

The Catholic Call for Antiracism Work

*The Gospel, Catholic Social Teaching, and the US Conference of Catholic Bishops
All Affirm the importance of Antiracism Work*

August 5, 2020

St. Joseph's Parish in Maplewood, New Jersey

-In the name of Jesus Christ, the Word made Flesh-

*He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to
do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?*

Micah 6:8

This We Believe

We affirm that Black Lives Matter precisely because it is demanded by the Gospel of Jesus Christ and by Catholic Social Teaching; it is likewise encouraged by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops that the Catholic faithful strive to eradicate racism through both a conversion of the heart and a reform of ecclesial, civil, and social institutions that suffer from systemic racism to this day (see [Open Wide Our Hearts](#)).

Gospel

All human persons are created in the image of God, and so our dignity is innate. However, this theological fact alone does not protect everyone's freedom to flourish in our social context. We are called to personal and social conversion to protect those whose dignity remains unrecognized because of personal and social sins and whose freedom to flourish remains restricted because of unjust systems and people.

We recognize that in our current social, political, criminal justice, legal, and economic context, Black Lives do not matter. Therefore, we unequivocally affirm as Catholics: Black Lives Matter. Naming identities in need of specific and preferential concern in a given context is not foreign to the New Testament, in which *specific identities* were called out by Jesus and other apostles. These individuals were disproportionately marginalized under unjust social sins prevalent in the New Testament context. Instead of saying "all lives matter,"

- Jesus said, "Samaritan lives matter" (John 4:4-26; Luke 10:25-37).
- Jesus said, "Canaanite lives matter" (Matthew 15:21-28).

- Jesus said, “Syrophoenician lives matter” (Mark 7:24-30)
- Jesus said, “Children’s lives matter” (Mark 5:21-43; 7:24-30; 9:14-29’ 6:14-29 9:33-37; 10:13-16; Matthew 15:21-28; Matthew 18:2-4; and others).
- Jesus said, “Roman lives matter” (Mark 5:21-43)

The Gospel narratives testify to more, too many to cite:

- Jesus said, “Gentile lives matter.”
- Jesus said, “Jewish lives matter.”
- Jesus said, “Women’s lives matter.”

Following Jesus, we say, “Black Lives Matter”.

Catholic Social Teaching

Principles of Catholic Social Teaching demand not only calling out injustices that take place near and far but also working to end personal and social sins that perpetuate those injustices. The below are paraphrases of related sections from [The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church](#).

- Innate **human dignity** demands that we organize civil and social systems that protect rather than neglect or harm the human person.
- The **common good** demands that we seek social relations that permit human persons to flourish freely and responsibly.
- The **preferential option for the oppressed** demands that our values, decisions, and actions prioritize the direct liberation of the marginalized over their (indirect or direct) oppression.
- **Solidarity** is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is, to the good of all and of each individual, ***because we are all really responsible for all***; we take the Incarnation, life, teachings, suffering, and death of Jesus Christ to be the perfect model of solidarity.
- **Subsidiarity** demands that local action is the first and best step toward living the gospel of Jesus Christ and constructing social systems that manifest the radical justice of the Reign of God.

USCCB’s Pastoral Letter Against Racism: *Open Wide Our Hearts*

The Bishops, in [their 2018 pastoral letter](#), hold that “racist acts are sinful because they violate justice.” They are quick to add that racist acts may occur “either consciously or unconsciously.” Most importantly,

“Racism can also be institutional, when practices or traditions are upheld that treat certain groups of people unjustly. The cumulative effects of personal sins of

racism have led to social structures of injustice and violence that ***makes us all accomplices in racism.***”

We participate in racist structures whether we like it or not, and ignoring this truth only perpetuates racism. Catholic silence in the face of racism leads to violence against Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (the letter explicitly names “Native Americans”, “Hispanics”, and “African Americans” as groups deleteriously affected by racism in the United States). The pastoral letter is unequivocal: systemic racism is perpetuated in the ecclesial, civil, and social institutions that make up our communities in the United States of America.

As Catholics, we refuse to remain silent. We resolve to work for justice in our values, our relationships, our families, our parishes, our communities, and in the structures that form our civil, legal, and social institutions. Systemic racism cannot be undone when we remain blind to the racist injustices that surround us. Yes, Jesus perceived the image of God in all human persons, and recognized that all of creation lived, breathed, and had their very being in Him the Incarnate Word (see Acts 17:28). However, Jesus of Nazareth *was not blind* to the *identities* of those who were unjustly suffering precisely *because* of their *identities* and *social positions* within the *context* of *1st-century Palestine*. The LORD saw the suffering that social sin (Original Sin) perpetuated on the bodies of marginalized members of society and sought to sanctify and incorporate their experiences into the Body of Christ, into His Body, without erasing their identities.

Though all are one in Christ Jesus, many remain marginalized by the structural sins that constitute our present social context of the 21st-century United States of America, here in Maplewood, in New Jersey, and elsewhere.

We encourage you to explore the following resources:

- The USCCB’s Ad Hoc Committee Against Racism has excellent resources here: <https://www.usccb.org/committees/ad-hoc-committee-against-racism>, including:
 - These educational resources: <https://www.usccb.org/committees/ad-hoc-committee-against-racism/combatting-racism-educational-resources?current=/node/25727>, which includes the [Examining our Subconscious Perceptions](#) Introduction and Exercise
 - The following 2-page introductions: [What Is Systemic Racism?](#) | [Racism and Economic Inequality](#) | [Racism and Education](#) | [Racism and Employment](#) | [Racism](#)

[and Housing](#) | [Racism and the Criminal Justice System](#) | [Racism and the Native American Experience](#) | [Racism and Voting](#) | [Racism and Immigration](#)

- *Open Wide Our Hearts*, their 2018 Pastoral Letter Against Racism:
<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/racism/upload/open-wide-our-hearts.pdf>
- Accompanying Study Guide to *Open Wide Our Hearts*:
<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/racism/upload/study-guide-open-hearts-2019-09.pdf>
- Practical Steps for Eradicating Racism: An Invitation
<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/racism/upload/action-steps-to-eradicate-racism.pdf>
- Interview of Fr. Bryan Massingale, a professor at Fordham:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ONiie2oYJCQ>
 - We urge you in particular to watch from 13:20: “What’s the greatest weakness with the Church’s engagement with the sin of racism? It frames its statements and its action in ways that are calculated not to disturb White people.”
- At prayer service for victims of racial violence, Bishop Burbidge announces new advisory council
https://www.catholicherald.com/News/Local_News/At_moving_prayer_service_for_victims_of_racial_violence_Bishop_Burbidge_announces_new_advisory_council/
- Bishop Anthony B. Taylor issued the following statement to the people of the Diocese of Little Rock, July 2, 2020, about Black Lives Matter:
<https://dolr.org/article/bishop-issues-black-lives-matter-statement>
- El Paso's Bishop Mark Seitz: Black lives matter:
<https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/el-pasos-bishop-mark-seitz-black-lives-matter>
- A Summary of Pope Francis’ response to the protests, including support for Bishop Mark Seitz who kneeled at a Black Lives Matter protest in El Paso:

<https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2020/06/03/pope-francis-bishops-george-floyd-protests-black-lives-matter>

We also implore other Catholic parish communities across the United States to form Social and Racial Justice ministries that answer the Bishops' call to eradicate racism not only from our hearts, but more importantly from our institutions and social structures.

Black Lives Matter
In Christ Jesus,

St. Joseph's Workers for Justice
A Catholic, lay-led Parish Ministry of St. Joseph's Parish in Maplewood, NJ
& Fr. Jim Worth, Pastor

About St. Joseph's Workers for Justice

This group is open to all who seek a better understanding of Catholic Social teaching regarding racial, economic, and gender justice and who wish to practice that teaching in works of transformative justice in our community and beyond. St. Joseph's two most well-known titles are "the Worker" and "the Just". The first one refers to his profession as a carpenter; St. Joseph the Worker is celebrated on May 1st to coincide with International Labor Day, thus honoring the dignity of work. The second title is celebrated on March 19th, and commemorates his just and righteous disposition. Drawing inspiration from St. Joseph, this group will be dedicated to learning and working for justice in our unjust world in the context of Catholic Social teaching, Theology, and History.