

# Silence Crucifies:

## A Statement from Concerned West Virginia Catholics

We are a small group of committed West Virginia Catholics associated with the Catholic Committee of Appalachia, the Catholic Worker movement, and the Women's Ordination Conference.

Today, as our church commemorates the execution of Jesus at the hands of the state and religious officials, we mourn the church's silence and complicity with the ongoing crucifixion of God's people and the Earth. In particular, we lament the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston's refusal to speak about specific injustices in our state, as the church's silence makes us complicit with oppression.

- **We lament our church's silence about the deep RACISM and XENOPHOBIA that plagues our state.** As our nation watched the rising visibility of racist violence against men and women of color by our law enforcement officials, our church was silent. When national movements rose up to speak out in defense of the lives of people of color, our church officials did not join them and remained on the sidelines. During the recent racially-charged presidential campaign, our church leaders refused to condemn white supremacist organizations that were energized by Donald Trump's campaign. And when Trump was sworn in as president and began to carry out racist policies, our local church leaders have refused to defend the lives that are threatened as each day goes by, even as other bishops and cardinals in the U.S. have done so. *The silence of our church crucifies.*
- **We lament our church's silence about GUN VIOLENCE in our nation.** Gun violence in our nation—both at the hands of law enforcement and by domestic terrorists—is an extension of the colonialist, racist, and militaristic roots of this country. It is amplified by pervasive misogyny, the powerful influence of the firearms industry and the National Rifle Association, and local phenomena such as our region's cultural affinity for guns. In the midst of very visible movements for policies that would curb gun violence, local church leaders have been silent and indeed continue to honor state politicians who are financially backed by the NRA. *The silence of our church crucifies.*
- **Finally, we lament our church's ongoing silence about the impact of EXTRACTIVE INDUSTRY and ECOLOGICAL DESTRUCTION in our state.** People's movements in our region have long believed that "Wherever coal has been mined a blight has fallen upon the land and upon the habitations of [people]." Church leaders in years past have recognized this too, and have joined the struggle for justice. For the last decade or more, however, church leaders in West Virginia have been silent as we watched mountaintop removal mining spread with increasing severity. As communities in the

coalfields and elsewhere in the state have experienced joblessness and hopelessness, local church leaders have been silent about the real *causes* of these economic dynamics. They have been silent as the industry's "war on coal" rhetoric has divided our communities and have even bought into this rhetoric themselves. They have been silent as the oil and gas industry has poisoned our communities while promising some future prosperity. And they have been glaringly silent as Pope Francis issued his ecological teaching in the form of his *Laudato Si'* encyclical letter, responding to Francis' challenge by preaching a message about "clean coal." As our planet reaches the ecological breaking point and needs strong religious voices more than ever, *the silence of our church crucifies.*

Today, as we recall the passion of our Lord, we join with the voices of the crowd yelling "CRUCIFY HIM," acknowledging our church's complicity with the suffering of so many members of God's creation. As we venerate the cross of Jesus, we commit to touching the wounds of the crucified Christ in our world today, and we commit to challenging our religious leaders when their silence brings them into the orbit of injustice.

But we know injustice is not the end of the Christian story.

*We believe Jesus was raised to new life  
and we believe that new life is possible  
anywhere that the stones of oppression  
are rolled away from peoples and places.*

We commit to doing our part to roll away the stones of oppression even when our church leaders refuse to do so. Silence crucifies, but a prophetic word brings life!

Yet, today, we pause and pray in our lament. We pray at the altar of St. Joseph, patron of our diocese, to ask forgiveness for the sins of the church; to pray for a new Spirit of truthfulness, justice, and courage for our diocesan leaders; and to ask for the strength we need to "become the church we wish to see in the world."

St. Joseph, pray for us.



*Good Friday*

*March 30, 2018*

*Cathedral of St. Joseph*

*Wheeling, West Virginia*