



open wide our hearts

the enduring call to love *a pastoral letter against racism*

The Call to Address Racism in Our Hearts and Communities

In their new pastoral letter against racism, *Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love*, the Catholic bishops of the United States invite conversion of hearts, minds, and institutions in order to address the evil of racism that still exists in our communities.

By our baptism, we are members of Christ's body and sharers in his mission. Imitating Christ, we must care for all members of our communities, honoring each person as unique, sacred, and created in the image of God. We know that the evil of racism cuts to the core of God's plan for humanity, devaluing the diversity God created within the human family. As followers of Christ, we seek to reclaim the God-given sanctity of each person's inviolable human dignity. The bishops remind us, "The command of love requires us to make room for others in our hearts. It means that we are indeed our brother's keeper (see Gn 4:9)."

Some among us may want to believe that our country has moved beyond the reality of racism that has so profoundly stained its past, or that racism does not involve us. Almost every day, news headlines demonstrate that our country's "original sin" of racism continues to impact the lives of many Americans, many of them Catholic—particularly those who belong to the African American, Hispanic/Latino, or Native American communities.

There are signs that racism's legacies remain prevalent in many systemic inequalities that have deep impact on people of color. The bishops write, "Racism

can only end if we contend with the policies and institutional barriers that perpetuate and preserve the inequality—economic and social—that we still see all around us."

"We read the headlines that report the killing of unarmed African Americans by law enforcement officials. In our prisons, the numbers of inmates of color, notably those who are brown and black, is grossly disproportionate. Despite the great blessings of liberty that this country offers, we must admit the plain truth that for many of our fellow citizens, who have done nothing wrong, interactions with the police are often fraught with fear and even danger."

— U.S. bishops, *Open Wide Our Hearts*

Within the walls of the Church, many people of color have experienced discrimination and outright racism. Leadership has been lacking. The bishops write, "All too often, leaders of the Church have remained silent about the horrific violence and other racial injustices perpetuated against African Americans and others." Reflecting on these realities, the bishops implore us to find ways to actively work against the evil of racism. We must seek racial justice within our Church and in our country. Let us all allow the Holy Spirit to convert our hearts to do the work of healing, so we may live authentically in true relationship to one another. Let the fruit of this conversion be evident in our full celebration and integration of ethnic and cultural diversity, which is truly a gift from God.

How Can I Respond?

- (1) **Listen to and know the stories of our brothers and sisters who have suffered from racism in history, and in the present.** True and authentic encounter is difficult but worth the effort. Authentic relationships require vulnerability, humility, and getting outside of your comfort zones. For some, this will mean actively seeking opportunities to engage with people of diverse backgrounds. For others, this might mean raising your voice or sharing your story. Through authentic engagement we bring together diverse perspectives and experiences which honor the fullness of God's plan.
- (2) **Work to address both individual and systemic racism.** Racism can be individual, when persons fail to recognize certain groups as created in the image of God and equal in dignity, or it can be systemic, where practices or policies are upheld that treat certain groups of people unjustly. These systems are often perpetuated due to the silence or unawareness of many. Commit to learning more about racism and employment, housing, wealth, education, criminal justice, and voting—and then get involved in diocesan, parish or community efforts to pray and work for conversion of both hearts and systems.
- (3) **Think about what you can do, wherever you are.** Commit to raising your awareness in whatever situations you find yourself.
 - a. **As people of faith,** we can intentionally work to create spaces of welcome and opportunities for encounter. Create opportunities for sharing of stories and learn how racism impacts our communities. Regularly think about whose voices may be missing as leaders and volunteers in parish ministry. In parishes and schools, educators can use activities from usccb.org/racism to integrate content on the pastoral letter into their lessons.
 - b. **In your family,** think about who you socialize with on a regular basis. Intentionally create opportunities to interact with those you may not run into over the normal course of your week. Where in your community do you see diverse groups of people come together? Parents: talk with your children about race. Continuing to talk with them about everyone's human dignity and the pain of racism in our country will help form them to respect the dignity of all. Find prayers for children at usccb.org/racism.
 - c. **At school or work,** ask: How you can learn more about other cultures? What resources are available to you? If there are others who are treated differently because of their race, speak up. Think about what you might do if you hear someone make disparaging remarks about a classmate or coworker. How can you be ready to respond?
- (4) **As individuals and communities of faith, examine your conscience.** We all must ask ourselves: Where have I not lived as an example of Christ's love? Where have my attitudes or perceptions caused me to devalue persons of other cultures or ethnicities? When have I been unnecessarily suspicious or allowed a preconceived notion to overshadow the human nature of another? When have I seen the "other" instead of welcoming an opportunity to listen to the story of that person's life, struggles, or joys?

For More Information

Read the new pastoral letter, *Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love* and then talk with others about how your community can respond to the bishops' invitation in the pastoral letter. USCCB resources against racism are at usccb.org/racism.



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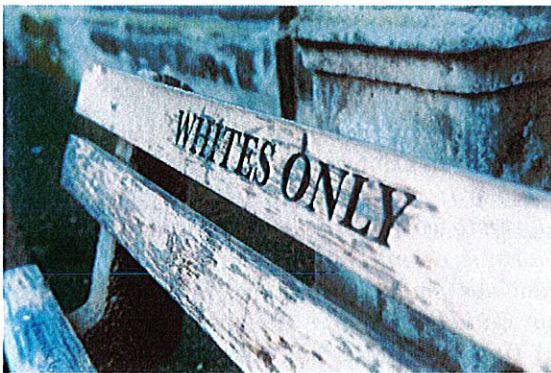


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What is Systemic Racism?

Today, racism continues to exist in our communities and in our parishes. Racism is what makes us see the "other" with suspicion or to attribute negative characteristics to an entire group of people. This evil manifests itself in our *individual thoughts*, and also in the *workings of our society itself*. Today's continuing inequalities in education, housing, employment, wealth, and representation in leadership positions are rooted in our country's shameful history of slavery and systemic racism.



Systemic Racism

Discrimination based on race and ethnicity takes many forms. The United States has made progress in eliminating some of the institutional, legalized racial discrimination of years past such as slavery, Jim Crow laws, "separate but equal" schools, and prohibitions on voting or owning land.

These hard-fought victories deserve to be remembered and celebrated.

Still, these advances are incomplete. Data on social and economic welfare show disparities between many persons of color and their white counterparts.

- Unemployment rates for African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans are considerably higher than the national average. Growing income inequality increasingly affects minorities.
- In the United States, median wealth for white households is ten times greater than for black households, and eight times greater than for Hispanic households.
- Minority homeownership rates lag behind their white counterparts, and yet research shows that minorities face extra hurdles in getting approved for mortgages.
- African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans are disproportionately affected through every stage of the criminal justice system, despite the evidence that different racial and ethnic groups commit crimes at roughly the same rates.

Racism's Impact in our Communities

America remains a deeply divided place in many ways. Many Americans of all racial and ethnic backgrounds [live in neighborhoods](#) that are homogenous. This often limits the opportunity to learn from, interact with, and befriend people who are racially and ethnically different. Yet, having experiences living near those with different experiences and backgrounds can strengthen communities and the Body of Christ.

Many people of color living in low-income areas experience low or no upward economic mobility due to limited access to quality schools, safe neighborhoods, reliable transportation, or higher-paying jobs. Laws and practices in more affluent communities, such as refusing [rent assistance vouchers](#), can prevent low income persons from moving into these communities. As a result, dialogue and encounter with others with diverse backgrounds, experiences, and opinions can be limited or non-existent. In [Evangelii Gaudium](#) (no. 59), Pope Francis noted that exclusion and inequality create the climate for discord. Recent violence in communities across the country and the hurtful rhetoric that mark conversations about refugees and migrants indicate that there is still much work to do.

As Christians, we are constantly called to examine our own hearts and consciences for how we might

"Racism can only end if we contend with the policies and institutional barriers that perpetuate and preserve the inequality—economic and social—that we still see all around us. With renewed vigor, we call on members of the Body of Christ to join others in advocating and promoting policies at all levels that will combat racism and its effects in our civic and social institutions."

— U.S. bishops, Open Wide Our Hearts

contribute to or break down racial divisions, intolerance, and discrimination. The failure to act to end systemic racism hurts those who are victimized and denies all of us the opportunity to benefit from the gifts of diversity.

This handout is excerpted from the Creating on the Margins Contest Packet. Visit usccb.org/youthcontest or usccb.org/concurso-juvenil to learn more about Creating on the Margins, a contest for youth in grades 7-12 that educates youth about poverty in the U.S. and our Catholic response. The 2018-2019 theme is "A Time to Heal Racism." The contest is sponsored by the [Catholic Campaign for Human Development](#).





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Scripture Reflection: Unity in the Body of Christ

In November 2018, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops approved a new pastoral letter against racism, *Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love*. In their letter, they invited all people of faith to “join us in striving for the end of racism in all its forms, that we may walk together humbly with God and with all of our brothers and sisters in a renewed unity.” Use the reflection below to aid you in prayerfully discerning how you may be called to respond to this invitation.

Introduction

St. Paul teaches us that all people are united together through the love and life of Jesus Christ. He uses the image of the body to express how people can be united even if they are different from one another. St. Paul emphasizes that the different members of the body all play an essential role. Each part of the body has a distinct function, as well as inherent dignity as part of God’s beloved creation.

As you listen to this reading, reflect on the way that the Body of Christ today is made up of diverse people, who are all different but are all essential to make the Church healthy and whole. How does the evil of racism frustrate God’s design of a diverse but united human family in which everyone is recognized as a valuable and vital member of that family?

“Every racist act – every such comment, every joke, every disparaging look as a reaction to the color of skin, ethnicity, or place of origin – is a failure to acknowledge another person as a brother or sister, created in the image of God.”

– U.S. bishops, *Open Wide Our Hearts*

Reading from Scripture

1 Corinthians 12: 12-14, 16-21, 24-26

As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit.

Scripture Reflection: Unity in the Body of Christ

6. Have I ever been in a situation when someone experienced personal, institutional, systematic or social racism—and I helped to cause their pain, acting contrary to love of God and love of neighbor?
7. Have I ever supported or aided a person who experienced personal, institutional, systematic or social racism and paid a price for it? How did I react? Did my faith grow? Am I willing to grow even more in faith through my actions?
8. How am I called to respond to the evil of racism?

At usccb.org/racism, find ideas about how you can respond to the call to help heal racism and read the Pastoral Letter in its entirety.

This resource is excerpted from:

- *The Creating on the Margins Contest Packet. Visit usccb.org/youthcontest or usccb.org/concurso-juvenil to learn more about Creating on the Margins, a contest for youth in grades 7-12 that educates youth about poverty in the U.S. and our Catholic response. The 2018-2019 theme is “A Time to Heal Racism.” The contest is sponsored by the [Catholic Campaign for Human Development](#).*
- *[A Prayer Service for Racial Healing in Our Land](#)*



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