

# open wide our hearts

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

— A 6-SESSION STUDY —



THE INSTITUTE FOR  
**CATHOLIC FORMATION**

DIOCESE OF BRIDGEPORT

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# INTRODUCTION

*Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love* is a pastoral letter against racism. The letter, released in 2018, was developed by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Cultural Diversity in the Church and was approved by the full body of bishops. The letter is a call to all people of faith to open their hearts and minds to Christ's love for all people. It is an invitation to pray, listen, study, reflect, and respond with meaningful action in order to seek justice and address the sin of racism that still exists within our communities.

This six-part study, originally developed by parishioners at St. James Parish, is an opportunity to engage in meaningful study, dialogue, storytelling, and prayer around the topic of race in the United States. Each session includes opportunities to pray, listen, reflect, and respond, following this typical agenda:

## **1 Welcome and Introductions**

Help foster an environment of trust and honesty by allowing participants time to get to know one another. Ensuring that each person feels welcome may result in a deeper, more fruitful conversation.

## **2 Brief Prayer. USCCB Prayer Against Racism or others appropriate to the conversation**

## **3 Reaction to Homework and/or Witness**

Take a few minutes to review key terms and concepts from the preparatory materials. Invite participants to ask clarifying questions. Alternatively, you may wish to invite, in advance, someone to share prepared thoughts and reactions to about the issues to be covered in the session.

## **4 Lectio Divina: A reflective reading of scripture related to the topic**

More on how to pray [lectio divina](#) on pg 24

In these sessions, it may be necessary, for the sake of time, to use an abbreviated form of Lectio Divina. Invite participants to prepare themselves to hear the word of God and allow a few moments of silence. Open with a brief, spontaneous prayer, inviting the Holy Spirit to open your hearts and your minds.

Proclaim the reading twice, leaving adequate time after each reading for participants to respond. If you are meeting via digital platform, participants may speak their responses or write them in the chat. After the first reading, invite participants simply to name a word or phrase that stuck out to them without further comment or explanation. After the second reading, ask participants to share briefly what they believe God is saying to them through the passage. Remember that this is not to be an academic analysis of scripture, but a prayerful response. Conclude by asking God to continue to speak to the hearts and minds of those gathered.

## 5 Small Group Conversations

The small group conversations are based on mutual sharing following these agreed-upon rules:

- + Listen and speak with respect, compassion, curiosity.
- + One person speaks at a time, without interruption or comments.
- + Speak for yourself and from your own experience.
- + Hold stories or personal material in confidentiality.
- + Be willing to discover and explore, look for something new.

**Tip:** Check out this [Lifelong Mini Lesson](#) to learn ways to be a better listener! (3 min)



Before each small group conversation, review these rules. Tell the participants how much time they have. Remind participants that each person must be respectful of the time so that everyone has a chance to share.

## 6 Large Group Conversation/Debrief Small Group Conversations

This time is for participants to share with the large group themes or questions that surfaced in the small group conversations. Confidentiality must be maintained, respecting the personal stories that have been shared. You may wish to ask, in advance, for volunteers to act as reporters for each group.

## 7 Call to Action/Preparing for the Next Session

Briefly ask participants to prepare for the next session, directing them to the readings and other materials to be reviewed in advance. In some sessions, participants may be asked to take a simple action that moves toward eradicating racism.

## 8 Closing Prayer

**Note:** These sessions may be held in person or digitally, using virtual meeting platforms. If gathering online, be sure to explain briefly the features of the platform and etiquette for online gatherings. These may include where and when to use the mute feature; details regarding the use of chat or breakout rooms; how to request technical assistance; and/or a request to keep video on during discussions.

# SESSION 1

Date:

Time:

## 5 minutes Welcome

Welcome participants and thank them for coming. Go over any logistical or hospitality details. If you are gathering digitally, review the features of the platform and the etiquette for online gatherings.

## 2 minutes Opening Prayer (from Open Wide Our Hearts)

Mary, friend and mother to all,  
through your Son, God has found a way  
to unite himself to every human being,  
called to be one people,  
sisters and brothers to each other.

We ask for your help in following your Son,  
so that prejudice and animosity  
will no longer infect our minds or hearts  
but will be replaced with a love that respects  
the dignity of each person.

We ask for your help in calling on your Son,  
seeking forgiveness for the times when  
we have failed to love and respect one another.

Mother of the Church,  
the Spirit of your Son Jesus  
warms our hearts:  
pray for us.

We ask for your help in obtaining from your Son  
the grace we need to overcome the evil of racism  
and to build a just society.

## 13 minutes Introductions

Invite participants to introduce themselves and share briefly why they have joined the study. You may wish to have facilitators go first, then call on participants to share.

## 10 minutes Video – Bishop Fabre (7 min)



### **5 minutes Introduction to the Sessions**

*Provide a brief overview of the purpose for this study. You may wish to include the following points:*

- + Indifference is not an option. We cannot sit on the sidelines and say racism does not exist in our country, community, church, homes, and hearts.
- + Racism is a sin and a life issue. Discussing racism may make us feel uncomfortable. We are not called to be comfortable. We are called to love and to reject sin—and that often is uncomfortable. There may be other terms that make us uncomfortable – we will need to “reckon” with them.
- + We must seek healing. We must pray and work to rid ourselves of the harm that bias and prejudice causes. We may not want to think that we participate in racism, but we all come with biases. Those biases must be named, claimed, and healed in order to restore our broken society.

### **15 minutes Lectio Divina: 1 Corinthians 12:12-26**

*Briefly go over the process for this shared prayer before beginning.*

### **20 minutes Small Group Conversations**

*Review the rules for sharing and tell participants how much time they have.*

**Question:** What was the first experience with racism that you remember?

### **10 minutes Brief Summary of Small Group Discussions**

*This should be an overview of themes or questions that surfaced, maintaining confidentiality among participants who shared their personal experiences.*

### **5 minutes Call to Action: Preparing for the Next Session**

*Inform participants about where to find the materials and what should be completed in order to participate fully in the next session. Remind them of the date, time, and location of the next gathering.*

**5 minutes**    **Closing Prayer, USCCB "Prayer to Address the Sin of Racism"**

We pray for healing to address  
The persistent sin of racism  
Which rejects the full humanity  
Of some of your children,  
And the talents and potential You have given.

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.

We pray for graced structures  
So children of color in Flint, and all children,  
Have access to clean water and health care.

We pray for graced structures  
So children of color in Mississippi, and all children,  
Have quality education that will allow them to  
develop their gifts.

We pray for graced structures  
So children of color in Camden, and all children,  
Have homes where families can live in dignity  
and security.

We pray for graced structures  
So children of color in Chicago, and all children,  
Can grow up without fear,  
without the sound of gunshots.

Lord of all,  
we ask you to hear and answer our prayers.  
Give us eyes to see how the past  
Has shaped the complex present,  
And to perceive how we must create  
A new way forward,  
With a new sense of community  
That embraces and celebrates  
The rich diversity of all,  
That helps us live out your call to reject  
The sin of racism, the stain of hate,  
And to seek a compassionate solidarity  
Supported by Your grace and Your love.

We ask this through Christ, Our Lord. Amen.

## Preparing for Session 2



**Read:** *Open Wide Our Hearts*: Introduction, [pages 1-8](#) (up to Do Justice)  
Review the corresponding pages in the Study Guide.



**Watch:** ["Race and the Catholic Church,"](#) Sr. Melinda Pellerin (1 hour)



**Reflect:** An Examination of Conscience: A Look at Myself in the Mirror  
(from [A Prayer Service for Racial Healing in Our Land](#), USCCB)

- + **Have I** fully loved God and fully loved my neighbor as myself?
- + **Have I** caused pain to others by my actions or my words that offended my brother or my sister?
- + **Have I** done enough to **inform myself** about the sin of racism, its roots, and its historical and contemporary manifestations? Have I **opened my heart** to see how **unequal access** to economic opportunity, jobs, housing, and education on the basis of skin color, race, or ethnicity, has denied and continues to deny the equal dignity of others?
- + **Is there** a root of racism **within me** that blurs my vision of who my neighbor is?
- + **Have I** ever witnessed an occasion when someone "fell victim" to personal, institutional, systematic or social racism and I did or said nothing, leaving the victim to address their pain alone?
- + **Have I** ever witnessed an occasion when someone "fell victim" to personal, institutional, systematic or social racism with *me* inflicting the pain, acting opposite of love of God and love of neighbor?
- + **Have I** ever lifted up and aided a person who "fell victim" to personal, institutional, systematic or social racism and paid a price for extending mercy to the other? How did I react? Did my faith grow? Am I willing to grow even more in faith through my actions?

## SESSION 2

Date:

Time:

### **10 minutes** Welcome and Introductions

*Welcome all participants and thank them for joining the session. If there are new participants, ask each person to introduce themselves and share briefly why they have joined the study.*

### **5 minutes** Opening Prayer (from *Open Wide Our Hearts*)

Mary, friend and mother to all,  
through your Son, God has found a way  
to unite himself to every human being,  
called to be one people,  
sisters and brothers to each other.

We ask for your help in calling on your Son,  
seeking forgiveness for the times when  
we have failed to love and respect one another.

We ask for your help in obtaining from your Son  
the grace we need to overcome the evil of racism  
and to build a just society.

We ask for your help in following your Son,  
so that prejudice and animosity  
will no longer infect our minds or hearts  
but will be replaced with a love that respects  
the dignity of each person.

Mother of the Church,  
the Spirit of your Son Jesus  
warms our hearts:  
pray for us.

### **5 minutes** Introduction to Session and Homework Review

*Briefly review the following terms:*

- + Racism
- + Systemic Racism
- + The Sin of Racism

**10 minutes Reaction to Homework**

**15 minutes Lectio Divina: [Deuteronomy 10:14-22](#)**

*Briefly go over the process for this shared prayer before beginning.*

**25 minutes Small Group Conversations**

*Review the rules for sharing and tell participants how much time they have.*

**Question:** What in the readings or in the webinar that resonated with you or what was described for which you could say, "Yes, I have felt that way or acted that way also"?

**10 minutes Brief Summary of Small Group Discussions**

*This should be an overview of themes or questions that surfaced, maintaining confidentiality among participants who shared their personal experiences.*

**5 minutes Call to Action: Preparing for the Next Session**

**For next time:** Consider how your perceptions from your environment as you were raised. Have they affected the way you see people now? When you speak of racism, can you claim it to yourself? Are you still holding on to the idea that your parents or grandparents who held those ideas, but you never have?

*Inform participants about where to find the materials and what should be completed in order to participate fully in the next session. Remind them of the date, time, and location of the next gathering.*

**5 minutes**    **Closing Prayer, USCCB "Prayer to Address the Sin of Racism"**

We pray for healing to address  
The persistent sin of racism  
Which rejects the full humanity  
Of some of your children,  
And the talents and potential You have given.

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.

We pray for graced structures  
So children of color in Flint, and all children,  
Have access to clean water and health care.

We pray for graced structures  
So children of color in Mississippi, and all children,  
Have quality education that will allow them to  
develop their gifts.

We pray for graced structures  
So children of color in Camden, and all children,  
Have homes where families can live in dignity  
and security.

We pray for graced structures  
So children of color in Chicago, and all children,  
Can grow up without fear,  
without the sound of gunshots.

Lord of all,  
we ask you to hear and answer our prayers.  
Give us eyes to see how the past  
Has shaped the complex present,  
And to perceive how we must create  
A new way forward,  
With a new sense of community  
That embraces and celebrates  
The rich diversity of all,  
That helps us live out your call to reject  
The sin of racism, the stain of hate,  
And to seek a compassionate solidarity  
Supported by Your grace and Your love.

We ask this through Christ, Our Lord. Amen.

## Preparing for Session 3



**Read:** *Open Wide Our Hearts*, "Do Justice" ([pages 8-17](#))

Review the corresponding pages in the Study Guide.

### Articles:

["Racism and Criminal Justice,"](#) USCCB, pg 25

["Racism and Economic Inequality,"](#) USCCB, pg 27

["Racism and Employment,"](#) USCCB, pg 29

["Racism and Education,"](#) USCCB, pg 31

["Racism and Housing,"](#) USCCB, pg 33



**Watch:** ["Racism Yesterday and Today,"](#) Gloria Purvis (1 hour)



### Reflect:

- + What did you learn from watching the video? What did you not know before? What makes you uncomfortable?
- + Consider the following statements from *Open Wide Our Hearts*:
  - "This is the original meaning of justice, where we are in right relationship with God, with one another, and with the rest of God's creation. Justice was a gift of grace given to all of humanity" (p. 9).
  - "We cannot, therefore, look upon the progress against racism in recent decades and conclude that our current situation meets the standard of justice" (p. 10).
- + What have you considered a "just society"? How does that measure up to the statement made by the bishops?
- + How have the African, Native American, and Hispanic experiences been similar or different in regard to racism?

## SESSION 3

Date:

Time:

Location:

### 10 minutes Welcome, Introductions and/or Check In

Welcome all participants and thank them for joining the session. If there are new participants, ask each person to introduce themselves and share briefly why they have joined the study. For returning participants, invite each person to share one word that describes how they are feeling right now.

### 5 minutes Opening Prayer (from *Open Wide Our Hearts*)

Mary, friend and mother to all,  
through your Son, God has found a way  
to unite himself to every human being,  
called to be one people,  
sisters and brothers to each other.

We ask for your help in following your Son,  
so that prejudice and animosity  
will no longer infect our minds or hearts  
but will be replaced with a love that respects  
the dignity of each person.

We ask for your help in calling on your Son,  
seeking forgiveness for the times when  
we have failed to love and respect one another.

Mother of the Church,  
the Spirit of your Son Jesus  
warms our hearts:  
pray for us.

We ask for your help in obtaining from your Son  
the grace we need to overcome the evil of racism  
and to build a just society.

### 10 minutes Respond to Homework

- + What constitutes a just society?
- + What does *Open Wide Our Hearts* say about a just society?
- + What did you find interesting or surprising from the readings?

### 10 minutes Lectio Divina: [1 John 4:16-21](#)

Briefly review the process for this shared prayer before beginning.

**5 minutes** [Video – Sister Thea Bowman addressing the USCCB in 1989](#)  
(5 min)



### **30 minutes** [Small Group Conversations](#)

*Review the rules for sharing and tell participants how much time they have.*

**Questions:** In *Open Wide Our Hearts*, the bishops state, “We cannot look at the progress of the recent decades and conclude that our current situation meets the standard of justice.”

- + What evidence is there that the standard of justice is not being met?
- + Was there anything in particular in Gloria Purvis's webinar that struck you as it pertains to “being in right relationship with others” or creating a just society?
- + In reading about the experiences of those who are Native American, African American, and Hispanic American, what did you learn or find notable?

### **10 minutes** [Brief Summary of Small Group Discussions](#)

*This should be an overview of themes or questions that surfaced, maintaining confidentiality among participants who shared their personal experiences.*

### **5 minutes** [Call to Action: Preparing for the Next Session](#)

**For next time:** In preparation for the next session, “Love Goodness,” consider:

- + Can we begin to hear the news differently?
- + Can we begin to look at social media posts in new ways – and perhaps have the courage to engage others in off-line conversations?
- + Can we begin to address racist statements made by family members or friends?

*Inform participants about where to find the materials and what should be completed in order to participate fully in the next session. Remind them of the date, time, and location of the next gathering.*

### **5 minutes** [Closing Prayer: Prayer for Justice from jesuitresource.org](#)

Grant us, Lord God, a vision of your world as your love would have it:

a world where the weak are protected, and none go hungry or poor;

a world where the riches of creation are shared, and everyone can enjoy them;

a world where different races and cultures live in harmony and mutual respect;

a world where peace is built with justice, and justice is guided by love.

Give us the inspiration and courage to build it, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## Preparing for Session 4



**Read:** *Open Wide Our Hearts*, "Love Goodness" (pages 17-20)  
Review the corresponding pages in the Study Guide.

**Article:** ["Fr. Augustus Tolton, Ex-Slave and First Black Catholic Priest in U.S., Takes Steps To Sainthood,"](#) by Liam Stack; *The New York Times*, June 13, 2019



**Watch:** ["Racism in Our Streets and Structures,"](#) a panel discussion with Cardinal Wilton Gregory, Dr. Marcia Chatelain, Ralph McCloud, and Gloria Purvis; moderated by John Carr; (75 minutes)



(Note: You are encouraged to watch the entire dialogue; however, if time does not permit watching the entire conversation, please view the segment from 22:57-27:15.)



**Reflect:** Consider this statement from *Open Wide Our Hearts*, "When we begin to separate people in our thoughts for unjust reasons, when we start to see some people as 'them' and others as 'us,' we fail to love" (page 17).

- + In what situations might we separate people in our thoughts for unjust reasons?
- + To you, who has been a "them"? Who has been an "us"?
- + It seems as if the command of love can never be simply "live and let others be." Why is it not enough?
- + In what ways has society led us to believe that we can "live and let others be"?
- + In what ways are we obligated to refute this notion?

## SESSION 4

Date:

Time:

### 5 minutes **Welcome and Check In**

*Welcome all participants and thank them for joining the session. Invite each person to share one word that describes how they are feeling right now.*

### 5 minutes **Opening Prayer: Wake Me Up Lord** (from [USCCB Prayer Service for Racial Healing](#))

Wake me up Lord, so that the evil of racism

finds no home within me.

Keep watch over my heart Lord,

and remove from me any barriers to your grace,

that may oppress and offend my brothers and sisters.

Fill my spirit Lord, so that I may give

services of justice and peace.

Clear my mind Lord, and use it for your glory.

And finally, remind us Lord that you said,

“blessed are the peacemakers,

for they shall be called children of God.”

Amen.

### 5 minutes **Video - “Racism in Our Streets and Structures,” Dr. Marcia Chatelain** (22:57 – 27:15)



### **10 minutes Respond to Homework**

*Was there anything in the reading that you found notable or surprising?*

### **10 minutes Lectio Divina: [Luke 18:1-8](#)**

*For this session, read the scripture passage and allow for silence. Then read the passage again and ask “what words or phrases stand out to you?” Before beginning, tell participants that they simply should share the word or phrase from scripture. No further explanation or reflection need be shared at this time.*

### **25 minutes Small Group Conversations**

*Review the rules for sharing and tell participants how much time they have.*

#### **Questions:**

- + In what ways has society led us to believe that we can “live and let others be?”
- + In what ways are we obligated to refute this notion?

### **20 minutes Brief Summary of Small Group Discussions**

*This should be an overview of themes or questions that surfaced, maintaining confidentiality among participants who shared their personal experiences.*

### **5 minutes Call to Action: Preparing for the Next Session**

*Inform participants about where to find the materials and what should be completed in order to participate fully in the next session. Remind them of the date, time, and location of the next gathering.*

### **5 minutes Closing Prayer, taken from [USCCB A Prayer Service for Racial Healing in Our Land](#)**

God of Heaven and Earth,  
you created the one human family  
and endowed each person with great dignity.

Aid us, we pray, in overcoming the sin of racism.  
Grant us your grace in eliminating this blight  
from our hearts, our communities,  
our social and civil institutions.

Fill our hearts with love for you and our neighbor  
so that we may work with you  
in healing our land from racial injustice.

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.

## Preparing for Session 5



**Read:** *Open Wide Our Hearts*, "Walk Humbly with God" (pages 20-31)  
Review the corresponding pages in the Study Guide.

**Article:** ["Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life,"](#) Derald Wing Sue, PhD, *Psychology Today*, pg 35



**Watch:** ["What is Cultural Appropriation?"](#) 10 minutes



**Reflect:** Consider how you might commit to:

- + examining regularly your own sinfulness in regard to racism
- + continuing to educate yourself regarding racism
- + being open to new relationships
- + working for justice



### Terms to remember:

#### Cultural Appropriation

According to Cambridge Dictionary, cultural appropriation is "the act of taking or using things from a culture that is not your own, especially without showing that you understand or respect this culture." Typically, cultural appropriation occurs when a person or group invokes and attempts to replicate materials or traditions of a culture from which they have not been socialized, and do not fully understand. This may be done to make a profit, a fashion statement, and/or a joke

#### Microaggression

A statement, action, or incident regarded as an instance of indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against members of a marginalized group such as a racial or ethnic minority.

Microaggressions include three main categories:

**Microassaults:** Conscious and deliberate, either subtle or explicit discriminatory actions against another based on that person's heritage or identity.

**Microinsults:** Often unconscious communications that subtly convey rudeness and insensitivity and demean a person's heritage or identity.

**Microinvalidations:** Often unconscious communications that subtly exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person's identity.

Microaggressions often include hidden messages reflecting oppressive worldviews that can create and support marginalization, which is the treatment of a person, group, or concept as insignificant. An example of a microaggression is when a white person clutches their purse or checks their wallet as a black or Latino man approaches or passes by. The hidden message is "you and your group are criminals."

## SESSION 5

Date:

Time:

### 5 minutes **Welcome and Check In**

*Welcome all participants and thank them for joining the session. Invite each person to share one word that describes how they are feeling right now.*

### 3 minutes **Opening Prayer: Wake Me Up Lord** (from [USCCB Prayer Service for Racial Healing](#))

Wake me up Lord, so that the evil of racism  
finds no home within me.  
Keep watch over my heart Lord,  
and remove from me any barriers to your grace,  
that may oppress and offend my brothers and  
sisters.

Fill my spirit Lord, so that I may give  
services of justice and peace.  
Clear my mind Lord, and use it for your glory.  
And finally, remind us Lord that you said,  
"blessed are the peacemakers,  
for they shall be called children of God."  
Amen.

### 5 minutes **Respond to Homework**

*Briefly review the following terms.*

- + Cultural appropriation
- + Microaggressions

*Invite any reactions to the bishops' strong statements for "seminaries, deacons, formation programs, houses of formation, and all our educational institutions to break any silence around the issue of racism, to find new and creative ways to raise awareness, analyze curricula, and teach the virtues of fraternal charity."*

### 10 minutes **Lectio Divina: [Matthew 27:15-26](#)**

*Briefly review the process for this shared prayer before beginning.*

### 7 minutes **[Video: "What School Doesn't Teach Us About Slavery"](#)** (7 min)



### **25 minutes Small Group Conversations**

*Review the rules for sharing and tell participants how much time they have.*

#### **Questions:**

- + In what ways has the teaching of our American history played a role in systemic racism?
- + Does learning the vocabulary around cultural appropriation and microaggressions help you to examine your family's actions as you were growing up? Now?

### **15 minutes Brief Summary of Small Group Discussions**

*This should be an overview of themes or questions that surfaced, maintaining confidentiality among participants who shared their personal experiences.*

### **5 minutes Call to Action: Preparing for the Next Session**

*Inform participants about where to find the materials and what should be completed in order to participate fully in the next session. Remind them of the date, time, and location of the next gathering.*

### **5 minutes Closing Prayer, adapted from [“Dismantling Racism in My Family of God,”](#) from Xavier University**

Dear God, in our efforts to dismantle racism, we understand that we struggle not merely against flesh and blood but against powers and principalities—those institutions and systems that keep racism alive by perpetuating the lie that some members of the family are inferior and others superior.

Create in us new minds and hearts that will enable us to see brothers and sisters in the faces of those divided by racial categories.

Give us the grace and strength to rid ourselves of racial stereotypes that oppress some of us while providing entitlements to others.

Help us to create a Church and nation that embraces the hopes and fears of oppressed People of Color where we live, as well as those around the world.

Heal your family God, and make us one with you, in union with our brother Jesus, and empowered by your Holy Spirit.

Amen.

## Preparing for Session 6



**Read:** [“So You Want to Be An Ally,”](#) Caitlin Duffy, pg 39



**Watch:** [“Deconstructing White Privilege,”](#) 22 minutes



**Reflect:** Be prepared to answer these two questions by the next session:

- + What is the most important thing I have learned about myself during these sessions?
- + What do I feel like I need to know or practice more of in order to have the courage to speak up in my family and community?

## SESSION 6

Date:

Time:

### **5 minutes Welcome and Check In**

*Welcome all participants and thank them for joining the session. Invite each person to share one word that describes how they are feeling right now.*

### **5 minutes Opening Prayer: Wake Me Up Lord** (from [USCCB Prayer Service for Racial Healing](#))

Wake me up Lord, so that the evil of racism  
finds no home within me.  
Keep watch over my heart Lord,  
and remove from me any barriers to your grace,  
that may oppress and offend my brothers and sisters.  
Fill my spirit Lord, so that I may give  
services of justice and peace.  
Clear my mind Lord, and use it for your glory.  
And finally, remind us Lord that you said,  
"blessed are the peacemakers,  
for they shall be called children of God."  
Amen.

### **15 minutes Lectio Divina: Acts 4: 32-37**

*Briefly review the process for this shared prayer before beginning.*

### **5 minutes Respond to Homework**

*How do we show up to these conversations, whether we are white or a person of color? What are our traumas? How do we sit with these traumas in order to begin to heal them?*

### **20 minutes Small Group Conversations**

*Review the rules for sharing and tell participants how much time they have.*

#### **Questions:**

- + What is the most important thing I have learned about myself during these sessions?
- + What do I feel like I need to know or practice more of in order to have the courage to speak up in my family and community?

### **15 minutes Brief Summary of Small Group Discussions**

*This should be an overview of themes or questions that surfaced, maintaining confidentiality among participants who shared their personal experiences.*

**15 minutes Call to Action: What comes next?**

*Lead participants in a discussion about what comes next. What type of follow up is necessary? What do they need to learn more about? How will they invite others into these conversations?*

*Note: You may wish to use this resource to aid in discerning future steps for your group: [A Process for Group Discernment](#) pg 42*

**5 minutes Closing Prayer, adapted from "[Dismantling Racism in My Family of God](#)," from Xavier University**

Dear God, in our efforts to dismantle racism, we understand that we struggle not merely against flesh and blood but against powers and principalities—those institutions and systems that keep racism alive by perpetuating the lie that some members of the family are inferior and others superior.

Create in us new minds and hearts that will enable us to see brothers and sisters in the faces of those divided by racial categories.

Give us the grace and strength to rid ourselves of racial stereotypes that oppress some of us while providing entitlements to others.

Help us to create a Church and nation that embraces the hopes and fears of oppressed People of Color where we live, as well as those around the world.

Heal your family God, and make us one with you, in union with our brother Jesus, and empowered by your Holy Spirit.

Amen.

## APPENDIX

### Lectio Divina

*Lectio divina* is a method of praying the Scriptures. What better way to get to know God than by spending time with God's spoken word?

The practice of *lectio divina* traces its roots back to the early centuries in the Church. By the sixth century, St. Benedict had made it a regular practice in most monasteries. And while in its beginnings this prayer method was set aside for monks and religious, today *lectio divina* is a widely held practice by many laymen and laywomen.

*Lectio divina* is a slow, rhythmic reading and praying of a Scripture passage. You pick a passage and read it. Notice what arises within you as you read it. Then you read it again, and then again, noticing what words and phrases grab your heart and noticing the feelings that arise. You respond to God about whatever is stirring within as you read and pray with the passage. Finally, you rest and let God respond and speak to you.

Let's consider the formal steps. To begin, you might open with a short prayer, asking God to guide your prayer time. Then do the following:

#### **Read.**

Slowly and thoughtfully, read the Scripture passage the first time. What word or phrase captures your attention and grabs your heart? Linger with it whenever this happens.

#### **Reflect.**

Slowly and prayerfully, read the passage again. What is God saying to you in this passage? offering you? asking you? What feelings are arising within you?

#### **Respond.**

Slowly and prayerfully, read the passage again. Respond to God from your heart. Speak to God of your feelings and insights. Offer these to God.

#### **Rest.**

Possibly read the passage another time. Sit quietly in God's presence, asking, "What are you saying to me?" Rest in God's love, and listen.

As you end your prayer period, you might close with an Our Father or another short prayer. It might be helpful to jot down in a journal what arose during this time. What did you speak to God, and what did God offer you?



# open wide our hearts

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## 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

“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 the Day of Pardon)



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## Racial Economic Inequality

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 important systemic issue is race-based economic inequality.



As Pope Francis wrote in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangeliu 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 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.”*

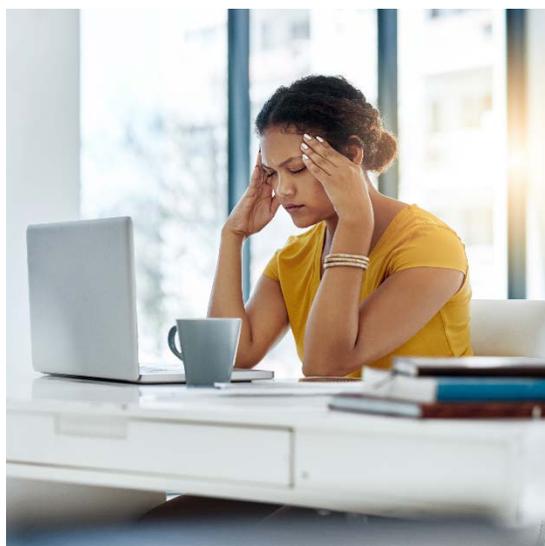
– *U.S. bishops, Open Wide Our Hearts*

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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 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 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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## Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life

### Is subtle bias harmless?

By Derald Wing Sue Ph.D., *Psychology Today*

Not too long ago, I (Asian American) boarded a small plane with an African American colleague in the early hours of the morning. As there were few passengers, the flight attendant told us to sit anywhere, so we choose seats near the front of the plane and across the aisle from one another.

At the last minute, three white men entered the plane and took seats in front of us. Just before takeoff, the flight attendant, who is white, asked if we would mind moving to the back of the aircraft to better balance the plane's weight. We grudgingly complied but felt singled out as passengers of color in being told to "move to the back of the bus." When we expressed these feelings to the attendant, she indignantly denied the charge, became defensive, stated that her intent was to ensure the flight's safety, and wanted to give us some privacy.

Since we had entered the plane first, I asked why she did not ask the white men to move instead of us. She became indignant, stated that we had misunderstood her intentions, claimed she did not see "color," suggested that we were being "oversensitive," and refused to talk about the matter any further.

Were we being overly sensitive, or was the flight attendant being racist? That is a question that people of color are constantly faced with in their day-to-day interactions with well-intentioned white folks who experience themselves as good, moral and decent human beings.

### The Common Experience of Racial Microaggressions

Such incidents have become a commonplace experience for many people of color because they seem to occur constantly in our daily lives.

- When a white couple (man and woman) passes a black man on the sidewalk, the woman automatically clutches her purse more tightly, while the white man checks for his wallet in the back pocket. (Hidden message: Blacks are prone to crime and up to no good.)
- A third-generation Asian American is complimented by a taxi cab driver for speaking such good English. (Hidden message: Asian Americans are perceived as perpetual aliens in their own country and not "real Americans.")
- Police stop a Latino male driver for no apparent reason but to subtly check his driver's license to determine immigration status. (Hidden message: Latinas/os are illegal aliens.)
- American Indian students at the University of Illinois see Native American symbols and mascots, exemplified by Chief Illiniwek dancing and whooping fiercely during football games. (Hidden message: American Indians are savages, blood-thirsty, and their culture and traditions are demeaned.)

In our eight-year research at Teachers College, Columbia University, we have found that these racial microaggressions may, on the surface, appear like a compliment or seem quite innocent and harmless, but nevertheless, they contain what we call demeaning meta-communications or hidden messages.

## What Are Racial Microaggressions?

The term racial microaggressions was first coined by psychiatrist Chester Pierce, M.D., in the 1970s. But the concept is also rooted in the work of Jack Dovidio, Ph.D. (Yale University) and Samuel Gaertner, Ph.D. (University of Delaware) in their formulation of aversive racism—many well-intentioned whites consciously believe in and profess equality, but unconsciously act in a racist manner, particularly in ambiguous situations.

Racial microaggressions are the brief and everyday slights, insults, indignities and denigrating messages sent to people of color by well-intentioned white people who are unaware of the hidden messages being communicated. These messages may be sent verbally (“You speak good English.”), nonverbally (clutching one’s purse more tightly), or environmentally (symbols like the confederate flag or using American Indian mascots). Such communications are usually outside the level of conscious awareness of perpetrators. In the case of the flight attendant, I am sure that she believed she was acting with the best of intentions and probably felt aghast that someone would accuse her of such a horrendous act.

Our research and those of many social psychologists suggest that most people, like the flight attendant, harbor unconscious biases and prejudices that leak out in many interpersonal situations and decision points. In other words, the attendant was acting with bias—she just didn’t know it. Getting perpetrators to realize that they are acting in a biased manner is a monumental task because (a) on a conscious level they see themselves as fair-minded individuals who would never consciously discriminate, (b) they are genuinely not aware of their biases, and (c) their self image of being “a good moral human being” is assailed if they realize and acknowledge that they

possess biased thoughts, attitudes and feelings that harm people of color.

To better understand the type and range of these incidents, my research team and other researchers are exploring the manifestation, dynamics and impact of microaggressions. We have begun documenting how African Americans, Asian Americans, American Indians and Latina(o) Americans who receive these everyday psychological slings and arrows experience an erosion of their mental health, job performance, classroom learning, the quality of social experience, and ultimately their standard of living.

## Classifying Microaggressions

In my book, [Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender and Sexual Orientation](#) (John Wiley & Sons, 2010), I summarize research conducted at Teachers College, Columbia University which led us to propose a classification of racial microaggressions. Three types of current racial transgressions were described:

- **Microassaults:** Conscious and intentional discriminatory actions: using racial epithets, displaying white supremacist symbols—swastikas, or preventing one’s son or daughter from dating outside of their race.
- **Microinsults:** Verbal, nonverbal, and environmental communications that subtly convey rudeness and insensitivity that demean a person’s racial heritage or identity. An example is an employee who asks a co-worker of color how he/she got his/her job, implying he/she may have landed it through an affirmative action or quota system.
- **Microinvalidations:** Communications that subtly exclude, negate or nullify the thoughts, feelings

or experiential reality of a person of color. For instance, white people often ask Latinos where they were born, conveying the message that they are perpetual foreigners in their own land.

Our research suggests that microinsults and microinvalidations are potentially more harmful because of their invisibility, which puts people of color in a psychological bind: While people of color may feel insulted, they are often uncertain why, and perpetrators are unaware that anything has happened and are not aware they have been offensive. For people of color, they are caught in a Catch-22. If they question the perpetrator, as in the case of the flight attendant, denials are likely to follow. Indeed, they may be labeled "oversensitive" or even "paranoid." If they choose not to confront perpetrators, the turmoil stews and percolates in the psyche of the person taking a huge emotional toll. In other words, they are damned if they do and damned if they don't.

Note that the denials by perpetrators are usually not conscious attempts to deceive; they honestly believe they have done no wrong. Microaggressions hold their power because they are invisible, and therefore they don't allow whites to see that their actions and attitudes may be discriminatory. Therein lays the dilemma. The person of color is left to question what actually happened. The result is confusion, anger and an overall draining of energy.

Ironically, some research and testimony from people of color indicate they are better able to handle overt, conscious and deliberate acts of racism than the unconscious, subtle and less obvious forms. That is because there is no guesswork involved in overt forms of racism.

### **Harmful Impact**

Many racial microaggressions are so subtle that neither target nor perpetrator may entirely understand what is happening. The invisibility of racial microaggressions may be more harmful to people of color than hate crimes or the overt and deliberate acts of white supremacists such as the Klan and Skinheads. Studies support the fact that people of color frequently experience microaggressions, that it is a continuing reality in their day-to-day interactions with friends, neighbors, co-workers, teachers, and employers in academic, social and public settings.

They are often made to feel excluded, untrustworthy, second-class citizens, and abnormal. People of color often describe the terrible feeling of being watched suspiciously in stores, that any slipup they make would negatively impact every person of color, that they felt pressured to represent the group in positive ways, and that they feel trapped in a stereotype. The burden of constant vigilance drains and saps psychological and spiritual energies of targets and contributes to chronic fatigue and a feeling of racial frustration and anger.

Space does not allow me to elaborate on the harmful impact of racial microaggressions, but I summarize what the research literature reveals. Although they may appear like insignificant slights, or banal and trivial in nature, studies reveal that racial microaggressions have powerful detrimental consequences to people of color. They have been found to: (a) assail the mental health of recipients, (b) create a hostile and invalidating work or campus climate, (c) perpetuate stereotype threat, (d) create physical health problems, (e) saturate the broader society with cues that signal devaluation of social group identities, (f) lower work productivity and problem solving abilities, and (g) be partially responsible for creating inequities in education, employment and health care.

## Future Posts

I realize that I have left many questions unanswered with this posting, but my research team and I plan to continue updating our findings for readers to consider. For readers who desire a more thorough understanding of microaggressions, I recommend two major sources on the topic published this year (2010): [Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation](#) and [Microaggressions and Marginality: Manifestation, Dynamics and Impact](#). Both can be accessed through the John Wiley & Sons website.

Future posts will deal with questions such as: How do people of color cope with the daily onslaught of racial microaggressions? Are some coping strategies better than others? How do we help perpetrators to become aware of microaggressions? What are the best ways to prevent them at an

individual, institutional and societal level? Do other socially marginalized groups like women, LGBTs, those with disabilities, and religious minorities experience microaggressions? In what ways are they similar or different? Is it possible for any of us to be born and raised in the United States without inheriting the racial, gender and sexual orientation biases of our ancestors? Are you personally a racist, sexist, or heterosexist? What is the best way for the average U.S. citizen to overcome these biases?

The first step in eliminating microaggressions is to make the "invisible" visible. I realize how controversial topics of race and racism, gender and sexism and sexual orientation and heterosexism push emotional hot buttons in all of us. I am hopeful that our blogs will stimulate discussion, debate, self-reflection, and helpful dialogue directed at increasing mutual respect and understanding of the multiple social identities we all possess.

## So You Want to Be a White Ally: Healing from white supremacy

By Caitlin Duffy

White people aren't inherently bad or broken. We are humans, born into and conditioned by a toxic culture of whiteness.

I am a person underneath my ancestors' assimilation and my social inheritance of this culture in the U.S., including the biases it seeds in me, the privileges it affords me, the realities it numbs me from, and the history and lineages it obscures.

This has been a simple but profound reckoning for me as an aspiring white "ally," especially since I've spent most of my life wanting little to do with people like me or my family.

I'm a descendant of Irish, German, and Polish immigrants with deep roots in New Jersey, some going back to the 1600s. My family has next-to-no remnants of the identities and cultures that my ancestors brought from Europe. Michael Eric Dyson, a Black professor of sociology and former pastor, describes the intergenerational process of (white) Americanization as [a dramatic makeover](#), "breaking down, or at least to a degree, breaking up ethnicity and then building up an identity that was cut off from the old tongue and connected to the new land." This process has isolated my family in many ways.

I grew up in a rural area and small town where 90 percent of the population was white. My first significant engagement with a community of color was through elementary school friends who had immigrated from Costa Rica. Growing up together, I was fascinated by their strong community ties and the collective sense of self expressed and reinforced through their ethnicity, faith, and rich cultural traditions such as food, music, and dance.

Looking back, I realize that they represented what my soul craved, but had not experienced, through white culture.

This has become clearer to me over the past 10 years, as I've sought out opportunities to learn about race and racism in my academic and personal life, and about diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in my work in philanthropy.

I've met hundreds of white peers in the nonprofit sector. We try to understand the harshness of our country's legacy of racial terrorism, and the ways it still manifests today. We work to unpack our unconscious biases, and change our behavior to minimize harm to people of color around us. We read articles and participate in book clubs. We attend trainings and pack conference sessions dedicated to DEI, courageous conversations, and power dynamics. Many of us have been fortunate to benefit from the life experiences and teachings of incredible leaders of color like [Lori Villarosa](#), [Allen Kwabena Frimpong](#), [Kerrien Suarez](#), [Jara Dean-Coffey](#), [Desiree Adaway](#), [Angela Park](#), [Keecha Harris](#), [Bina Patel](#), and [Vu Le](#).

In our learning about the extreme harm that white supremacy enacts on Black and Brown bodies, it can be easy to get stuck in guilt and shame about whiteness. These emotions can be leveraged for important action, though I don't believe it serves us or others to stay in them, especially when heeding important calls to "collect" and "call in" white friends, family members, and colleagues.

Jardana Peacock, a white spiritual teacher and student of antiracist activist Anne Braden, [says she was](#) "the girl always calling out other white

people, the voice of truth and accountability," yet she was "pushing most all of the white people away, except those more radical than myself."

This was very much my experience, especially because I was angry.

Angry because my good intent wasn't enough. Because the things I'd see and hear things from other white folks reflected back frustration with my own whiteness. Because if I was going to hold myself to high standards, then others like me should, too. Because we need change now, and I wanted other white people – especially those I love – to understand that the same way I did.

I was so self-righteous that a mentor said I was like rushing water, trying to push people against their will. How could I become like a flowing river, to instead bring people along with me?

One teacher who has supported me in this is Sandra Kim, founder of the online platforms [Everyday Feminism](#) and [Re-Becoming Human](#). Sandra talks about how we must build the emotional and spiritual capacity of white people to care for the pain of internalized white supremacy, so that it can be transformed into a compassionate call to action.

Sandra describes compassion as a naturally arising human response in the presence of pain – one that is stunted by our unconscious conditioning. To help people like me identify our normalized wounds, she defines the core pains of whiteness as:

- **Disconnection from the reality of white supremacy, and therefore from people of color and white people with different racial consciousness;**

- **Disconnection from ourselves, especially from our bodies, hearts, and spirits;**

- **Disconnection from our lineages, including blood, ethnic, spiritual, and land ancestors;**

- **Disconnection from nature, including the land, water, animals, plants, minerals, and our natural rhythms.**

That's why she connects our desire to hold deeper compassion for others with the need for us to deepen our containers for our own pain first. So many of us see fires around us and want to help, but we often only add to the flames because we're on fire ourselves. We have to acknowledge and care for these pains.

Edgar Villanueva, a long-time grantmaking practitioner and Native American leader, offers similar recommendations regarding our full, feeling selves. In his seminal book, [Decolonizing Wealth](#), he says, "Settlers and their descendants have to grieve the lives of their ancestors, the culture that made their domination and exploitation even imaginable, possible, and acceptable. What confused, numbed, dissociated hell it must have been, on a deep level, even if they enjoyed benefits on other levels. Hurting people hurt others."

Combined with ongoing education and [reparations](#), I believe that one of the most powerful things that people of European descent like me can do is to reckon with how white supremacy has dehumanized us and our families in these ways, and identify our own stake in racial justice. Questions that have guided me in this include:

- **What can healing look and feel like for white people, so that we can show up in multiracial workplaces and social movements in more effective, grounded ways?**

- **How can we recognize and treat white "fragility" as a trauma response to generations of isolating**

## **individualism and disconnection from our shared humanity?**

### **• What is our north star for a different way of being – not just doing? And not just as white people, but as humans?**

Resmaa Menakem, a Black therapist and social worker who specializes in trauma work, says that [the place to start is with our bodies](#), which must integrate both our learning and our unlearning. He writes, "We've tried to teach our brains to think better about race. But white-body supremacy doesn't live in our thinking brains. It lives and breathes in our bodies."

One venue where I've found a deep community of practice for ancestral healing and reembodiment has been with the Healing Team of the [DC chapter](#) of Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ). Together, we experiment with dialogue, reflection, ritual, and more holistic ways of being. Conscious breath, mindfulness, song, and movement have all been powerful practices for reconnecting with my body, voice, and emotions, and for holding space for those of others.

This approach to anti-racism has helped me peel back the layers of my anger to find pain, loneliness, and grief over the loss of community, culture, and identity in my lineage. It has provided more space for joy in my life and relationships with other white people, like the Healing Team, as well. Lebanese poet Khalil Gibran beautifully described this when [he wrote](#), "The deeper that sorrow carves into your being, the more joy you can contain."

Now when anger arises within me, I'm able to see it as an indication that something has been broken, such as an explicit agreement or an unspoken value that I hold. I'm better able to treat myself and others with compassion, and to give and receive feedback. This has strengthened my ability to engage with others around issues of race and racism in my family and my work; for example, in organizing caucuses with white peers in philanthropy. I also continue to take educational courses like ["Roots Deeper Than Whiteness"](#) with White Awake, and I donate monthly to local groups like the [Diverse City Fund](#), where I served on the "Board of Instigators" for three years.

I encourage you to find your own community of practice, and I invite you into relationship. I believe this work can help move us beyond white-savior charity mindsets and performative allyship, and build a foundation for more authentic, accountable relationships and collective liberation.

In [the words](#) of Richael Faithful, a Black healing justice practitioner whose teachings have influenced my life, "Ending white supremacy is as much about humanizing people of color as it is about reclaiming whites' own humanity."

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## A Process for Group Discernment

Building on our efforts to pray together, reach out together, and learn together, this process can help us discern how God is now calling us to act together.

### GROUP DISCERNMENT

We've prayed and reflected on the Gospel call to do justice. We've reached out to encounter others. We've gained new understanding of a problem or issue that community members care deeply about. We've brought the issue to prayer and studied it in the light of Catholic social teaching. We've gathered more information and sought to uncover root causes.

Now what?

Group discernment involves prayerfully reviewing and reflecting on our experience of prayer, encounter and learning in order to gain clarity on two questions: "What is the Holy Spirit calling us to do?" and "How can we best do it?"

Start by reflecting and discussing together our experiences so far praying together, reaching out together, and learning together.

### PRAY TOGETHER

When we pray together, God transforms us both individually and as members of the Body of Christ who are sent on mission in the world. As our guide and foundation, prayer inspires all we do, and we continually engage in and return to prayer even as we reach out, learn and act. Consider these questions as we begin.

- + How have we experienced God's call to respond in this particular area?
- + What have been the fruits of our prayer together on this issue?

### REACH OUT TOGETHER

Reaching out begins with encountering one another in our families and faith communities, and expands to our neighborhoods and the wider community. Reaching out acknowledges the many parts of the Body of Christ and is necessary to building a foundation from which we can learn and act together. Here are some questions to reflect on our experience in reaching out.

- + Who did we encounter through reaching out (to members of our faith community, the neighborhood, the wider church or community, etc.)?
- + What did we learn through reaching out?
- + How did this experience open our eyes to problems, issues and circumstances in new ways?
- + Who else's voices and experiences might be important for us to listen to?

### LEARN TOGETHER

Transformed by our encounter with God and neighbor, we strive to learn more about those issues impacting us and those around us. Catholic social teaching illuminates the problems facing our local and global communities with the light of our faith and guides us as we seek to understand root causes and discern how we are called to act. Ask these questions to recall our experience learning together.

- + What light do Scripture and Catholic social teaching shed on this issue?

- + What research, fact finding, or learning did we do to explore root causes?
- + What did we learn about why the situation, issue or problem exists? Note especially any economic, social, cultural, political, or historical factors.
- + Is there any additional information still needed in order to be ready to act?
- + Who else might we approach or involve in order to understand this challenge?
- + Who else is already working to address this issue? What are they doing? What gaps are there?
- + What is our faith community currently doing to address this issue in the areas of service / relief, community development, advocacy, and ethical practices? What gaps are there?
- + What are our strengths? What skills and expertise do we have at our disposal?
- + Who or what is within our sphere of influence—where can we realistically make a difference?

Now we are ready to consider how the Holy Spirit might be calling us to act.

### **ACT TOGETHER**

Prayer, reflection and learning necessarily lead to action. Action might occur through service and relief, community development, advocacy, ethical choices and practices, or all of the above. Here are some questions that can help as we seek to identify what action we might take.

- + How can action be done in a way that involves the entire faith community?
- + How can those most affected by the problem or issue be a part of any solutions?

Discerning how the Holy Spirit is calling us to act can be a big task. If this process seems difficult, a diocesan social concerns representative may be able to help.