



Carl J. Florea
Office of the Mayor
City of Leavenworth

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Dear Community Members,

As is my practice, I am going to share my thoughts with you on our current pandemic. But the pandemic I am going to address is not COVID-19. You are going to get a bit of a respite on that one. I am talking about a pandemic that has been with us a lot longer, inflicting untold damage on individuals and entire communities. It brings death and destruction in its path. And there is not now, nor will there ever be, a vaccine. I am talking about the ingrained and institutionalized racism that continues to plague our great nation. The latest casualties are George Floyd and Ahmaud Arbery, their families, and their communities. It is a rampant disease, often existing silently just beneath the surface. It is far more widespread than any of us want to believe. We want to believe that it is isolated. We want to believe that it is restricted to the south. We want to believe it is restricted to large cities. Certainly, it is not a problem for us, is it?

In truth, this is a disease in which all of us who are white are carriers. We all spread it, most often unwittingly, (I would hope), but at times very blatantly. I can't imagine what it would be like every time you walk or jog in public to be accompanied by fear. Every time you are pulled over by a policeman to wonder if this might be the end. Every time you are in a store to have extra eyes following your every move. It is so far from my experience, that I have a hard time comprehending that anyone would have to live this way. But those who are people of color, do.

What makes this pandemic so horrible, is the fact that those who have it, those who carry it, those who spread it, are not its victims. But over and over and over again, we see individuals and communities of color paying the price, while we pretend it isn't really our problem. It is our problem, and it will be with us a lot longer than COVID-19. Long after we get a vaccine for that virus we will be dealing with the insidious and pervasive effects of our racism. Unlike the COVID-19 battle, where we have been drilled into social distancing and separation, this pandemic will require social connection. We need to own the racism that exists in our own lives as well as our institutions and societal norms. We need to be willing to be uncomfortable when confronted with the extent that we have been carriers of this disease. We need to learn from those who are its victims. We need to do what we can, to cleanse our nation. It has not been easy. It will not be easy. It will take a lot of time and effort. But we cannot afford to just continue on the path we have been on. We cannot accept a society where the color of your skin alone means you must do everything with a nagging fear that you or someone you know and love may be its latest victim. We can and must do better. This is not a conservative or liberal issue, it is a human issue. Until it is addressed, we are all a little less human.



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