

# OPINION

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## A Modern-Day Bull Connor

### Sheriff's abusive law enforcement

BY MARC MORIAL

In April 1963, while confined to jail in Birmingham, Ala. for leading peaceful civil rights demonstrations in what was then considered to be the most segregated city in America, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. wrote an open letter challenging a group of local ministers and the nation to speak out against the brutal, segregationist tactics of the infamous Birmingham police commissioner, Bull Connor.



Forty-seven years later, in Maricopa County, Ariz., there's another police official who seems bent on defying the Constitutional rights of non-white, law-abiding citizens.

For more than a decade, Maricopa County Sheriff Joe Arpaio has been the subject of numerous investigations and lawsuits for his inhumane treatment of prisoners and overzealous enforcement of immigration laws, including Arizona statues that amount to outright racial profiling.

Since March, 2009, the Justice Department has been investigating Arpaio for violating the Civil Rights Act, which forbids discrimination in programs receiving fed-

eral funds. Investigators have requested documents and interviews to ascertain whether the aggressive search and seizure tactics of Arpaio's office during its pursuit of undocumented immigrants, violated the civil rights of law-abiding Latino citizens. For more than 18 months, Arpaio has refused to cooperate with the probe. In early September, the Justice Department filed suit against Arpaio. Maricopa County stands to lose \$113 million in federal funds if Arpaio doesn't produce proof that he's not engaging in racial profiling.

Arpaio's obstinate refusal to cooperate with this federal investigation is virtually unprecedented. According to the Justice Depart-

ment, Arpaio is the first local law enforcement official in 30 years to refuse to provide documents in a federal civil rights inquiry. Arpaio's actions follow a longstanding pattern of abuse of power and anti-immigration behavior. In 2008, a federal judge ruled that Maricopa County jails failed to meet constitutional standards.

Moreover, Arpaio has publicly admitted that for years he has been employing many of the tactics contained in Arizona's controversial new immigration law, which the Justice Department has said illegally conflicts with federal statutes and undermines the nation's foreign policy.

Joe Arpaio is becoming a symbol of rising anti-immigration fever

throughout the nation. He's a throwback to the days when powerful and arrogant police officials openly blocked racial progress and defied federal law.

Arizona ACLU Legal Director Dan Pochoda has said, "Sheriff Arpaio does not have the right to profile people because they look Latino regardless of their immigration status. His job is to uphold the law, not violate people's rights."

I agree. Joe Arpaio calls himself the "toughest sheriff in America." But his abusive law enforcement and anti-immigration tactics make him look more like a modern-day Bull Connor.

*Marc H. Morial is the president and chief executive officer of the National Urban League.*

## Living the Baptismal Promises

### With love and support for sexual minorities

BY KELLY BURD

Sharing in the sacrament of baptism was one of my favorite aspects of parish ministry.



When I baptized infants, I got to hold them in my arms and look into their bright eyes as I proclaimed God's abundant love for them in Christ. I would turn to the congregation and ask, "Do you, who witness and celebrate this sacrament, promise your love, support and care to this one?" They always affirmed, "We promise our love, support and care."

Grace abounds in a community bound together by faith, sharing responsibility for

the new life in our midst.

Inevitably, each cooing infant becomes a teenager with a changing body, an increasing awareness of his or her sexuality and a peer group whose acceptance is of utmost importance. Most will be straight. And many will be lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgendered, whether or not they have recognized it, accepted it, or begun to live into it.

Those young people we've been reading about in the headlines - they are our children. We have held them, loved them, baptized them - both the bullied children who may contemplate suicide and the bullying children who mob and taunt them. They belong to our churches and go to our schools. They live in our homes and just down the street from us. They come over for sleepovers and birthday parties with our children and grandchildren, our nephews and nieces, cousins

and siblings.

As individuals, we have the power to do something vitally important: shape the perspectives of young people in our lives. Every moment of every day, our language, attitudes and actions concerning sexual orientation and gender identities (as well as race, culture, religion and other forms of diversity) convey a message. From simply watching us they will learn either the way of Christ's inclusive compassion or the way of exclusivity and hate. Which will they learn from you?

As the church, we are challenged to keep those baptismal promises in tangible ways. Do youth experience our love, support and care for them when they are struggling with their sexual identity? What does love look like when we witness them acting with malice toward kids who are different from themselves?

Are we offering a safe place (sanctuary)

for suffering, alienated youth in our communities? Are we speaking with a loud, prophetic voice on issues of justice for LGBT people? Are we taking a public stand against other forms of intolerance?

All of these actions are pastoral and prophetic expressions of love, support and care, and they are but a few possibilities. What can our churches do that not one of us could accomplish alone? Let's dream big, collaborate, and live into those baptismal promises with faith, courage and action.

The United Church of Christ offers LGBT justice and anti-bullying resources at [ucc.org/lgbt](http://ucc.org/lgbt). LivingWorks' Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training helps people to recognize and competently respond to persons at risk of suicide. For information, visit [livingworks.net](http://livingworks.net).

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