

Bishop Burbidge ([00:00](#)):

This is Bishop Michael Burbidge and you are listening to the Walk Humbly Podcast.

Billy Atwell ([00:08](#)):

Welcome to the Walk Humbly Podcast. I'm Billy Atwell, chief communications officer for the diocese and your cohost. If you're listening to this podcast then you are benefiting from the generosity of those who have given to the Bishop's Lenten Appeal. So, to those who have made this possible by funding the communications office and the different media ministries that we have here, thank you so much for what you've invested in. If you haven't already, please make sure you rate this podcast and write a review wherever you're listening to it.

Billy Atwell ([00:35](#)):

And if you're listening on YouTube, make sure you subscribe and ring the bell. You can sign up for our e-newsletter arlingtondiocese.org. You can follow Bishop Burbidge on Twitter at Bishop Burbidge, where every day you can read a short reflection of the gospel of that day. You can also follow the diocese on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Send your questions for the podcast to info@arlingtondiocese.org. Again, it's info@arlingtondiocese.org. I welcome your host, Bishop Burbidge. Bishop, how you been?

Bishop Burbidge ([01:03](#)):

I'm doing well, Billy. Thank you. I hope all of our listeners are doing well. I know these are still very challenging days and lots of uncertainty out there. But I want everyone to know I'm praying for you and ask you to stay safe and healthy for God to watch over you. And hopefully maybe in this summer, our listeners have a chance to be with family. Maybe you get that opportunity, be renewed and refreshed. But thoughts and prayers are with everyone during these very challenging times.

Billy Atwell ([01:33](#)):

Thank you. So, Bishop, today, we're going to discuss black lives matter, the tearing down of statues, efforts to defund the police and reopening of dioceses and schools. But before we dig into that, earlier this week the Supreme Court handed down two major decisions, both of which sided with the position of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and religious freedom and the teachings, which is a part of the teaching of our church. Can you talk us through some of the basics of what those two decisions were and why that matters to us?

Bishop Burbidge ([01:59](#)):

Right. And how providential? We just recently in June celebrate religious freedom week often saying that religious liberty is the greatest freedom that we have as a nation. And so, we're always staying vigilant so that that great gift, that religious freedom, is not violated. And you're right. This past Wednesday was a critical and a positive day for the church in United States. One decision of the Supreme court, Billy, related to the famous case has been going on for a while, the little sisters of the poor. And basically they were being forced to provide contraceptive coverage in their health insurance plan as part of the Affordable Care Act.

Bishop Burbidge ([02:42](#)):

This was certainly against our religious convictions and our beliefs and infringement, quite honestly. And the court voted seven, two, which is rare in these times and made it clear that no religious institution or

person should be forced to violate the teachings and tenets of their faith. And in addition, we should not buy into the fallacy that contraception is healthcare. So, the little sisters of the poor, we wanted to thank them for their witness, for their perseverance and for their great example.

Billy Atwell ([03:23](#)):

Yeah. They really stepped out and encouraged [crosstalk 00:00:03:25]-

Bishop Burbidge ([03:27](#)):

They really did.

Billy Atwell ([03:27](#)):

Face of this important case and they did such good work and I'm sure they took a lot of heat for it but-

Bishop Burbidge ([03:31](#)):

And they're not used to that arena.

Billy Atwell ([03:32](#)):

Yeah. That's true.

Bishop Burbidge ([03:33](#)):

It's a wonderful, wonderful religious community that is dedicated to taking care of the elderly, most especially the sick and the dying. It's not something they looked forward to being out in the public arena but they knew what was at stake.

Billy Atwell ([03:47](#)):

That's a great example for all of this.

Bishop Burbidge ([03:48](#)):

Yeah. And then the second case involved the right of Catholic schools, free of government interference to choose teachers who will teach and model the Catholic faith. And by a vote of seven to two, the court ruled in favor of the schools. So, there was an attempt we saw with this case by some to separate the education provided by our schools from our religious mission. And that just cannot be.

Bishop Burbidge ([04:16](#)):

The two are essentially connected. And education as we know, so many of us believe, so many of us have benefited from the fact that education is central to the Catholic church's mission. And our schools carry out a very specific, fundamental, ministerial role. So, when people send their children to our schools, they naturally expect the teachers to model the faith and the faith that the school was founded upon.

Billy Atwell ([04:47](#)):

Right. Right.

Bishop Burbidge ([04:47](#)):

And those values and principles define who we are. So, the Supreme court, once again in this case, affirmed religious liberty, which is a founding principle of our nation. So, I want to thank everyone, especially during religious freedom week who have been offering specific prayers and intentions for cases in situations like this. The leadership of our United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and so many others who offered their prayers.

Billy Atwell ([05:13](#)):

Yeah. This was a great week. Sometimes we get something handed down from the Supreme Court and we're not very excited about [crosstalk 00:05:19]. This is one to celebrate. Certainly a good week for religious freedom. And if you're interested in being updated on these kinds of issues, what's happening with regard to religious freedom, both nationally but also within our state, make sure you go to [vacatholic.org](#), sign up for the email list from the Virginia Catholic Conference. So, that's the conference where the Bishop of Arlington and Richmond form as the head. And that is the public policy body for the church in our commonwealth. So, please go to [vacatholic.org](#) and sign up so you can be updated when these things come down and understand the rationale behind our position.

Bishop Burbidge ([05:54](#)):

Yeah. I'm really glad you mentioned that. I really do want to encourage our listeners. This is a tremendous resource and it's a great teaching tool.

Billy Atwell ([06:01](#)):

Yeah. Very good. Bishop, one of the most notable organizations in the news right now is Black Lives Matter. It began as a statement or a sentiment but it became an organization that has led to a lot of protest and demonstrations throughout the nation. A lot of people are being asked what their position is on this organization and the sentiment. What is yours when it comes to black lives matter?

Bishop Burbidge ([06:22](#)):

Yeah. Thank you, Billy. As you alluded to, there are really two different things going on here. There is the statement, black three words, black lives matter. Well, that's really the gospel. We are all created in the image and likeness of God, every one of us without exception. And therefore, there is an inherent dignity that must be respected and upheld as we revere all of human life. So, to say black lives matter, it's a statement reflective of the gospel of life, which certainly says every life matters because of being created in God's image and likeness as spirits rolling within us.

Bishop Burbidge ([07:03](#)):

And so, to say that and to use those three words and to remind people every life and black lives matter, it's a good thing to do. It's rooted actually in the gospel. It's a basic part of our teaching as Catholics. And alternatively, there's also an organization with the same name that holds positions that we Catholics would oppose to, especially in the area of sexuality and gender. So, I think we just have to know when we were saying black lives matter, what are we focusing on? And what are we saying when we say that is to be supported?

Bishop Burbidge ([07:47](#)):

Every human person is to be revered and cherished and dignity is to be upheld. Of course, absolutely. That's who we are as children of God. But it brings us really to the larger issue that is very much in the

forefront of all of us as a nation right now. And that is racism. And this has been an issue that the church and we here in the Diocese of Arlington have taken very seriously, even just within the past year or two.

Bishop Burbidge ([08:18](#)):

Last year, I participated in listening sessions of how this evil of racism has specifically impacted the lives in an unjust way of so many people, our brothers and sisters, our fellow parishioners and our neighbors. And to hear the stories of how being a victim of racism, discrimination just really touched your heart. It made you sad that this is a reality, not only in the past but also in the presence. And we have to work definitely to eradicate any form of racism in our world and in our society.

Billy Atwell ([08:59](#)):

I remember after the listening sessions, you came back and summarized on the podcast some of the things that you had heard. And it was so clear that as a pastor, your pastor's heart was hurt by what some of the stories that people conveyed and the things that you heard in that listening session. I remember that well.

Bishop Burbidge ([09:14](#)):

Yeah. Absolutely Billy. And the bishops of the country have encouraged our parishioners many times to read the letter against racism entitled by the bishops, Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love. In fact, we were supposed to have a conference on this very topic in March before the epidemic.

Billy Atwell ([09:36](#)):

[crosstalk 00:09:36].

Bishop Burbidge ([09:37](#)):

Yeah. And it was going to be keynotes speech, mass of round table discussion, the ability to have some questions and answers. And hopefully we can reschedule that as we move forward. But you know what? We have to understand, this is not just a political issue, this is who we are as followers of God and his son Jesus. And we have to first understand that racism is an evil that cannot be tolerated in any form. And no person should ever look upon another person, someone of another skin color and then see them as lesser.

Bishop Burbidge ([10:13](#)):

We have to acknowledge, Billy, I think tragically that issues that exist within society sometimes occur within the church as well. We have to acknowledge that sadly it's painful but it's the reality. We're not immune from the wider problems. So, we must identify instances of racism and treat them as we would any other evil and try our best to work it out. And we must also actively work with our young people to ensure that they think properly about people who do not look like them, that they are compassionate towards those who suffer discrimination or abuse and that they are courageous witnesses of the gospel when they see any form of injustice like that.

Bishop Burbidge ([10:56](#)):

So, this is an issue that is ongoing. It's an issue we've addressed in the past. It's an issue we must continue to address today. In fact, it's providential that after this podcast today, I'm having a Zoom session with leaders of our black community because I need to hear from them not only about their

experiences but what it is now that they think we should be doing as a diocese. And these are our brothers and sisters. And I'm very much looking forward to this conversation and to the follow-up that will occur.

Billy Atwell ([11:28](#)):

Essentially, we get questions and emails from people... They're well meaning. And they'll say, "What is the church doing on racism? Or when is the Bishop going to speak out on it?" And I'm always so happy to get that email because we can quickly respond to that with a litany of things that have not just happened recently but of things that have happened over the years even prior to you being installed here in Arlington.

Billy Atwell ([11:49](#)):

The fact that we have an office of multicultural ministries and the purpose of that office help bring together but to also work with communities of Asian ancestry or African ancestry, whatever it might be. But to bring them together, there's a regular rosary conference call praying for an end to racism. And that existed prior to this year, prior to the situations that we're dealing with now.

Billy Atwell ([12:13](#)):

And just how many times you've offered commentary and statements and spoken about it on the podcast for Catholic black history month, how many people don't know that there is Catholic black history. And there's such a rich heritage there. But there's so many good things that we can point to that we can continue building.

Bishop Burbidge ([12:28](#)):

Yeah. And you're right there. As a diocese, we should be very proud because it's been for years that the realization that we are blessed in this diocese to have so many cultures and people of different backgrounds and to celebrate and also to acknowledge that there are unique pastoral needs to each given community. And so, this diocese for many, many years has been in the forefront of doing that. And I'm very, very proud to continue that good work.

Billy Atwell ([12:57](#)):

That's wonderful. So, on a related topic, there's been a movement in our country to tear down statues of those who represented the confederacy or maybe those who have owned slaves and so on. And it's devolved to a point that statues of Catholic saints have been desecrated. Also, we just heard about a Marian statue that was spray painted today. It was being circulated on social media and there was a black lives matter activist actually that suggested that the statue of Jesus should be torn down if the statute doesn't look African. Very troubling things here. What are your thoughts as we've seen this develop in the news?

Bishop Burbidge ([13:30](#)):

No. It's very troubling to me, especially when we hear of statues of Catholic saints or blessed mother being torn down or vandalized. And so, first, Billy, the way I think about it is we understand that free speech and the ability to let your voice be heard is a great gift that we have in this country. But it does not give you the right to break the law and to be violent. And that, I don't think we can ever find to be

acceptable. No person has a right to deface public or private property. We have peaceful lawful ways to seek a remedy for something that you feel is unjust.

Bishop Burbidge ([14:20](#)):

And I've heard that process described that if there is a statue that's prominent within a community that is a source of opening wounds and making those wounds even deeper and the best thing to do is not to have that statue there, well, then, there's a process to go about that, to let your voice be heard, to bring it to those you've elected to represent you, to allow a vote to take place. And if it needs to be taken down, it should be taken down. And if it needs to be moved to a museum so we don't lose that sense of history of what we've learned from-

Billy Atwell ([14:55](#)):

The context.

Bishop Burbidge ([14:55](#)):

The past or the context of that, then let that be. But I don't think I would ever give a nod to the fact that if you don't like this, then vandalize it.

Billy Atwell ([15:09](#)):

Right. Right.

Bishop Burbidge ([15:10](#)):

Or break the law and take it into your own hands. I don't think that's helpful, so. And another concern is, where does that end? We're imperfect as a people, as a nation, we are. And yet, there's much to celebrate. And I think we have to be very, very careful here. But I would really urge that if there were certain things that you need to protest, then do so peacefully and allow your voice to be heard but do not add to the violence so sadly we're witnessing across our country right now.

Billy Atwell ([15:51](#)):

And we're so blessed to live in a nation where the right to peaceful protest is enshrined in the constitution. Of all the most basic things, you have a right to. How many nations in history have had that as a basic right? It's a fairly radical idea that's been proposed and even considered by some city councils is to defund the police. So, they'll see unjust actions like the murder of George Floyd and they say the reaction to that by some has been to defund police. What's your reaction to that proposition?

Bishop Burbidge ([16:22](#)):

First, let me respond Billy by making it clear yet again, because we have said this previously that as a nation, we should have zero tolerance for abusive behavior by police officers.

Billy Atwell ([16:36](#)):

Correct. Right.

Bishop Burbidge ([16:36](#)):

So, we agree on that. And they have a very difficult job, absolutely, but the men and women who wear the uniform should be the individuals who can withstand the pressure and not resort to abuse or unjust violence against any individual. And so tragically when we saw that scene of Mr. Floyd, our hearts were just broken to see the abuse of power like that. And there's zero tolerance and we have to make that clear across the board. But I do think at the same time, we have to be careful to make sure that we don't use instances of abuse by police as justification for condemning all police. Or what do we mean by the defunding them?

Bishop Burbidge ([17:28](#)):

Police provide invaluable service to maintain law and order. And that's good. And I don't think any country can survive without police to protect law abiding citizens from criminals who victimize others for personal gain. Now, reviewing the budgets of how that money is utilized, how is it directed, that review I would think should take place every year like it should in a diocese as it should in an organization. Are we using the funds given to us to be at our very best?

Bishop Burbidge ([18:03](#)):

And maybe some of the funds have to be reallocated for maybe better training, maybe for other ways in which the police could be of greater service to the community or whatever. So, reviewing the budget, reallocating funds and things like that but to defend those who we entrust to keep law and order, I think is not a great path to travel. So, I think that should be considered very seriously. And I also often wonder what happens that when we see someone abuse power so tragically, like we did with Mr. Floyd, that the next step is to generalize all police officers.

Bishop Burbidge ([18:59](#)):

And I think that's very, very unfair that whether it's a bad teacher or a bad someone in the medical profession who abused power or a priest or whatever, if the next step is to put everyone who shares that same profession in that same category and in that negative light, whereas the great majority each and every day are living out the vocation in the work entrusted to them, I don't think that's a good thing to do either. And we see that happening now. And we see that the abuse that we talked about, the abuse of police using their office in a way that's not honorable, can not be tolerated. But these men and women who carry out their responsibility with honor should not be lumped into that same category.

Billy Atwell ([20:09](#)):

Right. Right.

Bishop Burbidge ([20:11](#)):

And that's true with any profession.

Billy Atwell ([20:13](#)):

Yeah. Right.

Bishop Burbidge ([20:13](#)):

I mean, we saw it with priests when we went through... And I experienced that personally that, yes, if a priest, if a police officer or teacher is bringing this honor to our profession or vocation, we have to speak out against that. And in a sense, we own that. Because we're colleagues. And even though I haven't

acted in such a way whatever, I have to say, "Well, you know what? I'm sorry. I'm really sorry that one of my colleagues did that. And I think we owe that as an apology. But let me assure you that there is no room for that." And I think that's what we have to do with the police now too. We have to make sure that those who are doing their job every day and putting their lives in service of us should be given that respect.

Billy Atwell ([21:08](#)):

I have noticed there's obviously been a change in policing practices over time. And one thing that's changed is the intimate connection of a police officer to the community. They used to be regionalized differently. Now, it seems that a police officer doesn't necessarily know the community that he's in. It's no fault of his own. It's just the nature of how he's assigned responsibilities. It seems like maybe if there was more of that connection, some of this might be dissuaded a bit because they'll know the context of where they're going sometimes.

Bishop Burbidge ([21:34](#)):

And yeah. And don't get me wrong. I mean, it's like in any profession. There needs to be accountability. There to be an honest review and where things are wrong and there's behavior, we have to address that. And we can have little patience where what you're call to do is not being done. And so, we know that throughout our country there're grave concerns and we should look at them, we should acknowledge them. So, I'm not downplaying that at all.

Billy Atwell ([22:07](#)):

Right. Right.

Bishop Burbidge ([22:07](#)):

And I just wanted to be sure that I say that. I think for me in a personal way, it brings back a lot of memories because my mother's father was a police officer. And I know my mom telling the stories that every night that he would leave the house that she would be praying, that he came back that night. And anytime the phone rang from the time he was on his beat, it was always a moment of panic. And yet, she was so proud of him. He served the community well. He was so respected by the members of his community. And we want to honor those who are doing that and we want to have zero tolerance for those who are not.

Billy Atwell ([23:05](#)):

Yeah. That's very true. Very true. One question that many people in our diocese have and I'm sure you've heard it already is, what's the next school year going to look like? I'm sure you get that question a lot. But as we look to this 2020 school year, what are some of the things people should expect and see?

Bishop Burbidge ([23:22](#)):

Yeah. You are right. This is the question of the day. Parents are asking it and rightfully so. And Billy, there are so still so much uncertainty out there. And what things are like right now on this July day, I don't know if going to be the same this time next month. We don't know. Maybe things will be much better. Maybe God forbid, things will be a little bit more unsettling. We don't know. But here's what we're planning.

Bishop Burbidge ([23:55](#)):

First of all, the health and well-being and safety of our students and of our educators is the priority. All right? So, that's number one. Number two, we follow the science and we allow the experts who guide the situation to provide guidelines that we very much will adhere to for the safety of all of those involved. But we are very much determined to open our schools in the fall. We would like to do so five days a week. It's funny, some parents say that, "Bishop, if you open school, make sure it's five days a week."

Billy Atwell ([24:44](#)):

Yeah. You're right. We're all running a little [inaudible 00:24:47].

Bishop Burbidge ([24:47](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. That's true. But I think that because the parents know and even the medical experts know that the emotional and mental health of children is also at stake. And they need to be in a community with their friends and learning in a learning environment. But Billy, we will only do so if we can to the best of our ability assure the health and well-being of our students and our Catholic educators. And so, we have to allow for some flexibility. There are certain guidelines that will need to be in place. But each school is different.

Bishop Burbidge ([25:30](#)):

The size of each school is different, the classrooms, the space and all those things. So, we will allow our schools and our pastors and our principals and all to figure out a way of what they can do or what they can't do. And there may be schools who well to adhere to these guidelines or whatever. We're just not in a position to do that. So, we may have to adjust. What an elementary school can do may not be what a high school can do. And so, yes. There will be certain principles and guidelines but also the flexibility based on the community or the school itself.

Billy Atwell ([26:08](#)):

And that's the management model of the church. We always call that your subsidiarity.

Bishop Burbidge ([26:11](#)):

Yeah. Yeah.

Billy Atwell ([26:12](#)):

That decisions are best left to the lowest level that are appropriate. So, some decisions have to be made by you and Dr. Joe Vorbach, the superintendent, setting basic principles but then working with the institutions at the local level to accommodate whatever their restrictions or opportunities might be. And I've talked to a few of the principals and they are working dearly to open as much as they can. But they're trying to be prudent as well.

Bishop Burbidge ([26:34](#)):

Yeah. And there's lots of collaboration going on. There's collaboration with the educators, with the parents. So, on a local level, there's communications going on and to see where we are. And but we're going to have to be flexible. We've seen that throughout this situation. And but I will also take another moment to commend and thank our Catholic educators for since March where everything had to close

down how quickly they were able to provide education and really not compromise what was being given to the students.

Bishop Burbidge ([27:10](#)):

And thanks to the parents too. I really do want to thank the parents. I'm looking at you because you and your wife also were having that responsibility of continuing the education of your children. Parents, I know with your own responsibilities of work and employment plus this additional responsibility, you've been heroic. And I want to just give a great shout out, a great thank you to all our parents out there.

Billy Atwell ([27:36](#)):

Wonderful. So, we've gone through a lot in this podcast. But there was one question that came from a person I thought would be very timely for where we are in this pandemic and so on. So, I'd like to ask this, if [crosstalk 00:27:45]-

Bishop Burbidge ([27:45](#)):

We have gone through a lot in this podcast.

Billy Atwell ([27:46](#)):

This was a heavy one, but. So, Joshua, he's actually visiting from out of state, he's from Brooklyn, New York. He said, "Even without something like COVID going on, in my home diocese, had issued a dispensation from the obligation to attend Sunday mass or issued any other either to dispensation. But I traveled to another diocese without such a dispensation, which one am I beholden to? So, if there's an Arlington parishioner that goes to another state, let's say they don't have the dispensation, is it your dispensation or the lack of dispensation in that other diocese that there [crosstalk 00:28:18]-

Bishop Burbidge ([28:18](#)):

It's my dispensation.

Billy Atwell ([28:19](#)):

Oh, okay. Good.

Bishop Burbidge ([28:20](#)):

So, in the case that Joshua mentioned, my dispensation applies to you, Joshua, wherever you are because you're a member of this diocese. So, yeah. That's a good question though.

Billy Atwell ([28:32](#)):

Yeah. Because it's like does it transfer either across [inaudible 00:28:35]? So, that's good to know. All right. Bishop, any final thoughts... Again, we've gone through some heavy things here but any just final summary thoughts and if you would send us off with your [crosstalk 00:28:43]?

Bishop Burbidge ([28:44](#)):

Yeah. Billy, you're right. These are very heavy issues and subjects we've discussed today. And these are unsettling days as we continue to see evil and violence and division within our diocese. It does. It can easily give us all a heavy heart. But we're people of faith. And we can never forget that. We have the

truth. We know the way. And God is with us. And I think all that we can do is to renew our efforts and promises every day, to be faithful to what God is asking of us and to entrust our nation, to entrust those we love, to entrust those who are suffering and those who are victims to the Lord.

Bishop Burbidge ([29:32](#)):

He is very near to us and we need his healing love and strength and grace more than ever. So, I encourage all of our listeners in the midst of everything that we're experiencing right now to please continue to be men and women of faith and men and women of prayer and men and women who through your own lives offer that good example that our nation and our world both need now more than ever. And so, again, as I said in beginning of the podcast and just to repeat, please know everyone that my thoughts and prayers are with you. God watch over you, keep you safe and healthy. And together, let's keep praying for one another and walk humbly with our God.

Bishop Burbidge ([30:16](#)):

Thank you for listening to the Walk Humbly Podcast. Make sure you check out more episodes on iTunes, Google Play, Stitcher and Spotify. You can follow me on Twitter at Bishop Burbidge, where I offer gospel reflections each morning and share photos and updates of what is going on in the diocese of Arlington. Stay up to date with news, event information and inspirational content by subscribing to our e-newsletter at arlingtondiocese.org.