



open wide our hearts

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

This is the tenth in a series of articles focused on helping share the important messages contained in this pastoral letter issued by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Walk Humbly with God: Working in Our Churches and Changing Structures

Racism will not end overnight. We instruct our priests, deacons, religious brothers and sisters, lay leaders, our parish staffs, and all the faithful to endeavor to be missionary disciples carrying forth the message of fraternal charity and human dignity. We ask them to fight the evil of racism by educating themselves, reflecting on their personal thoughts and actions, listening to the experience of those who have been affected by racism, and by developing and supporting programs that help repair the damages caused by racial discrimination. We need to continue to educate ourselves and our people about the great cultural diversity within our Church. One way to do this is to support actively the cause for canonization of the first African American saint. We can also promote knowledge of the martyrs, blessed, and saints of the different cultural groups and nationalities present in our midst, and propose them as models of faith for the entire Church. So many of our parishes are richly diverse, composed of people from various cultures and ethnic groups, such that they can be a model for the whole Church and for the country. We will redouble our efforts to promote vocations to marriage, priesthood, and religious life—especially within communities of color—so as to better reflect all of the People of God. We commit to preach with regularity homilies directed to the issue of racism and its impact on our homes, families, and neighborhoods, particularly on certain feast days and national holidays. We direct our priests and deacons to do the same.

The roots of racism have extended deeply into the soil of our society. 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 the 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. “Even in the developed world,” Pope Francis told members of the U.S. Congress, “the effects of unjust structures and actions are all too apparent. Our efforts must aim at restoring hope, righting wrongs, maintaining commitments, and thus promoting the well-being of individuals and of peoples.”

Certainly, we cannot accomplish this task alone. We call on everyone, especially all Christians and those of other faith traditions, to help repair the breach caused by racism, which damages the human family. Ecumenical and interreligious cooperation has been pivotal at key moments in our history, for instance, in the abolition of slavery and during the civil rights era. The leadership of the civil rights movement, especially that of Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., invited ecumenical and interreligious cooperation, as was seen when Catholics, Protestants, and Jews marched together. That spirit is integral to the fight today, and in some communities, the success of this effort will very much depend on this kind of collaboration. As religious leaders, we must continue this tradition.

Excerpt from “Open Wide Our Hearts: the enduring call to love”

A pastoral letter against racism from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops