

Overcoming Racism



GATHER

OPENING PRAYER

"Lord of all, we pray for healing to address the persistent sin of racism, which is the rejection of the full humanity of some of your children, and the talents and potential you have given them. We pray for the grace to recognize the systems that do not support the dignity of every person, that do not promote respect for those who are seen as other, who bear the legacy of centuries of discrimination, fear, and violence. Give us eyes to see how the past has shaped the complex present.

"We pray for social structures in which children of color can grow up without fear, in security and dignity, with access to health care and a quality education that will allow them to develop their gifts.

"Empower us to create a new way forward, with a new sense of community that embraces and celebrates the rich diversity of all. Help us to live out your call to combat racism and hatred. Show us how to live in compassionate solidarity, supported by your grace and your love. We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen."

- Excerpted and condensed from *Prayer to Address the Sin of Racism*, 2018, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. See www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/racism/prayer-to-address-the-sin-of-racism.cfm.

REPORT ON ACTIONS

How have you been able to live your faith and serve others since your last meeting?

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

A reading from the holy gospel according to Luke (10:30-33)

"Jesus replied, 'A man fell victim to robbers as he went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. They stripped and beat him and went off leaving him half-dead. A priest happened to be

going down that road, but when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. Likewise, a Levite came to the place, and when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. But a Samaritan traveler who came upon him was moved with compassion at the sight." (Luke 10:30-33)

- What do you think was Jesus' purpose in making this story about a Samaritan—a group hated by his fellow Jews—the hero of this story?

Reflection. "Jesus fell a second time under the weight of the cross. He suffered immensely for his willingness to identify with our humanity. Undoubtedly, some who saw him were quick to look down on him unsympathetically, as being a criminal. One of the signs of prejudice is to separate ourselves from those we deem unworthy or inferior. Applying such biased thinking to whole groups, is a signal that racism has infected our thinking – like the hostility between Samaritans and the Jews in Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan. As soon as we start mentally separating people based on racial or ethnic stereotypes, we judge falsely and break the commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves."

- *Stations of the Cross: Overcoming Racism*. Written by Tom Faletti. Prepared for St. Peter's Parish, Washington, DC, March 2019, and adapted by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, March 2020. <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/racism/upload/stations-of-the-cross-overcoming-racism.pdf>

SOCIAL INQUIRY

"Consideration of racism is grounded in fundamental scriptural beliefs: equal dignity of all people, created in God's image; and Christ's redemption of all. The Catechism of the Catholic Church spells this out: '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' (no. 1935)."

- "Catholic Social Teaching (CST) and Racism," Fr. Fred Kammer, S.J., *Just South Quarterly*, Fall 2009. <http://www.loyno.edu/jsri/sites/loyno.edu.jsri/files/CSTandRacism-Fall2009jsq.pdf>

The images filling our screens now may feel like some disturbing déjà vu-history repeating itself from the 1960's or the Rodney King trial in 1993. Archbishop José Gomez, president of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, issued this statement on May 31, 2020, following the death of George Floyd during his arrest in Minneapolis:

"The killing of George Floyd was senseless and brutal, a sin that cries out to heaven for justice. How is it possible that in America, a black man's life can be taken from him while calls for help are not answered, and his killing is recorded as it happens?

...The cruelty and violence he suffered does not reflect on the majority of good men and women in law enforcement, who carry out their duties with honor. We know that. And we trust that civil authorities will investigate his killing carefully and make sure those responsible are held accountable.

But the violence of recent nights is self-destructive and self-defeating. Nothing is gained by violence and so much is lost...Legitimate protests should not be exploited by persons who have different values and agendas. Burning and looting communities, ruining the livelihoods of our neighbors, does not advance the cause of racial equality and human dignity."

- Statement of Archbishop José Gomez, Washington, D.C., May 31, 2020.

<http://www.usccb.org/news/2020/20-84.cfm>

In his acceptance speech for the 1964 Nobel Peace Prize, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., said that violence does not bring permanent change:

"Violence is impractical because it is a descending spiral ending in destruction for all. It is immoral because it seeks to humiliate the opponent rather than win his understanding; it seeks to annihilate rather than convert. Violence is immoral because it thrives on hatred rather than love. It destroys community and makes brotherhood impossible. It leaves society in monologue rather than dialogue. Violence ends up defeating itself. It creates bitterness in the survivors and brutality in the destroyers.

...The nonviolent resisters can summarize their message in the following simple terms: we will take direct action against injustice despite the failure of governmental and other official agencies to act first. We will not obey unjust laws or submit to unjust practices. We will do this peacefully, openly, cheerfully because our aim is to persuade. We adopt the means of nonviolence because our end is a community at peace with itself. We will try to persuade with our words, but if our words fail, we will try to persuade with our acts. We will always be willing to talk and seek fair compromise, but we are ready to suffer when necessary and even risk our lives to become witnesses to truth as we see it."

- "The Quest for Peace and Justice," Nobel Lecture, December 11, 1964.

<https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1964/king/lecture/>

"I did not know what to do...only that I wanted to do something. So, I asked one of my professors, an African-American man whom I greatly respected, whether we could get

together to talk. "I'm happy to talk, Matt," he said. "But the conversation you need to have is not with me, but with your white brothers and sisters.

"...Because I had loving parents who did not display the bigoted attitudes of the generations before them, you might think that I have lived a life free from personal complicity in prejudice and racism. That is not true. Our family histories are not the only histories we inherit.

"... I have often been judged, not by the content of my character, but by the color of my skin, and that judgment has nearly always redounded to my benefit."

- Matt Malone, S.J., "An open letter to my fellow white Americans," *America Magazine*, June 10, 2020, <https://www.americamagazine.org/politics-society/2020/06/08/open-letter-my-fellow-white-americans>

OBSERVE:

1. Watch this short video of Sr. Thea Bowman addressing the U.S. Catholic Bishops in 1989: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oyBio-7ib2I>. What has changed for Black Americans since then? What has not changed?
 - *Among racial and ethnic groups, in 2019 African Americans had the highest poverty rate, 27.4 percent, followed by Hispanics at 26.6 percent and whites at 9.9 percent. 45.8 percent of young black children (under age 6) live in poverty, compared to 14.5 percent of white children.*
 - Source: "The State of Working America," Economic Policy Institute, <http://www.stateofworkingamerica.org/index.html%3Fp=4193.html>
 - *Since Sr. Thea's speech in 1989, economic growth for the country at large has been increasingly decoupled from the rate of people in poverty. The top 20% are doing much better, while the bottom 50% have stagnated or dropped. And most Black Americans are in that bottom 50%.*
 - Source: "The State of Working America," Economic Policy Institute, <http://www.stateofworkingamerica.org/index.html%3Fp=4193.html>
 - *The wealth gap between white and Black Americans: At \$171,000, the net worth of a typical white family is nearly ten times greater than that of a Black family (\$17,150) in 2016. (Brookings) For example, housing discrimination—subprime lending that crashed in 2008 disproportionately affected black people, who still have less access to FHA loans.*
 - Source: [Kriston McIntosh](#), [Emily Moss](#), [Ryan Nunn](#), and [Jay Shambaugh](#), February 27, 2020, "Examining the Black-white wealth gap," Brookings Institution, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2020/02/27/examining-the-black-white-wealth-gap/>

2. What proposals have been put forth for addressing issues between police officers and Black civilians? (For example, search the internet for proposed changes in policing policy in [your state, your city, Congress]. Or search for proposals to fund teams trained in mental health to respond to 911 calls regarding the mentally ill or homeless.)
3. Name circumstances/experiences where you see an advantage to being White. Name circumstances/experiences where you see an advantage to being Black, Hispanic, Asian, etc.
4. What messages did you receive as a child and teen that shaped how you viewed Black people, perhaps unconsciously? For example, how were Black people portrayed in crime dramas on television? How were the police portrayed? Did you see positive images of Black people, other than as entertainers? How did adults around you speak about Black people, if at all? How did your peers relate to Black people? How were Black people's contributions to America conveyed in your school curriculum?

JUDGE:

1. How do you think the recent demonstrations, peaceful and violent will affect the policies of governments and police forces? How will this affect the broader society?
2. What is your response to Archbishop Gomez's statement?
3. Why is it important to acknowledge the concerns of people who feel they are judged by the color of their skin?
4. What can we say and show our children to teach them to value people of all races?
5. How does being the only one of a different color in a group affect the dynamics?
6. What are the causes of limited/unequal service – such as health care and education--for some and not others? Could this be described as passive racism? Why or why not?

ACT:

1. Based on what you have observed and decided, take one positive action to make a difference in your family life or in your local community.
2. Learn more about the stories of past oppression faced by people of color. Authors include James Baldwin, Ta-Nehisi Coates, Toni Morrison.
3. Search the internet for information about the roots of injustice. For example, search about the "Black Codes" after the Civil War, "redlining" with regard to housing, the history of policing Black people, or how the War on Drugs affected people of color differently from White people. Search for "penalties for crack cocaine" and "powder cocaine." Look for films on your favorite streaming service.

4. Take an intentional step to welcome new neighbors, socialize with people from other communities, and learn about people from other cultures, races, and backgrounds.
5. Invite a family of color to join your CFM group.
6. Invite someone of a different race, economic status or church affiliation to your next social inquiry meeting, dinner, or another event.
7. Research ways you can help the vulnerable have access to services and learn why they weren't already available.
8. Work to increase the ratio of color diversity where you have an influence to do so.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, through your redemptive power and through the guidance of the Church, help us aid all individuals, couples and families to fulfill God's mysterious design. Help us to live out your call to combat racism and hatred. Let us do God's will with the spirit of love and humility, so that we may be agents of your justice and mercy and receive the Kingdom of God in our lives. Amen.



Write about your group's experience with this Social Inquiry meeting and share it in *ACT*. Send stories to director@cfm.org.

See more meeting plans and directions for holding a CFM meeting, visit http://www.cfm.org/supplemental_materials

For more CFM meeting plans, become a member of the Christian Family Movement. <https://www.cfm.org/join-and-renew-form>

