

On this date, August 4 in 1964, federal investigators located the bodies of three missing men buried in an earthen dam on the Old Jolly Farm outside Philadelphia, Mississippi.

The three men were identified as Michael (Mickey) Schwerner and James Chaney (both worked for the Congress of Racial Equality –CORE-- in nearby Meridian, Mississippi) and Andrew Goodman (a college student who volunteered to work on voter registration, education, and civil rights advocate as part of the 1964 Mississippi Summer Project). All three were working to defend human equality and social justice in the Deep South.

On June 21, 1962, a local police officer stopped and arrested all three. The officer charged Chaney, a black man and the driver, with speeding and held Schwerner and Goodman for investigation. Neshoba County sheriff's deputy Cecil Price escorted them to the Philadelphia, Mississippi jail around 4pm. A little after 10pm, he collected Chaney's speeding fine and told the three men to get out of the county. That was the last time they were seen alive.

Local authorities and media paid no attention to missing person reports. Ku Klux Klan membership in Mississippi was soaring. Local Klan members were more than comfortable using violence to eradicate the Civil Rights movement. There was no doubt that the evil of racism dragged the three to their graves.

The Catholic Church's position on racism is clear:

*The equality of persons rests essentially on their God-given dignity and the rights that flow from it. Every form of social or cultural discrimination in fundamental personal rights on the grounds of sex, race, color, social conditions, language, or religion must be curbed and eradicated as incompatible with God's design. Racism is not merely one sin among many. It is a radical evil dividing the human family...*

Racism is a disorder caused by covert and overt assumptions of privilege. Catholic teaching acknowledges only one manner of preferential treatment of people, that being prioritized attention to the needs of the poor and marginalized. Special consideration to the poor is not an act of charity, but rather a matter of justice.

Catholic Charities of Stockton offers special consideration to all affected by poverty, marginalization or are victims of bias and prejudicial injustice. We seek to reduce poverty by tearing down the barriers that prevent individuals and families from social and economic independence. It is our strong belief that any strategy to reduce poverty must also address the deep connection between racism and poverty.

Luke Chapter 10 provides words of guidance from Jesus on this issue. When asked, "Who is my neighbor", he tells the parable of the Good Samaritan. Then he asks a question to the questioner, "Which of the three, in your opinion, was neighbor to the robbers' victim?" He answered, "The one who treated him with mercy."

Our instruction is..."Go and do likewise."