssa Pointer, Reuters)

The Springfield Dominicans' endorsement of the NBSC statement comes as Springfield, Illinois, is responding to the death of Earl Moore Jr., who allegedly died at the hands of two white emergency medical technicians responding to his medical emergency in December. The EMTs were charged with murder on Jan. 9. after the county coroner said his death was a homicide by asphyxiation; police body camera footage shows the EMTs strapped Moore facedown on a stretcher. Moore, 35, died just blocks from the neighborhood where five Dominican sisters live.

The Springfield Dominicans acknowledge Moore's death was not directly caused by poor policing, but say it calls for a response and was caused by the same institutionalized racism, which can "damage the souls of all people of every race" and that we must decide to seek healing as a nation.

"The Black women with whom we share consecrated religious life have an authoritative voice that must be heeded," said Sr. Rebecca Ann Gemma, who is the prioress general of the Springfield Dominicans, currently the president of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious and a member of the LCWR subcommittee overseeing antiracism efforts for the organization. "They ask vital questions: 'How many lives will it take? Where is the collective voice of our religious communities, African American organizations, and Church?' " and notes these are "questions we can only answer together."

The Sisters of Mercy statement describes the cycle that never seems to end.

"After every police or vigilante killing of a Black person, a predictable cycle begins: hashtags, an inundation of news pundits and misinformed persons asking, 'what did he/she do to cause this?' and throngs of allies peacefully protesting calling for justice and asserting 'never again,' " the statement says. "Just as predictable as the cycles is the aftermath of the cycles. As time passes the hashtags appear less, protests stop, and the media moves on to the next story."

In both the Nichols and Moore cases, arrests have been made and charges filed, but those are forms of accountability, the statement says, not justice. In addition to passage of the George Floyd Act, the Mercies urge adoption of the policies in the #8cantwait campaign, which calls for research-based restrictions on use of force.

The Network statement notes that "Far too often, Black and brown lives are traumatized by public safety officers who fail to see humanity in Black bodies and inflict harm, and even death," and that "the rate at which Black people die at the hands of police is more than double that of whites."

The Adrian Dominicans' statement came just seven days after they issued a statement on another incident that is all too familiar: three mass shootings in less than 48 hours. Most of the victims in two of the shootings were Asian or Asian American.

"We stand in sorrowful prayer, solidarity and heartache with our brothers and sisters in the Asian American community and with all others suffering the impact of violent crime in our nation," that statement says. "We call on Congress to enact sweeping gun safety and control legislation, including a renewal of the ban on assault weapons."

Advertisement

Course on digital evangelization

The International Union of Superiors General, the iMisión platform and Católicos en Red (Catholics on the Net) have joined forces to create an online course on evangelization in social networks. The course will highlight the importance of how to communicate the Gospel message through the new platforms and will provide professional techniques to do so effectively.

"The UISG always invests heavily in training women religious and the laity in the service of the church so that they have the necessary professionalism, especially in these complex times, to manage communication on social networks," said Patrizia Morgante, UISG communications officer, in a statement announcing the course.

The course is aimed at religious sisters belonging to the UISG but also open to any Catholic interested in evangelizing on social networks. It will be held simultaneously

in Spanish, Italian and English, will run five months, Feb. 17 to June 30, and the sessions will take place Friday 2 to 4:30 p.m. Rome time (8 to 10:30 a.m. Eastern U.S. time) via Zoom and Thinkific.

"We live in a world in which digital communication plays a very important role in evangelization and in the mission of religious life and the Church," Morgante's statement says, but in which also "digital and technological development changes very rapidly."

The course costs $350 per participant, or $300 for each participant whose religious congregations have more than one member participating. English registration is here; Spanish registration is here. The discount and more information are available by emailing info@catolicos.red.