

To my American family: Let us build a bridge.

In 2007 when I discerned to become an American citizen there were many things that I loved and admired about our country and our American nation. The day that I took the oath of citizenship I told many people that I chose this very important step not to live in America but to be an American and look at every American as my family. One of the memorable meditations that I had on that day was the beautiful name of our country: **The United States of America**. I was particularly struck by the word **“United”** States. I was very excited to be a part of a family that has unity as a foundation because that is the very nature of the name of our country, that we are people of many States and united to call ourselves Americans.

Unity is like a bridge. However, the bridge is built to connect two points or two locations. Bridges make the destination seem much closer from one part to the other. At the same time, it takes much time, effort, and patience to build a bridge. Most importantly, it takes willingness on the part of everyone from each side of the river to cooperate with one another in building the bridge that connects them.

As I began to read the history of our nation, I learned that not only our county is blessed by many amazing bridges in most of the States, but also by many remarkable men and women who spent their lives building bridges among the people of our nation despite the name of their party, color of their skin, and the belief of their religion. On the contrary, last weekend, white supremacists and neo-Nazis demonstrated in Charlottesville, Virginia what our nation has opposed for decades. It is heart aching to see my American family today divided and, at times, not remembering the beautiful name that our country has (United States of America).

In recent times we have witnessed countless rallies where people protested throughout many States for various ideologies. Yes, without doubt, one of the privileges that we have in this blessed land is the gift of freedom, freedom of speech, freedom of upholding our ideas and beliefs. At the same time, freedom is not the right to do as we like or prefer, but the opportunity to do what is right. The misunderstanding of such freedom has affected the way our people rally to express their ideals. The recent demonstration and violence in Charlottesville, VA echoes the confusion about what true freedom means in our society.

Cardinal Sean O’Malley, Archbishop of Boston, in his statement in the wake of the white nationalist rally in Charlottesville, VA said: ***“Our country is once again in a moment when the civic and biblical heritage is being attacked and tested. We need to reassert and reaffirm the belief that one nation is meant to include all: the multiple races, cultures, ethnicities and religions which make up our country.”***

As we reflect on the current events of such division, anger, and, at times, even hate and revenge in our American family, we cannot lose hope or be discouraged because the good that we have and the admirable history that we treasure is much bigger and much greater. Our American family is a makeup of many children who call this land their home regardless of the origin of their ethnicity, tradition of their faith, or their economic status. As we face these challenging times we have to be very diligent to focus on finding a response to such dark realities rather than react. Also, as we journey with such perspective we have to stop and look at each other not to prove our own ideas but more importantly to find a common ground that will be suitable as a foundation for a new bridge.

It's not what happens to us, but how we respond to it that matters. A reaction and a response may look exactly alike. However, there is a huge difference between reacting and responding. A reaction is typically quick, without much thought, tense and aggressive. A response is thought out, calm and non-threatening. A reaction typically provokes more reactions perpetuating a long line of hatefulness with nothing accomplished. A reaction causes destruction to our "bridges" but a response builds a foundation for our "bridges" and/or repairs the old "damages."

Today more than ever, there is a need for an open dialogue, conversation and understanding so that we would come together as one family to repent, to forgive and to heal. This is the path that leads to peace. The words of Albert Einstein confirm that, ***"Peace can only be achieved by understanding."*** Also Saint Pope John Paul II reiterated this truth, ***"No peace without justice; no justice without forgiveness."***

May the hearts of all people be open to the love that can heal and reconcile. Love is the road that leads to forgiveness, and forgiveness is the key that opens the door of peace. Martin Luther King Jr. reminds us that: ***"Love is the ultimate force that makes for the saving choice of life and good against the damning choice of death and evil. Therefore the first hope in our inventory must be the hope that love is going to have the last word."*** Also Bishop James Conley, bishop of the Diocese of Lincoln, affirmed the message of love by saying, ***"The only Christian response to the evil that unfolded in Charlottesville is to redouble our prayers for our nation, and to redouble our efforts to build a civilization of love."*** So let love be our bridge.