



Carl J. Florea
Office of the Mayor
City of Leavenworth

June 1, 2020

Dear Community Members,

Well, while I have gotten responses from most of my community letters, both positive and negative, (comes with the territory and I accept that), none have generated the kind of “stir” created by my last letter on Thursday of last week. While I still believe that what I said was true, (although some of you obviously disagree with that), I would like to add further commentary and explanation. Hopefully, it will help more of you to understand where I was coming from, even if you still disagree.

Let me first state that there seems to have arisen some confusion on the nature of the letters themselves. These are personal letters, from the Mayor, me, alone. I write them, I have them sent out, they are not seen or approved by anyone else, including the City Council. My letters have been placed on the City’s stationery; on that letterhead are the names of the council members and the administrator, as well as my own. So, even though they have been issued as letters from the Mayor, and only have my name attached to them, it seems to have created confusion in the minds of some that they were somehow representative of the Council’s thoughts or had Council approval. That is not the case, and I apologize to any confusion that resulted. To avoid this in the future, my letters will be printed on the Mayor’s stationery, which does not have this list of City Council members on it, and therefore will help clarify that my letters represent my voice, and my voice alone.

Now, I would like to address the two areas that seemed to cause the most grief for those who took exception to the letter. The first one had to do with the scope of the issue itself. What does the issue of racism and the death of George Floyd have to do with us here in Leavenworth? Shouldn’t the Mayor focus on local issues alone? Isn’t this a distraction from the real issues that we are facing locally? My response to that is, we are not, and should not, be living in isolation from the rest of our society. Indeed, most of what I address, and most of the work I do as Mayor, is focused on our community. But this is about being members of a larger society. Our obligations go beyond our city limits. The most obvious example, perhaps, is our military. You may be from Leavenworth, but if you enlist in one of the armed services and are deployed, you serve as a representative of the entire US, including all those cities across our country who are now burning. As much as we would like to, at times, disassociate ourselves from what goes on “out there”, we cannot. I have lived my entire adult life working as an advocate for the marginalized among us, and as an activist for peace and justice. This is rooted for me in my faith and a belief that God is a God of love, and my desire to work to reflect that love. And, yes, that love is for those who disagree with me as well. Unfortunately, (or fortunately), that old activist is who got elected as Mayor of Leavenworth. I will continue to share who I am, while respecting those who differ. And, hopefully, those who do not agree with certain stands, will find other areas of commonality. Unfortunately, we are going through a time of great polarization. It seems to be harder to “agree to disagree” in our society. You are either in total agreement with me, or you are the enemy. How sad! When I was pastor of Faith Lutheran here in town, I remember the words of one of our elder members, Dorothy. She was not at all a fan of my anti-war activism and couldn’t have been more in disagreement. However, we were able to keep a warm personal relationship despite this deep difference. I remember one conversation I had with her in which I asked her specifically why she stayed in the church despite having a pastor with whom she had so many disagreements. Her reply was telling. She said, “Well, we don’t get to choose our families.” She gave me space to be far different than her. And, of course, I gave her that same space, never saying that my beliefs were more “Christian” than hers. We cared for each other. My hope is that we will live that out here in Leavenworth, and that eventually our society will return to that level of common commitment despite differences. We can “agree to disagree” and find much in common.

The second area with which people took exception is my blanket statement that all of us who are white are carriers of the disease of racism. Ouch! That hurt people. I will attempt to clarify what I meant by that. Again, you may still disagree, but maybe I can be more clear. When I said that all of us as white people share in the problems of racism, it was not intended as a judgment on anyone’s character. It was not saying that we are bad people, or less moral, or even less caring. And of course, racism is not just a “white problem”. But in this society, we (whites), do bear a unique responsibility. It is not about trying to make people feel guilty, (I’m a firm believer that guilt is a poor motivator, and I certainly do not feel guilt for being white. It is just a reality I had nothing to do with). It just means that we have benefited from being white in ways that those who are black, (or other people of color), have not. I never had to prove my worth, it was a given. I never had to fear how my actions would be taken, that I would be looked at under suspicion, that my motives would be suspect. This is too often the common reality for people of color in our society. What I get to take for granted, they have to fight continually for, and no matter how “good” they are, they may never break free of distrust and fear and suspicion. That is not acceptable in my mind. That is not what our nation’s ideals embody. We have work to do to make those a reality for all. And it is work we all must take part in.

I spent some time living in the south as the only white family in an area of Shreveport, LA known as “The Bottoms”. I experienced so much and grew so much. I underwent a real conversion experience while there! The stories I could tell you! What happened to George Floyd represents to many people of color the sum of their experiences and their fears. That is why it has exploded as it has. Until we can understand and hear the underlying causes, (unfortunately they are being undermined and clouded by the violence and looting), we will continue to experience the brokenness of a large segment of society and we will all suffer for it, over and over again.

Again, you still may not agree with this assessment of the situation we are in as a nation. That is certainly your choice. And perhaps, if you voted for me you are feeling a bit of “buyer’s remorse” now. I am sorry for that. I have always tried to be pretty transparent about who I am and what I value. And hopefully, regardless of how you feel about this issue, we can continue to work together to make this community better than ever. In the words of Dorothy, may we experience the truth that, “We don’t get to choose our families.” And our Leavenworth family is stronger than what would divide us! Stay safe!



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