



# open wide our hearts

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

## The Call to Address Racism in Our Hearts and Communities

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

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

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

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

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

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

## How Can I Respond?

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

## For More Information

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



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