



Diocese  
of Austin



**Addressing Racism,  
Prejudices, and Migration**

*a resource for homilists*





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Wednesday, June 24, 2020

*Solemnity of the Nativity of Saint John the Baptist*

Dear Fathers and Deacons,

The challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic has stretched us in the way we minister to the faithful through Word and Sacrament. Bishop Vásquez is grateful for the diligence you have spent refining your ministry so that the people of God remain connected and fed.

During this unprecedented reality, we have also been challenged to speak out against the painful sin of racism that has again brought the nation to a point of crisis. The unacceptable killing of George Floyd set into motion several weeks of sometimes excruciating, but vitally important, conversation between Americans of every perspective as to the authentic meaning of justice, dignity, and love. As priests and deacons, ordained to preach the Word of God, we are often the only, but sometimes the most important, voices our parishioners hear. The overwhelming nature of this crisis can result in homilists feeling inadequate to sufficiently convey a message that comforts those most in need and challenges those who need to speak out in words and actions.

We have asked DeKarlos Blackmon to put together this resource for you to assist in homily preparation. This extremely thorough guide includes the reflection written by Bishop Vásquez for the *Prayer for Peace and Racial Harmony in Our Communities* held at Holy Cross Parish in June, an important clarification of Black Lives Matter, and an extensive collection of quotes that address racism, inclusion diversity, migration, and refugees. Finally, he offers backgrounders created by the USCCB to supplement *Open Wide Our Hearts*, its recent pastoral letter against racism. These backgrounders provide information on the profound issues that make our ministry of preaching so integral at this time in American history.

I hope you find this document to be informative and helpful as you continue to serve the people God has entrusted to your care. Please know that DeKarlos remains available to you and is happy to accompany your parish through the necessary catechesis to live out the mission of the Church in participating and shaping the moral character of our society.

With kind regards,

Very Rev. James A. Misko

*Vicar General and Moderator of the Curia*

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Friday, June 19, 2020

*Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus*

Dear Fathers and Deacons,

Approaching the topic of racism in homilies can be daunting for those with preaching faculties. Many deacons, priests, and bishops have expressed to me the difficulty of addressing racism, prejudices, and immigration in homilies. While, yes, some are quite comfortable addressing these topics, others fear these topics are politically charged and should not be discussed within the Sunday Eucharist. The problem with the latter perspective is that not addressing these issues denies the opportunity to preach against the evil of racism and prejudices.

St. Paul, when writing the epistle to the church of Ephesus, reminds them, “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”<sup>1</sup> Living every day in a society that is becoming increasingly secular, the faithful need homilies that compel us to pray for the grace to look beyond our own narrow-mindedness, prejudices, and biases toward one another. It is precisely during the Sunday Eucharist that the homilist must speak “to people who are, at least to some degree, searching for Jesus Christ and the meaning that the Gospel can give to their lives.”<sup>2</sup> Through the liturgy, the preacher witnesses to others the saving power of God, becoming a sign of hope for the hopeless.

Considering thoroughly the very real issues many parishioners deal with daily, addressing difficult topics will sometimes disquiet the soul. However, this is in full view of the certain reality that joys, hopes, griefs, and anxieties of society, particularly the poor or afflicted, are also the joys, hopes, griefs, and anxieties of the Christian faithful.<sup>3</sup> From my perspective as the Secretariat Director of Life, Charity, and Justice, I encourage you to help me support you as we fulfill “the church’s obligation to participate in shaping the moral character of society.”<sup>4</sup>

I pray that the following resources are helpful as you navigate the difficult topics plaguing our communities.

Sincerely,

F. DeKarlos Blackmon, OblSB

*Director of Life, Charity, and Justice*

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<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 4:32

<sup>2</sup> *Preaching the Mystery of Faith: The Sunday Homily*. (p. 15)

<sup>3</sup> *Gaudium et Spes* (par. 1)

<sup>4</sup> *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* (par. 9)

# Prayer for Peace and Racial Harmony In Our Communities

Reflection by Most Reverend Joe S. Vásquez  
Bishop of Austin

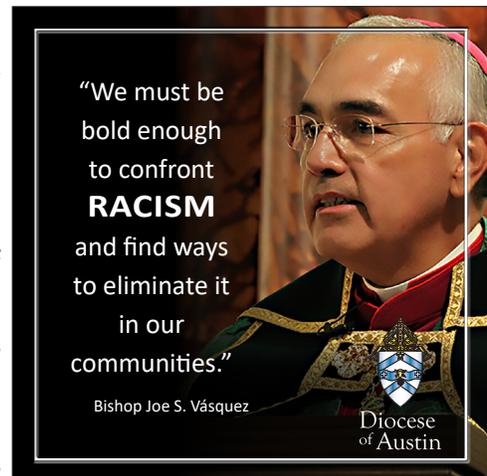
Holy Cross Catholic Church, Austin • June 9, 2020

Dear brothers and sisters, I apologize for not being able to join you this evening but want to take this opportunity to express my thoughts and reflections with you regarding the killing of Mr. George Floyd. As many of you are, I too am angry and disgusted. When I first saw the video of a law enforcement officer, someone who is supposed to protect and serve, placing his knee on the neck of Mr. Floyd, I was offended. It became even more unsettling as I heard Mr. Floyd begging for his life when he said, "I can't breathe, I can't breathe." Mr. Floyd's death is tragic and should have never happened – we witnessed a killing. It is unacceptable and shows a complete disregard for George Floyd's human rights and dignity.

Sadly, we have seen this type of abuse repeated time-and-again to people of color, particularly Black Americans. The indignation and anger that people have experienced these last few weeks have motivated tens of thousands around the world to march in protest, expressing solidarity for those men and women who are unjustly treated because of their race or color of their skin.

Racism has been tolerated far too long in our society. We need to call it what it is: racism is sinful and evil. Brothers and sisters, we must be bold enough to confront this evil and find ways to eliminate it in our communities. We must also hold accountable those criminal justice and law enforcement officers who have abused their authority with brutality. We cannot allow things to continue the way they have been with people's unalienable rights being violated. The violent death of George Floyd moves and challenges us to work for reform and to bring about justice for all, especially for those who are victims of racism and, indeed, those who have lost their lives.

God created every human being in his image and likeness; we are all precious in his sight and loved unconditionally. Every person must be respected and valued because they reflect God's presence in our world. God has given each of us an inestimable dignity that can never be taken away. We must defend and protect one another to be truly human; anything else denies human dignity and harms every person in our human family. If we believe this, then we must treat those around us as true brothers and sisters. In doing



so, we can call ourselves sons and daughters of a loving father. If we do not believe and do this, how can we dare call God, "Our Father?"

As we pray for victims, we also pray for those in law enforcement who carry out their duties with integrity for the common good. There is no doubt that good officers suffer as a result of the sinful actions of their peers. As the African American spiritual states, everyone is "standing in the need of prayer." So, what we are doing here tonight is very important as it reminds us that we are children of God. We are responsible to one another. This prayer service is meant to inspire us to work hard to bring about change. But, our prayer cannot end this night. We cannot expect to simply pray this away without putting forth a concerted effort to effect meaningful change in our communities and our relationships with each other.

## How to Address Black Lives Matter in Homilies, Columns, et cetera

There is no doubt that the protests around the country are an expression of the anger, repulsion and distress felt by people of color over police brutality, particularly as a result of the death of George Floyd. For many Black Americans, these unfortunate circumstances have triggered centuries of trauma. Black people do not have the privilege of simply walking away when the media moves on to something else. These are not incidents Black people just get over. As a result, it has left many priests asking, "How do I pastorally address *black lives matter* without offending half of my congregation?"

While many may attempt to counter "Black Lives Matter" with "All Lives Matter," it would be perceived that they fail to recognize that doing so detracts from the unique experiences and challenges with which Black Americans have had to contend throughout their lives in the United States. So, I would suggest that we consider the very concept of the phrase itself. The authentic concept of *Black lives matter* is rooted in the sanctity of human life. For this reason, the concept of *Black lives matter* should not be confused with Black Lives Matter Global Foundation (BLMGF), an organization of the same name. Although BLMGF claims to exist for the advancement of black people, its radical agenda goes far beyond the concept of *Black lives matter*, covering many issues that are antithetical to Catholic teaching.

As the Christian faithful, we must draw a distinction between the life-affirming concept of *Black lives matter* and BLMGF. We can reject many of the ideals of BLMGF while still stating that *Black lives matter*. In view of our Catholic faith, let us be mindful that *Black lives matter* must be a rallying cry devoted to the sanctity of human life from conception to natural death. Let's continue to help the faithful to achieve greatness for all people, while at the same time being faithful to the teachings of Christ in matters of marriage, sexuality, and family.

*F. DeKarlos Blackmon*

# Notable Quotations

## *...addressing Racism, Inclusion, and Diversity*

"Racism has been tolerated far too long in our society. We need to call it what it is: 'racism is sinful and evil'" (Bishop Joe S. Vásquez of Austin).

"Racism is a sin: a sin that divides the human family, blots out the image of God among specific members of that family, and violates the fundamental human dignity of those called to be children of the same Father" (*Brothers and Sisters to Us*, 1979).

"Racism arises when—either consciously or unconsciously—a person holds that his or her own race or ethnicity is superior, and therefore judges persons of other races or ethnicities as inferior and unworthy of equal regard. When this conviction or attitude leads individuals or groups to exclude, ridicule, mistreat, or unjustly discriminate against persons on the basis of their race or ethnicity, it is sinful. Racist acts are sinful because they violate justice. They reveal a failure to acknowledge the human dignity of the persons offended, to recognize them as the neighbors Christ calls us to love" (*Open Wide Our Hearts*, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 2018).

"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" (*Open Wide Our Hearts*, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 2018).

"While it is true that individuals and families have thrived, significant numbers of African Americans are born into economic and social disparity. The poverty experienced by many of these communities, which has its roots in racist policies that continue to impede the ability of people to find affordable housing, meaningful work, adequate education, and social mobility" (*Open Wide Our Hearts*, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 2018).

"The poverty experienced by many . . . communities has its roots in racist policies that continue to impede the ability of people to find affordable housing, meaningful work, adequate education, and social mobility" (*Open Wide Our Hearts*, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 2018).

"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" (*Open Wide Our Hearts*, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 2018).

"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" (*Open Wide Our Hearts*, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 2018).

"All too often, Hispanics and African Americans ... face discrimination in hiring, housing, educational opportunities, and incarceration. Racial profiling frequently targets Hispanics for selective immigration enforcement practices, and African Americans, for suspected criminal activity" (*Open Wide Our Hearts*, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 2018).

"To understand how racism works today, we must recognize that generations of African Americans were disadvantaged by slavery, wage theft, 'Jim Crow' laws, and by the systematic denial of access to numerous wealth building opportunities reserved for others. This has left many African Americans without hope, discouraged, disheartened, and feeling unloved. While it is true that some individuals and families have thrived, significant numbers of African Americans are born into economic and social disparity" (*Open Wide Our Hearts*, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 2018).

"Native Americans experienced deep wounds in the age of colonization and expansion, wounds that largely remain unhealed and strongly impact the generations to this day" (*Open Wide Our Hearts*, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 2018).

"In the dark days of slavery, reading was forbidden, but for [their] ancestors, the Bible was never a closed book." (*What We Have Seen and Heard*, U.S. Black Catholic Bishops, 1984).

"We oppose all oppression and all injustice, for unless all are free, none are free. Moreover, oppression by some means freedom's destruction for both the oppressor and the oppressed, and liberation liberates the oppressor and the oppressed." (*What We Have Seen and Heard*, U.S. Black Catholic Bishops, 1984).

"Our diversity should never be considered a problem that needs to be solved, or something that divides" (Bishop Gregory L. Parkes of St. Petersburg).

"Like COVID-19, racism can infect any person, without regard of region, religion, race or ethnicity. It is highly contagious, easily transmitted to others, and too often unseen and disguised in those seemingly healthy. Racism is a social and spiritual disease that kills people" (His Eminence Sean Cardinal O'Malley of Boston, 2020).

"The antidote to the poison of racism is community and solidarity." (His Eminence Sean Cardinal O'Malley of Boston, 2020).

"We recognize that the Catholic Church in the United States must contend with our historical complicity in slavery and our need for racial healing. Our faith calls us to leadership in breaking down barriers and standing against injustice. To violate human dignity is to dishonor the presence of Christ in each person" (His Eminence Sean Cardinal O'Malley of Boston, 2020).

"Each of us as Catholics must acknowledge a share in the mistakes and sins of the past. Many of us have been prisoners of fear and prejudice. We have preached the Gospel while closing our eyes to the racism it condemns. We have allowed conformity to social pressures to replace compliance with social justice" (*Brothers and Sisters to Us*, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 1979).

"[Racism] mocks the words of Jesus: "Treat others the way you would have them treat you." Indeed, racism is more than a disregard for the words of Jesus; it is a denial of the truth of the dignity of each human being revealed by the mystery of the Incarnation" (*Brothers and Sisters to Us*, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 1979).

"Each of us as Catholics must acknowledge a share in the mistakes and sins of the past. Many of us have been prisoners of fear and prejudice. We have preached the Gospel while closing our eyes to the racism it condemns. We have allowed conformity to social pressures to replace compliance with social justice" (*Brothers and Sisters to Us*, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 1979).

"Let the Church proclaim to all that the sin of racism defiles the image of God and degrades the sacred dignity of humankind which has been revealed by the mystery of the Incarnation. Let all know that it is a terrible sin that mocks the cross of Christ and ridicules the Incarnation. For the brother and sister of our Brother Jesus Christ are brother and sister to us" (*Brothers and Sisters to Us*, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 1979).

"Racism and economic oppression are distinct but interrelated forces which dehumanize our society. Movement toward authentic justice demands a simultaneous attack on both evils" (*Brothers and Sisters to Us*, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 1979).

"The difficulties of these new times demand a new vision and a renewed courage to transform our society and achieve justice for all. We must fight for the dual goals of racial and economic justice with determination and creativity. There must be no turning back along the road of justice, not sighing for bygone times of privilege, no nostalgia for simple solutions from another age. For we are the children of the age to come, when the first shall be last and the last shall be first, when blessed are they who serve Christ the Lord in all His brothers and sisters, especially those who are poor and suffer injustice" (*Brothers and Sisters to Us*, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 1979).

"Racism is not merely one sin among many; it is a radical evil that divides the human family and denies the new creation of a redeemed world. To struggle against it demands an equally radical transformation, in our own minds and hearts as well as in the structure of our society" (*Brothers and Sisters to Us*, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 1979).

"Many times the new face of racism is the computer print-out, the graph of profits and losses, the pink slip, the nameless statistic. Today's racism flourishes in the triumph of private concern over public responsibility, individual success over social commitment, and personal fulfillment over authentic compassion" (*Brothers and Sisters to Us*, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 1979).

"The new forms of racism must be brought face-to-face with the figure of Christ. It is Christ's word that is the judgment on this world; it is Christ's cross that is the measure of our response; and it is Christ's face that is the composite of all persons but in a most significant way of today's poor, today's marginal people, today's minorities" (*Brothers and Sisters to Us*, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 1979).

"The legal system and the criminal justice system both work in a society which bears in its psychological, social, and economic patterns the marks of racism. It is a reasonable judgment that racist attitudes and the social consequences of racism have some influence in determining who is sentenced to die in our society. This we do not regard as acceptable" (*Statement on Capital Punishment*, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 1980, no. 3).

"We have many gifts from our African past that we must share. Our Blackness is a gift as well as our Catholic faith. By sharing we will enrich our community, our Church, and ourselves" (*What We Have Seen and Heard*, U.S. Black Catholic Bishops, 1984).

"But any kind of social or cultural discrimination in basic 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" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 1965, no. 29).

"It is now possible to remove from most of the human race the curse of ignorance. A duty most appropriate in our times, especially for Christians, is to work untiringly to the end that fundamental economic and political decisions are taken, nationally and internationally, which will ensure the recognition and implementation everywhere of everyone's right to human and civil culture in harmony with personal dignity, without distinction of race, sex, nation, religion, or social circumstances" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 1965, no. 60).

"Man's creation by God 'in his own image' confers upon every human person an eminent dignity; it also postulates the fundamental equality of all human beings. For the Church, this equality, which is rooted in man's being, acquires the dimension of an altogether special brotherhood through the Incarnation of the Son of God.... In the Redemption effected by Jesus Christ the Church sees a further basis of the rights and duties of the human person. Hence every form of discrimination based on race...is absolutely unacceptable" (*The Church and Racism: Towards a More Fraternal Society*, Pontifical Commission on Justice and Peace, 1988, no. 17).

"This principle of the equal dignity of all persons, of whatever race, already finds solid support in the sciences and a firm basis in philosophy, ethics and religions in general. The Christian faith respects this intuition, this affirmation, and rejoices in it. It represents a considerable convergence among the various disciplines which reinforces the convictions of the majority of people of good will and allows the drawing up of universal declarations, conventions and international agreements for the protection of human rights, and the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination. (*The Church and Racism: Towards a More Fraternal Society*, Pontifical Commission on Justice and Peace, 1988, no. 18).

"Faith in the one God, Creator and Redeemer of all humankind made in his image and likeness, constitutes the absolute and inescapable negation of any racist ideologies. It is still necessary to draw out all the consequences of this: 'We cannot truly pray to God the Father of all if we treat any people in other than brotherly fashion, for all men are created in God's image'" (*The Church and Racism: Towards a More Fraternal Society*, Pontifical Commission on Justice and Peace, 1988, no. 19).

"The Church has therefore the vocation in the midst of the world to be the people redeemed and reconciled with God and among themselves, forming 'one body, one spirit in Christ,' and giving witness before all to respect and love. 'Every nation under heaven' was symbolically represented in Jerusalem at Pentecost, the antitype and victory over the dispersion of Babel. As Peter said, when he was called to the house of the pagan, Cornelius, 'God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean.... God shows no partiality....' The Church has the sublime vocation of realizing, first of all within herself, the unity of humankind over and above any ethnic, cultural, national, social or other divisions in order to signify precisely that such divisions are now obsolete, having been abolished by the cross of Christ" (*The Church and Racism: Towards a More Fraternal Society*, Pontifical Commission on Justice and Peace, 1988, no. 22).

"The Second Vatican Council has rightly defined the Church as 'sacrament, a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all men' since 'both Christ and the Church... transcend the distinctions of race and nationality.' Within the Church 'no inequality arising from race or nationality, social condition or sex' should exist. This is indeed the meaning of the word 'Catholic' -i.e., universal, which is one of the marks of the Church. As the Church spreads, this catholicity becomes more manifest (*The Church and Racism: Towards a More Fraternal Society*, Pontifical Commission on Justice and Peace, 1988, no. 22).

"Equality does not mean uniformity. It is important to recognize the diversity and complementarity of one another's cultural riches and moral qualities. Equality of treatment therefore implies a certain recognition of differences which minorities themselves demand in order to develop according to their own specific characteristics, in respect for others and for the common good of society and the world community. No human group, however, can boast of having a natural superiority over others, or of exercising any discrimination that affects the basic rights of the person" (*The Church and Racism: Towards a More Fraternal Society*, Pontifical Commission on Justice and Peace, 1988, no. 23).

"Doctrine and examples by themselves are not sufficient. The victims of racism, wherever they may be, must be defended. Acts of discrimination among persons and peoples for racist or other reasons-religious or ideological-and which lead to contempt and to the phenomena of exclusion, must be denounced and brought to light without hesitation and strongly rejected in order to promote equitable behavior, legislative dispositions and social structures" (*The Church and Racism: Towards a More Fraternal Society*, Pontifical Commission on Justice and Peace, 1988, no. 26).

"The 1965 U.N. Convention expressed this conviction forcefully: 'Any doctrine of superiority based on the difference between races is scientifically false, morally condemnable and socially unjust and dangerous.' The Church's doctrine affirms it with no less vigor: all racist theories are contrary to Christian faith and love. And yet, in sharp contrast to this growing awareness of human dignity, racism still exists and continually reappears in different forms. It is a wound in humanity's side that mysteriously remains open. Everyone, therefore, must make efforts to heal it with great firmness and patience" (*The Church and Racism: Towards a More Fraternal Society*, Pontifical Commission on Justice and Peace, 1988, no. 33).

"The equality of men rests essentially on their dignity as persons 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" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1935).

"Access to employment and to professions must be open to all without unjust discrimination: men and women, healthy and disabled, natives and immigrants. For its part society should, according to circumstances, help citizens find work and employment" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2433).

"An appreciation of racial diversity begins with an understanding of how our own lives are affected by skin color and race. Each of us should examine how our thinking and our actions are influenced by the color of our skin. How has my skin color enhanced my life or hindered me, helped or prevented me from understanding people of other races? How can I enhance my own life by learning more about other races?" (*Reviving the Common Good*, Archbishop John Roach of St. Paul and Minneapolis, 1991).

"The history of the Church shows that Christianity does not have simply one cultural expression, but rather, 'remaining completely true to itself, with unswerving fidelity to the proclamation of the Gospel and the tradition of the Church, it will also reflect the different faces of the cultures and peoples in which it is received and takes root'. In the diversity of peoples who experience the gift of God, each in accordance with its own culture, the Church expresses her genuine catholicity and shows forth the 'beauty of her varied face'" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 116).

"The Catholic community stands with all people who struggle for an end to racism and violence, in our families, in our places of worship, in our communities and in our world. We must continue to build bridges and we must confront racism and violence with a commitment to life, a vision of hope, and a call to action" Archbishop Joseph E. Kurtz of Louisville, President of the U.S. Bishops Conference, June 19, 2015).

"The message of peace is not about a negotiated settlement but rather the conviction that the unity brought by the Spirit can harmonize every diversity. It overcomes every conflict by creating a new and promising synthesis. Diversity is a beautiful thing when it can constantly enter into a process of reconciliation and seal a sort of cultural covenant resulting in a 'reconciled diversity.' As the bishops of the Congo have put it: 'Our ethnic diversity is our wealth... It is only in unity, through conversion of hearts and reconciliation, that we will be able to help our country to develop on all levels'" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 230).

# Notable Quotations

## ...addressing Migrants and Refugees

“Every migrant is a human person who, as such, possesses fundamental, inalienable rights that must be respected by everyone and in every circumstance” (*Caritas in Veritate*, 2009, no. 62).

“The Gospel mandate to ‘welcome the stranger’ requires Catholics to care for and stand with newcomers, authorized and unauthorized, including unaccompanied immigrant children, refugees and asylum-seekers, those unnecessarily detained, and victims of human trafficking” (*Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 2015, no. 81).

“Comprehensive reform is urgently necessary to fix a broken immigration system and should include a broad and fair legalization program with a path to citizenship; a work program with worker protections and just wages; family reunification policies; access to legal protections, which include due process procedures; refuge for those fleeing persecution and violence; and policies to address the root causes of migration” (*Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 2015, no. 81).

“Refugees are among the most vulnerable people, fleeing war, religious persecution, and extreme targeted violence. Turning a blind eye to those in need with such callous disregard for human life would go against the values of our nation and fail to meet the standards that make our society great” (Bishop Joe S. Vásquez of Austin, U.S. Catholic Bishops Committee on Migration, 2019).

“Offering refuge to those fleeing religious and other persecution has been a cornerstone of what has made this country great and a place of welcome” (Bishop Joe S. Vásquez of Austin, U.S. Catholic Bishops Committee on Migration, 2019).

“The Catholic Church has a long history of involvement in the immigration issue. Our experience in working with immigrants throughout the years compels us to speak out on the issue of immigration reform, which is a moral issue that impacts human rights. The Church’s work in assisting migrants stems from the belief that every person is created in God’s image” (Bishop Joe S. Vásquez of Austin, February 2, 2017).

“People of goodwill, especially those in government leadership, should ensure that refugees, regardless of their religious belief, are compassionately welcomed without sacrificing our security or values as Americans. These refugees are the very ones Jesus referred to as the least of our brothers and sisters among us. They, too, are children of God and are entitled to be treated with human dignity” (Bishop Joe S. Vásquez of Austin, February 4, 2017).

“Each of us must work to encounter the migrants and refugees who are all around us. All too often, they seem invisible to us. We need to hear their stories, literally share their journeys, and see them as our brothers and sisters” (Dominican Sister Donna Markham of Catholic Charities USA).

"America is a continent born of immigrant peoples who came to inhabit these lands and who from north to south gave birth to new civilizations. Throughout history the continent has suffered through the expansion of other peoples who came to conquer and colonize these lands, displacing and eliminating entire peoples and even forcing unknown millions of persons and families from Africa to come as slaves" (*Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope*, U.S. Catholic Bishops and Mexican Catholic Bishops, 2003, no. 13).

"Our common faith in Jesus Christ moves us to search for ways that favor a spirit of solidarity. It is a faith that transcends borders and bids us to overcome all forms of discrimination and violence so that we may build relationships that are just and loving" (*Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope*, U.S. Catholic Bishops and Mexican Catholic Bishops, 2003, no. 19).

"The word of God and the Catholic social teaching it inspires illuminate an understanding—one that is ultimately full of hope—that recognizes the lights and shadows that are a part of the ethical, social, political, economic, and cultural dimensions of migrations between our two countries. The word of God and Catholic social teaching also bring to light the causes that give rise to migrations, as well as the consequences that they have on the communities of origin and destination" (*Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope*, U.S. Catholic Bishops and Mexican Catholic Bishops, 2003, no. 22).

"In the Church no one is a stranger, and the Church is not foreign to anyone, anywhere. As a sacrament of unity and thus a sign and a binding force for the whole human race, the Church is the place where illegal immigrants are also recognized and accepted as brothers and sisters." (*Message for World Day of Migrants*, Pope Saint John Paul II, 1995).

"The presence of so many people of so many different cultures and religions in so many different parts of the United States has challenged us as a Church to a profound conversion so that we can become truly a sacrament of unity" (*Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity*, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 2000).

The new immigrants call most of us back to our ancestral heritage as descendants of immigrants and to our baptismal heritage as members of the body of Christ" (*Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity*, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 2000).

The presence of brothers and sisters from different cultures should be celebrated as a gift to the Church" (*Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity*, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 2000).

Immigrants, new to our shores, call us out of our unawareness to a conversion of mind and heart through which we are able to offer a genuine and suitable welcome, to share together as brothers and sisters at the same table, and to work side by side to improve the quality of life for society's marginalized members" (*Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity*, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 2000).

Through the members of the Church, solitary migrations are to end in the embrace of solidarity" (*Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity*, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 2000).

The Catholic community is rapidly re-encountering itself as an "immigrant Church," a witness at once to the diversity of people who make up our world and to our unity in one humanity, destined to enjoy the fullness of God's blessing in Jesus Christ" (*Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity*, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 2000).

The Church supports the human rights of all people and offers them pastoral care, education, and social services, no matter what the circumstances of entry into this country, and it works for the respect of the human dignity of allesspecially those who find themselves in desperate circumstances" (*Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity*, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 2000).

We call upon all people of good will, but Catholics especially, to welcome the newcomers in their neighborhoods and schools, in their places of work and worship, with heartfelt hospitality, openness, and eagerness both to help and to learn from our brothers and sisters of whatever religion, ethnicity, or background" (*Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity*, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 2000).

Racist attitudes can linger in subtle ways, even when people get to know one another in parish activities, unless we vigorously educate ourselves about our neighbors, learn to appreciate their heritages, encounter their own images of us, and strive to work with them on behalf of common causes" (*Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity*, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 2000).

Indeed, no culture is either permanent or perfect. All constantly need to be evangelized and uplifted by the good news of Jesus Christ" (*Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity*, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 2000).

The Church of the twenty-first century requires a profound conversion in spirit and in its institutions to reflect its own cultural pluralism, to address the needs of the whole Catholic community, and to further a genuine communion of solidarity among the diverse members of the Body of Christ" (*Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity*, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 2000).

As Catholics we are called to take concrete measures to overcome the misunderstanding, ignorance, competition, and fear that stand in the way of genuinely welcoming the stranger in our midst and enjoying the communion that is our destiny as Children of God" (*Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity*, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 2000).

The call to solidarity is also a call to promote the effective recognition of the rights of immigrants and to overcome all discrimination based on race, culture, or religion. . . . Catholic lay people, diocesan officials, and bishops should continue to work together with community organizations, labor unions, and other religious bodies on behalf of the rights of immigrants in the workplace, schools, public services, our legal system, and all levels of government" (*Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity*, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 2000).

Communion does not abolish differences but brings together one family, diverse and united in the one Lord" (*Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity*, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 2000).

Whenever the diverse cultures of a parish and diocese are able to share the Eucharist in special celebrations that reflect the cultural riches of the participants, the Church demonstrates in the sacrament of our unity the multicultural face of the Church" (*Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity*, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 2000).

Priests, seminarians, religious, and lay ministers should all be encouraged to learn a language and acquire cultural knowledge relevant to their ministry" (*Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity*, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 2000).

Immigrants will experience the Church's welcome most personally at the level of the parish. Pastors and parish staff, accordingly, must be filled with a spirit of welcome, responding to a new and perhaps little-understood culture" (*Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity*, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 2000).

Catholic schools can provide the children of immigrants with opportunities to adapt to American culture in a context permeated by the faith and in an atmosphere of hospitality to all cultures, and they can do much to promote cultural understanding and respect among parents and students alike" (*Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity*, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 2000).

Immigrant communities give ample witness to what it is to be Church in their desire to worship as a people, in their faith, in their solidarity with one another and with the weakest among them, in their devotion and their faithfulness to the Church of their ancestors" (*Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity*, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 2000).

The Church of the twenty-first century will be, as it has always been, a Church of many cultures, languages and traditions, yet simultaneously one, as God is one Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in diversity" (*Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity*, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 2000).

Diversity of ethnicity, education, and social class challenges us as pastors to welcome these new immigrants and help them join our communities in ways that are respectful of their cultures and in ways that mutually enrich the immigrants and the receiving Church" (*Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity*, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 2000).

# PRAYER FOR PEACE IN OUR COMMUNITIES

## Prayer

O God, Father of mercies and peace,  
to know you is to know love, joy and hope.  
Despite the difficulties we may face in our communities,  
help us to always remember that we are in your presence.

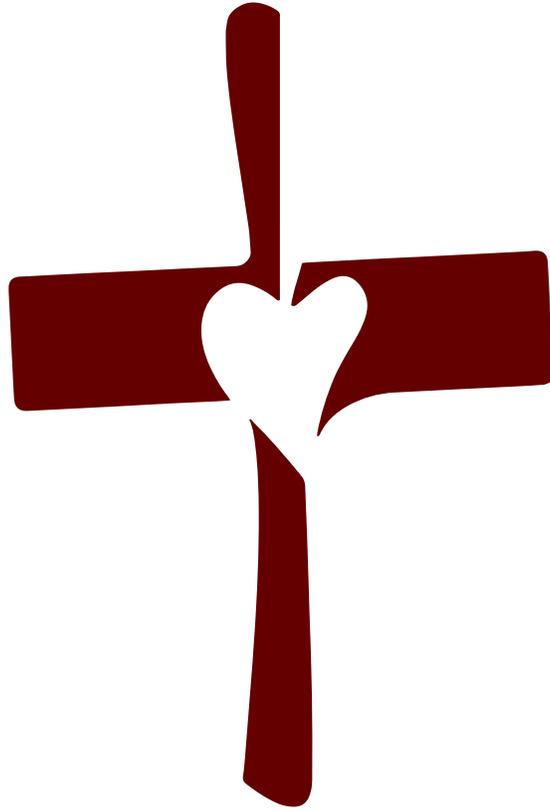
Through the intercession of Saint Peter Claver,  
a witness of your unfailing love,  
may we receive the hope that will help us to overcome  
prejudice, racism, intolerance, bias and narrow-mindedness,  
and live together in harmony without regard to distinction.

Grant us, a greater visibility  
of the hidden power of the Eucharist  
to appreciate every human person as our neighbor,  
so that we may be united in building up  
the Kingdom of justice and peace.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.



Diocese of Austin  
Secretariat of Life, Charity and Justice



# open wide our hearts

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

## **Backgrounders**

Further educational resources and parish resources that were created to accompany the pastoral letter may be accessed by visiting <https://www.usccb.org/racism>. The USCCB has made available educational resources for K-8, high school, college, and adult faith formation. It also lists parish resources such as bulletin inserts, pastoral aids, prayer resources, and backgrounders. For more information, please reach out to the diocesan office of Life, Charity, and Justice, (512) 949-2486.



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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**

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*“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

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**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](https://usccb.org/youthcontest) or [usccb.org/concurso-juvenil](https://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](https://catholiccampaignforhumandevelopment.org).*





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## Racial Economic Inequality

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As Pope Francis wrote in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangeli Gaudium*, “Inequality is the root of social ills.” In his 2015 [Congressional address](#), the Pope spoke of the economic inequality in the U.S., challenging leaders and all Americans to work for the common good so that every individual, created in God’s image, can flourish. The U.S. bishops have [long advocated for economic justice](#) so that [all persons](#) may thrive.

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*“To understand how racism works today, we must recognize that generations of African Americans were disadvantaged by slavery, wage theft, ‘Jim Crow’ laws, and by the systematic denial of access to numerous wealth building opportunities reserved for others. This has left many African Americans without hope, discouraged, disheartened, and feeling unloved. While it is true that some individuals and families have thrived, significant numbers of African Americans are born into economic and social disparity.”*

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

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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. This is a significantly larger gap than [many Americans perceive](#). Currently, Native Americans, blacks, and Hispanics also experience poverty at [roughly twice or more than twice the rate](#) of whites.

For the typical household, two-thirds of wealth comes from housing equity, such that the wealth gap between white and black households is largely the story of [work and housing policies](#) that have created obstacles for African Americans to achieve home and

land ownership for generations. Despite the gains of the Civil Rights Movement, barriers in education, in employment, and in housing still exist today and all contribute to racial economic inequality. For Native Americans, [colonial and later U.S. policies](#) led to the loss of land, restrictions in self-governance, and economic devastation that left a legacy of low educational attainment and [unemployment rates](#) that remain among the highest in the country.

Income gaps across racial and ethnic groups have [narrowed only slightly](#) in the last few decades. For example, lower-income African Americans made 47% as much as low-income whites in 1970 and in 2016, they made 54% as much as white counterparts. Hispanics of all income categories actually fell further behind during this same period.

In 2017, The Harvard University Business School Review documented that hiring

discrimination against African Americans [has not declined](#) in the past 25 years.



The [2018 annual report](#) of the Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard University found a widening gap in homeownership in recent decades, with current rates at 72% for whites and 43% for blacks. It is evident that many minority families still face challenges in achieving homeownership and economic equality.

## Pray with St. John Paul II

“Lord God, our Father, you created the human being, man and woman, in your image and likeness, and you willed the diversity of peoples within the unity of the human family. At times, however, the equality of your sons and daughters has not been acknowledged, and Christians have been guilty of attitudes of rejection and exclusion, consenting to acts of discrimination on the basis of racial and ethnic difference. Forgive us and grant us the grace to heal the wounds still present in your community on account of sin, so that we will all feel ourselves to be your sons and daughters.” ( )



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## Racism and Education

In the November 2018 Pastoral Letter Against Racism, *Open Wide Our Hearts*, the Catholic bishops of the United States urge all Catholics to acknowledge “the scourge of racism” that still exists in our hearts, words, actions, and institutions. 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 treat certain groups of people unjustly. One area of systemic racism is lack of access to quality education for persons of color.



As children of God, all persons have a God-given right to flourish and develop their potential, so they may lead lives of dignity and contribute to the common good. The right to education has been cited in Papal encyclicals for over a century.

Unfortunately, millions in the U.S. were denied that right. Before Emancipation in 1863, teaching enslaved black people to read

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*“The poverty experienced by many . . . communities has its roots in racist policies that continue to impede the ability of people to find affordable housing, meaningful work, adequate education, and social mobility.”*

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

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and write was illegal. After slavery ended, for the next century, almost every school in the U.S. was segregated. Further, public schools for minorities were given limited resources. By the 1960s, the great majority of African-Americans, Native Americans, and Latino students, were educated in segregated and underfunded schools. Most colleges had few, if any, minority students.

During the Civil Rights Movement of the late 1950s and the 60s, school desegregation was a major issue, [causing bitter, sometimes violent, struggles](#). In 1954, the Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v Board of Education of Topeka* that all U.S. schools be integrated.

Regrettably, [recent studies](#) have shown that after initial gains, [schools are now as segregated](#) as they were before the *Brown* decision. [Today](#) in schools located in high-poverty areas, the majority of the students are African American, Hispanic and Latino. Because public schools chiefly [depend on local real estate taxes](#) for funding, [schools in](#)

[areas](#) with high housing values can offer more to students, often leaving many minority students out of the equation.

The U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights has studied the critical gaps of these inequitable funding structures. The [recent data](#) from that office shows consistent problems for minority students, such as limited access to early learning, lack of teacher equity, limited access to courses and programs that lead to college and career readiness, and low rates of teacher retention. Schools on Native American reservations face a host of [additional barriers](#) to student success.

Without quality pre-school programs, many minority students start grade school [at a disadvantage](#). Inexperienced teachers and teachers with limited professional development opportunities are twice as likely to teach in minority public schools. Many African Americans and Latinos attend schools that do not offer the intensive writing classes and upper level math courses needed for college admission, and these schools do not offer adequate college and career counseling. Without resources, consistent support and mentoring, minority students drop out of school at much higher rates than white students—[recent statistics](#) show that while 62% of white students get a

college degree in 4-6 years, only 38% of Black students, 45% of Latino students and 13% of Native Americans do.



Catholic schools, in fulfillment of their mission on behalf of all children of God, must strive [to increase enrollment](#) of underserved populations, including Hispanic/Latino and African American students, in order to ensure that high-quality educational opportunity is available to all students. We must work together as people of faith to improve educational opportunities for all our brothers and sisters in Christ.

## Pray with St. John Paul II

“Lord God, our Father, you created the human being, man and women, in your image and likeness, and you willed the diversity of peoples within the unity of the human family. At times, however, the equality of your sons and daughters has not been acknowledged, and Christians have been guilty of attitudes of rejection and exclusion, consenting to acts of discrimination on the basis of racial and ethnic difference. Forgive us and grant us the grace to heal the wounds still present in your community on account of sin, so that we will all feel ourselves to be your sons and daughters.” ([Universal Prayer on the Day of Pardon](#))



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## Racism and Employment

In the November 2018 Pastoral Letter Against Racism, *Open Wide Our Hearts*, the Catholic bishops of the United States urge all Catholics to acknowledge “the scourge of racism” that still exists in our hearts, words, actions, and institutions. 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 treat certain groups of people unjustly. One area of systemic racism is lack of access to equal employment opportunities for many persons of color.



Saint John Paul II [reminded us](#) that due to every person being created in the image and likeness of God, everyone who is willing and able should have access to opportunities for fair employment. Unfortunately, this was not the case for Native Americans, African Americans, Hispanics/Latinos, and many immigrants throughout the nation’s history—and fair access to employment remains a challenge today.

For Native Americans, [colonial and later U.S. policies](#) led to the loss of land,

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*“All too often, Hispanics and African Americans ... face discrimination in hiring, housing, educational opportunities, and incarceration.”*

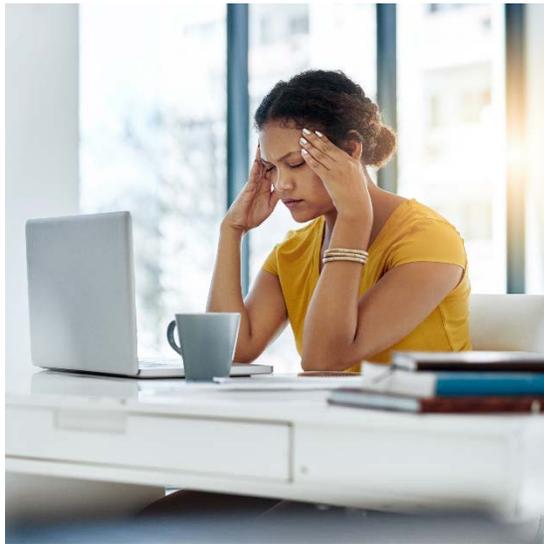
– *U.S. bishops*, *Open Wide Our Hearts*

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restrictions in self-governance, and economic devastation that left a legacy of low educational attainment and [unemployment rates](#) which remain among the highest in the country. Throughout its history, the United States has, especially during times of economic stress, [discriminated against and placed legal restrictions on newly arrived groups of immigrants](#) and blamed them for social ills. The blame, discrimination and legal restrictions were detrimental to the impacted groups and led to restricted access to employment opportunities and other means of advancement.

After the end of slavery until the First World War, [90% of African Americans lived in the South](#), the great majority toiling as sharecroppers. This entailed back-breaking labor in white landowners’ fields for a small share of the crop and often substandard housing. In addition, the imposition of [Jim Crow](#), which guaranteed segregation and disenfranchisement, [was ample impetus to leave the South for good](#). With the start of WWI in 1916, the [Great Migration](#) brought black laborers north to work in factories.

However, they faced many challenges. Many white residents in northern cities resented the new black residents, [and tensions could spill over into violence and riots](#). Despite higher available salaries than those in the South, black migrants to the North were typically relegated to lower paying jobs. The Great Depression further eroded job possibilities. Even with post-Depression economic recovery, [many labor unions that secured just wages were closed to African Americans](#), as were many professions. Even college-educated African Americans often found limited entry-level employment. Unemployment, under-employment, and discrimination in the workplace were the norm.



Part of the Civil Rights agenda in the 1960s was focused on jobs with dignity and job training opportunities. The U.S. Federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) was created in 1964 to protect against illegal discrimination in the workplace, which unfortunately has continued. In 2016 and 2017, for example, the EEOC investigated tens of thousands of [racial discrimination cases](#). Employment disparities among college graduates of different races [persist](#).

In 2017 the Harvard University Business School Review [documented](#) that hiring discrimination against African Americans was still a reality—and did not decline in the past 25 years. The authors note that despite a growing concern with diversity, “subtle forms of racial stereotypes” in the workplace and “unconscious bias” have shown little change: support for more affirmative action policies and stronger enforcement of antidiscrimination legislation is critical because this pattern “will not diminish on its own.” The unemployment rate among African American workers and Hispanic workers is still higher than for whites, and [in 14 states and the District of Columbia, black unemployment is at least twice as high as white unemployment](#). Native American communities often have [vastly higher unemployment](#) than the national average. Unequal opportunity still remains a concern.

## Pray with St. John Paul II

“Lord God, our Father, you created the human being, man and women, in your image and likeness, and you willed the diversity of peoples within the unity of the human family. At times, however, the equality of your sons and daughters has not been acknowledged, and Christians have been guilty of attitudes of rejection and exclusion, consenting to acts of discrimination on the basis of racial and ethnic difference. Forgive us and grant us the grace to heal the wounds still present in your community on account of sin, so that we will all feel ourselves to be your sons and daughters” ( )





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## Racism and Housing

In the November 2018 Pastoral Letter Against racism, *Open Wide Our Hearts*, the Catholic bishops of the United States urge all Catholics to acknowledge “the scourge of racism” that still exists in our hearts, words, actions, and institutions. 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 treat certain groups of people unjustly. One area of systemic racism is unequal access to decent housing.

Decent housing is a basic human right—deserved by all due to their dignity as being created in God’s image. Without decent, safe, and affordable housing, all aspects of family life suffer, and a life of dignity is impossible. Yet an [affordable housing crisis](#) is a current reality in the U.S. and, for minorities, it has been a reality throughout the nation’s history.



After the Civil War, the great majority of freed slaves lived in the South, often in dilapidated shacks. Such housing was

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*“While it is true that individuals and families have thrived, significant numbers of African Americans are born into economic and social disparity. The poverty experienced by many of these communities, which has its roots in racist policies that continue to impede the ability of people to find affordable housing, meaningful work, adequate education, and social mobility.”*

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

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provided by white land owners to Black sharecroppers who would work for free for the housing and a small portion of the crops. The workers did not own these dwellings and could be evicted from them at any time. With the Great Migration north in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to seek employment and better lives, African Americans were crowded into low-income housing in cities like Chicago and Detroit in areas that increasingly became segregated.

Later in the twentieth century, African Americans seeking housing were faced with both private and governmental prejudice. Private homeowners, real estate agents, and private developers (such as the founder of Levittown) could, and would, refuse to sell to Black citizens, so they were confined to segregated areas. The U.S. Federal Housing Administration policies and programs in the 1930s-1950s used strategies to deny

mortgages, home loans, and home ownership to Blacks. For example, the practice of [redlining](#)—actually drawing red lines on maps around predominately African American neighborhoods to indicate where banks could not get federal insurance for loans they made—ensured that banks denied all mortgage requests from people in these areas. African American WWII veterans were [denied access](#) to the low-rate mortgages available to white veterans under the GI Bill.

The U.S. Government also [built segregated public housing](#) (as a part of the New Deal in the 1930s), first for low-income whites, then for low-income Blacks. With the housing boom after WWII, whites could leave public housing and buy low and moderate-priced



houses in the growing suburbs with new means of financing: both the new suburbs and new forms of mortgages were closed off for African-Americans. They were often trapped in decaying older housing stock in certain urban areas or in the blocks of public housing, poorly designed and poorly maintained by the Federal government.

The Fair Housing Act of 1968 required the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to take “affirmative” steps to end housing discrimination and promote integration. But, [after five decades](#), the federal housing discrimination ban has failed to end segregation and provide equal access to housing opportunities for all, particularly African Americans. Today, many Latinos also face limited opportunities for decent housing; Native Americans on reservations continue to live in substandard housing. The plight of homelessness continues to be a major social problem, [especially for minorities](#), who are a population [more vulnerable to eviction](#). The American Dream of owning decent homes to raise families in safety and dignity still [remains a distant dream for many](#) in this country.

## Pray with St. John Paul II

“Lord our God, you created the human being, man and woman, in your image and likeness, and you willed the diversity of peoples within the unity of the human family. At times, however, the equality of your sons and daughters has not been acknowledged, and Christians have been guilty of attitudes of rejection and exclusion, consenting to acts of discrimination on the basis of racial and ethnic difference. Forgive us and grant us the grace to heal the wounds still present in your community on account of sin, so that we will all feel ourselves to be your sons and daughters.”  
([Universal Prayer on Day of Pardon](#))



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## Racism and Migration in the United States

In the November 2018 pastoral letter against racism, *Open Wide Our Hearts*, the Catholic bishops of the United States urge all Catholics to acknowledge “the scourge of racism” that still exists in our hearts, words, actions and institutions. Racism is rooted in a failure to acknowledge the human dignity of people of different ethnic backgrounds. It does not reflect the love of neighbor that the Lord calls us to have. It denies the beauty of the diversity of God’s plan. Racism manifests itself in sinful individual actions, which contribute to structures of sin that perpetuate division and inequality. One area where racism has become evident is in the way that the United States has approached the issue of migration, historically and even today.



Ethnicity has long been a factor guiding migration policy in the United States. One of the earliest and most overt examples of this was the forced migration and enslavement of millions of African people to colonial North America. Slavery, and the racist ideas the slave trade was

built upon, informed the development of migration policy. Another example was the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, a federal law that effectively barred Chinese migration to the United States.

In the early twentieth century, eugenics became popular among many of the political and scientific elite. Though false, it was upheld as science wherein biological principles were used to differentiate between what were perceived as superior and inferior races. Opponents of mass immigration believed that non-Catholic Northern European or Anglo-Saxon bloodlines were superior to those who originated outside of northern Europe. Policies enacted based on eugenics responded to fears that unrestricted migration from Southern and Eastern Europe, Asia, or Africa, would “dilute” the Anglo-Saxon nature of life in the United States.

This same ideology reached a high point with the passage of the National Origins Act in 1924, which imposed a quota system that significantly restricted immigration from countries in the Eastern hemisphere into the United States. Western hemisphere countries were exempt. This system remained in place for four decades, ending with the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965.

Although the overt racial discrimination that was built into the quota system was eliminated, many migrant communities continue to experience racism in life in the United States. Hispanics and other migrant populations are often

discriminated against in hiring, housing, educational opportunities, and in the criminal justice system.

Though the Gospel calls us to welcome the stranger, many immigrants and refugees are met with fear, judgement and hatred. Racist rhetoric that marginalizes and causes discrimination against migrant populations is common. In response, the church must provide a counter-example for those who use race to deny the God-given dignity of people who are migrants. As Catholics, we are called to welcome newcomers upon their arrival and help to ease their transitions into life here in the United States. A truly welcoming community does not emerge by chance but is established through the hard work and conviction of local residents, through direct

service, sharing experiences, faith, advocacy, and institution building.

In their pastoral letter *[Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope](#)*, the bishops of the United States and Mexico emphasized the importance of encounter in the process of conversion. *Strangers No Longer* reminds us that “part of the process of conversion of mind and heart deals with confronting attitudes of cultural superiority, indifference, and racism; accepting migrants not as foreboding aliens, terrorists, or economic threats, but rather as persons with dignity and rights, revealing the presence of Christ; and recognizing migrants as bearers of deep cultural values and rich faith traditions.”

## For More Information

- [Justice for Immigrants Campaign](#)
- [USCCB Committee on Migration and Refugee Services](#)
- [Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope](#), Pastoral Letter of the U.S. and Mexican Bishops
- [USCCB Committee on Cultural Diversity](#)

## Pray with St. John Paul II

“Lord God, our Father, you created the human being, man and woman, in your image and likeness, and you willed the diversity of peoples within the unity of the human family. At times, however, the equality of your sons and daughters has not been acknowledged, and Christians have been guilty of attitudes of rejection and exclusion, consenting to acts of discrimination on the basis of racial and ethnic difference. Forgive us and grant us the grace to heal the wounds still present in your community on account of sin, so that we will all feel ourselves to be your sons and daughters.” ([Universal Prayer on Day of Pardon](#))



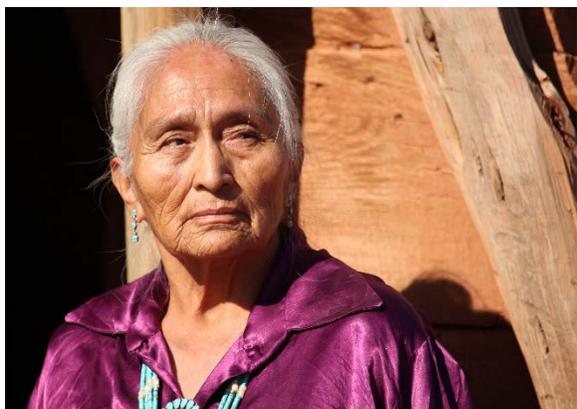


# open wide our hearts

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

## Racism and the Native American Experience

In the November 2018 Pastoral Letter Against Racism, *Open Wide Our Hearts*, the Catholic bishops of the United States urge all Catholics to acknowledge “the scourge of racism” that still exists in our hearts, words, actions and institutions. Racism is rooted in a failure to acknowledge the human dignity of people of a different race. It does not reflect the inner life of God—the Triune unity of three-in-one—that we are called to imitate. Racism manifests itself in sinful individual actions, which contribute to structures of sin that perpetuate division and inequality. The Native American experience offers a particular illustration of racism in history and today.



When Europeans arrived on the shores of this country, they were often blind to the dignity of indigenous peoples. Colonial and later U.S. policies toward Native American communities were often violent, paternalistic, and directed toward the theft of Native American land. Native Americans

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*“Native Americans experienced deep wounds in the age of colonization and expansion, wounds that largely remain unhealed and strongly impact the generations to this day.”*

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

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were killed, imprisoned, sold into slavery, and raped. These policies decimated entire communities and brought about tragic death.

The results were massive forced relocations of people as endured by the Cherokee people on the “Trail of Tears” and of the Navajo in the “Long Walk.” Thousands of men, women, and children died during those forced removals. Schools and orphanages began “Americanizing” Native children by forcing them to abandon all facets of their culture, including their native languages. The devastation caused by national policies of expansion and manifest destiny, fueled by racist attitudes, led to the near eradication of Native American peoples and their cultures.

The effects of this evil remain visible in the great difficulties experienced by Native American communities today. Poverty, unemployment, inadequate health care, poor schools, the exploitation of natural

resources, and disputes over land ownership in Native American communities are the legacy of these evils today.

In *Heritage and Hope: Evangelization in the United States* (NCCB Pastoral Letter, 1990), the U.S. Catholic bishops wrote, “As Church, we often have been unconscious and insensitive to the mistreatment of our Native American brothers and sisters and have at times reflected the racism of the dominant culture of which we have been a part.” All Catholics are called to give renewed attention to historical and present injustices resulting from racism against Native Americans, better integrate the needs and contributions of Native Catholics, and work for greater justice for the descendants of the first Americans.

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*“We ask the Catholic community to join us in seeking new understanding and awareness of their situation and in committing our Church to new advocacy and action with our Native American brothers and sisters on issues of social justice and pastoral life which touch their lives.”*

- *U.S. bishops, 1992: A Time for Remembering, Reconciling and Recommitting Ourselves as a People*

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## For More Information

- [USCCB Subcommittee on Native American Affairs](#)
- [Native American Catholics at the Millennium](#), Ad Hoc Committee on Native American Catholics, 2003
- [1992: A Time for Remembering, Reconciling, and Recommitting Ourselves as a People: Pastoral Reflections on the Fifth Centenary and Native American People](#), National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1991
- [Native American Protocols](#), Archdiocese of Los Angeles
- [Black and Indian Mission Office](#)

## Pray with St. John Paul II

“Lord God, our Father, you created the human being, man and woman, in your image and likeness, and you willed the diversity of peoples within the unity of the human family. At times, however, the equality of your sons and daughters has not been acknowledged, and Christians have been guilty of attitudes of rejection and exclusion, consenting to acts of discrimination on the basis of racial and ethnic difference. Forgive us and grant us the grace to heal the wounds still present in your community on account of sin, so that we will all feel ourselves to be your sons and daughters.” ([Universal Prayer on Day of Pardon](#))





# open wide our hearts

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

## Racism and the Criminal Justice System

In the November 2018 Pastoral Letter Against Racism, *Open Wide Our Hearts*, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops urge all Catholics to acknowledge “the scourge of racism” that still exists in our hearts, words, actions, and institutions. Racism is rooted in a failure to acknowledge the human dignity of people of a different race. Racism does not reflect the inner life of God—the Triune unity of three-in-one—that we are called to imitate. Racism manifests itself in sinful individual actions, which contribute to structures of sin that perpetuate division and inequality, as has been seen throughout our nation’s history and into the present. One such structure in need of conversion is the criminal justice system.



In *Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and the Criminal Justice system*, the U.S. Catholic bishops wrote, “Racism and discrimination that continue to haunt our

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*“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*

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nation are reflected in similar ways in the criminal justice system.” For decades, the bishops have recognized the limited utility of mandatory minimum sentencing for drug and non-violent offenses. Recognizing that the default response to social ills such as mental illness, drug addiction, homelessness, unemployment and illiteracy is too often incarceration, the bishops have advocated for sentencing reform and increased use of rehabilitative and restorative justice programs that focus on education, literacy, job-placement, and substance-abuse treatment.

Over the past four decades, there has been a 500% increase in the number of people incarcerated in the U.S., [which now totals roughly 2.2 million](#). Contributing factors to this increase include mandatory minimum

sentences, harsher sentences for non-violent drug offenses, “three-strikes” laws, and changes in policing. The United States now has the highest rate of incarceration in the world. With 5% of the world’s population, the United States houses roughly 25% of the world’s prisoners.

Currently, African Americans and Hispanics/Latinos make up [56% of prisoners but are only 28% of the U.S. population](#). Although “color blind” on the surface, [racial disparities appear in every stage of the criminal justice system](#), which has built the resulting prison and jail population over decades.

- Whites and African Americans engage in drug use at similar rates, but African Americans are much [more likely to be arrested](#) for it.
- Although the gap among incarceration rates of different races

has narrowed somewhat in recent years, African Americans [are still incarcerated at more than five times the rate of whites](#).

- African Americans are more likely to [experience traffic stops](#), searches, and [juvenile arrests](#), and receive harsher sentences and greater [length of sentencing](#).
- Recent headlines have also raised questions about treatment by law enforcement of persons of color, with [studies](#) pointing to racial [disparities in use of non-lethal force](#) against African Americans and Hispanics.

We must continue to work and pray against the evils of racism, particularly as it may manifest in our criminal justice system and in the way that laws are enforced.

### For More Information

- [\*Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and the Criminal Justice\*](#)

### Pray with St. John Paul II

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# open wide our hearts

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

## Racism and Voting

In the November 2018 pastoral letter against racism, Open Wide Our Hearts, the Catholic bishops of the United States urge all Catholics to acknowledge “the scourge of racism” that still exists in our hearts, words, actions, and institutions. Racism can be individual, when persons fail to recognize certain groups as created in the image and likeness of God and equal in dignity, or it can be systemic, where practices or policies treat certain groups of people unjustly. One example of systemic racism is lack of access to the vote for some communities of color.



The Church teaches that all persons have both a legal right and a responsibility to have their voice heard in the public square to promote human dignity and the common good of society. As people of faith, we have the obligation to help shape the moral character of society by voting and other acts of public participation. We also must act to ensure that the right to vote is protected for all citizens. This has often been threatened for many minorities in the U.S.

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*“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.”*

– U.S. bishops, Open Wide Our Hearts

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Sixty years ago, the United States Commission on Civil Rights [documented](#) a history of pervasive discrimination toward minorities in all aspects of voting, despite the 1870 Fifteenth Amendment that prohibits denying citizens the right to vote because of “[race](#), [color](#), or previous condition of servitude.” Since the 1870s, threats of violence and actual violence, especially in the South, had been used to discourage African Americans from voting. Government officials openly opposed minority voting. For example, U.S. Senator Theodore Bilbo of Mississippi called for Klansmen to visit African Americans the night before elections to send a message that they should not try to vote. [Poll “taxes”](#) became a part of the election system in many states, requiring money from poor sharecroppers for voting privileges. Literacy tests were another systematic attempt to deny voters of color access to the voting booth: in states where educational opportunities for minorities were very limited, many African Americans had little

or no literacy skills. Some of [these tests](#) were designed so no one could pass, such as demands to recite the entire U.S. Constitution or to count the bubbles in a bar of soap to prove math abilities. Gerrymandering, the practice of redrawing voting district boundaries, was historically [used to suppress](#) the African American vote.

These injustices prompted the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which was initially successful in eliminating many of the barriers to voting for minorities. However, a 2018 Report by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights detailed a [decline](#) in the Act's enforcement. The report suggests Latino Americans, Native Americans, and African Americans are facing new barriers to voting. [Some Catholic voices](#) are raising concerns about voter identification laws seen in many states in recent years. The Maryland Catholic Conference [opposed one such](#) legislative proposal in 2017, which would "make voting more difficult for people with disabilities, the elderly, and the poor," who "have already established their identities via voter registration."

State Catholic conferences have also been vocal about other issues related to access to voting, including [gerrymandering](#) and [restoration of voting rights](#). Others raise concerns about restrictions on early voting, lack of local and accessible registration opportunities and precinct voting locations

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([Universal Prayer on Day of Pardon](#))

(especially true in the South and on Native American reservations), and illegal purges of voting rolls, which disproportionately affect African-American and Latino American voters. [One in ten Latinos](#) have been harassed at polling places.



Today, too many barriers to the right to vote remain for minorities. In response, we are called to work to ensure that all are able to exercise their rights, as faithful citizens, to raise their voices in the public square.



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## Diocese of Austin

**Secretariat of Life, Charity and Justice**

**Black Ministry • Hispanic Ministry • Social Concerns**

The Offices of Black Ministry and Hispanic Ministry provide support to all matters related to the promotion of continued integration of African-American and Hispanic/Latino Catholics into parish and community life, and activities related to the spiritual, educational and societal well-being of Catholics who are served by these offices. The Office of Social Concerns serves as a central diocesan resource for social justice education, and advocacy in support of poor and vulnerable persons and communities. Social Concerns promotes awareness of Catholic social teaching, and opportunities to live the Baptismal call to love God and neighbor. While each of these offices are supported by the the Catholic Services Appeal, Black Ministry is also supported by the National Black and Indian Mission Office.