



STEWARDS OF OUR EARTH All of God's Creation

Social Justice Committee, Holy Cross Parish, Mt. Airy, June 16, 2024

Ongoing Fight for Human Rights and Equality

“On June 19, 1862, the Act to secure ‘Freedom to all Persons within the Territories of the United States’ (37th Cong. Chap. CXI, 1862) was signed by President Abraham Lincoln. The Emancipation Proclamation, an executive order, was enacted on January 1, 1863. **It took over two years for soldiers to deliver and read on June 19, 1865, the Presidential Proclamation securing the promised freedom to over 250,000 enslaved Black people in Texas.**” (Jacqueline Wolf Tice, *Sierra Club Pennsylvania*, May 30, 2022)

In 2019, Pennsylvania established Juneteenth (June 19), the day marking the legal end of enslavement of Black people in the United States, as a state holiday. “It is a day to celebrate and remember one of our difficult national histories that both honors evolution and rejects oppression. **It is a day to honor Black American culture, music, food, history, art, values, and experience.**” (Jacqueline Wolf Tice)

Mayor Kenney issued an executive order in **2020 making Juneteenth an official city holiday**. President Biden signed legislation into law on June 15, **2021, which made Juneteenth, a federal holiday**—placing that date at the same level of other important milestones in U.S. history.

However, Black communities have celebrated Freedom Day for decades. Juneteenth celebrations then, like now, recognize the ongoing fight for human rights and equality and are commemorated through family cookouts, faith services, musical performances, and storytelling. Juneteenth celebrates African American resilience and achievement while aiding in the preservation of those historical narratives that promoted racial and personal advancement since Freedom Day.

“Sixty years ago, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed and signed into law after a long moral and political struggle. Catholic and other religious communities played key roles in this effort, which offered hope to people who had been excluded from opportunities in education, housing, and employment simply based on race, color, or national origin.

These are not abstract or historical issues. As Pope Francis has said, ***Racism is a virus that quickly mutates and, instead of disappearing, goes into hiding and lurks in waiting.***

After 60 years, what has changed and what has not? How has racial discrimination been overcome, and where and how does it continue?... How does our history shape our current choices and how does our faith call us to advance the common good through a principled and active commitment to resist racism and ensure that we continue to honor and protect the essential freedoms that the Civil Rights Act enacted for all Americans 60 years ago?” (Sisters of Mercy, *Mercy Justice Team*, 6/3/24)

Unless the rights of each individual are harmoniously ordered to the greater good, those rights will end up being considered limitless and consequently will become a source of conflicts and violence. -- Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*

Comments on this column may be directed to the Social Justice Committee at socialjustice@holycrossphl.org.