

Valparaiso Mayor Matt Murphy – Statement on Equality
June 3, 2020

Together, we've all been impacted by the tragic death of George Floyd on May 25. The past week has brought a range of emotions, including grief, sadness, anger and outrage. We've seen people lawfully expressing their frustrations in seeking answers and we've also seen disturbing acts of violence and destruction. These events remind us that there is much work to be done in our country to live up to the principles America embodies.

Although not perfect, I've been greatly encouraged by the positive steps the City of Valparaiso and Valparaiso Police Department, alongside our citizen-led Human Relations Council, have made in fostering inclusion and fairness. Established in 2011 to advise the mayor on issues of diversity, equity and inclusion, the HRC remains an active council and an important voice in our community.

When it comes to policing, Valparaiso has a well-trained police force that has long made fairness and community policing top priorities. The VPD is one of just 13 police departments in Indiana (and just 500 nationwide) to be accredited by the Commission of Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies – opening its policies to rigorous oversight and review. The VPD works consistently to strengthen community relationships through its popular Citizens Police Academy and Junior Academy, programs within the schools, and frequent opportunities for interaction, such as Coffee with a Cop and Breakfast and Badges. These programs are not new nor a reaction to the events in Minneapolis, but an ongoing, longstanding commitment to community policing.

Further, to add transparency and responsiveness to the community, Police Chief Jeff Balon meets several times each year with various engaged citizens and members of the city's Human Relations Council to review actions, department statistics and outreach efforts. Just last year, Chief Balon was honored for his diversity efforts by the Northwest Indiana African American Alliance, Inc.

Despite all of our efforts and best intentions, we can always do better. As a City, we are committed to doing our part by advancing conversations about prejudice and opportunity among neighbors. In the past several days, I've had many conversations with local leaders, businesspeople and residents – including children – about fostering equality and addressing concerns. These conversations will continue, and I encourage you to continue these conversations with your families. I invite you to interact with the Valparaiso Police Department and city administration, taking advantage of the many opportunities we extend to the community. As a community, we will continue to listen and to put our positive messages into action. Please do your part by being intentional in your actions to welcome others and to treat people of all colors and backgrounds with respect.