



## Confronting Racism: A Call to Conversion

It has been a month since George Floyd died at the hands of a police officer. Two weeks ago we witnessed the death of Rayshard Brooks. Their deaths were preceded by those of Manuel Ellis, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and others before them. These events are clear indicators that racism in its many forms still pervades our communities. They compel Catholics to open wide our hearts.

As *Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call To Love – A Pastoral Letter Against Racism* reminds us, racism is an evil that demeans our faith: “Every racist act – every such comment, every joke, every disparaging look as reaction to the color of skin, ethnicity, or place of origin – is a failure to acknowledge another person as a brother or sister, created in the image of God.” Furthermore, as Catholics we uphold the consistent ethic of life. In *Open Wide Our Hearts*, the bishops remind us that racism is a *life issue*: “Racism directly places brother and sister against each other, violating the inherent dignity in each person.”

In confronting racism we are called to identify the multiple ways it pervades society. In *Open Wide Our Hearts* the bishops recognize that racism may be the sin of an individual, but it is also the result of institutional practices. For example, as a disproportionate number of Black Americans experience economic and social disparity, the bishops write that, “The poverty experienced by many of these 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.”

Over the past several weeks we have witnessed peaceful protests and protests marred by destruction. Some destruction was caused by opportunists and looters falsely hiding under the guise of protestors. The church always advocates for non-violent, peaceful change. At the same time, we are reminded of Pope Paul VI’s words: “If you want peace, work for justice.” An end to protests will not bring about peace. Peace can only exist when we properly address the injustice and causes of racism.

In the recent aftermath of the deaths of Black Americans, Catholics are called to pray and act. As Archbishop Paul Etienne stated in “A Call to Address Racism in Our Hearts and Community,” we must “continue to pray and work together for the personal and societal conversions necessary to address the evils of racism.” The faithful are called to ongoing conversion as followers of Christ. Via conversion of our hearts we can bring about change in individuals, institutions, and society. This call to action is imperative. As noted in *Open Wide Our Hearts*, “. . . too often racism comes in the form of the sin of omission, when individuals, communities, and even churches remain silent and fail to act against racial injustice when it is encountered.”

In searching for a way to move forward, we suggest starting with USCCB’s webpage on [Combatting Racism](#) or this archdiocesan [faith formation page](#). Start a ministry in your parish, form a small group in your parish to [discuss Open Wide Our Hearts](#), incorporate lessons on racism into [faith formation classes](#), initiate a [prayer service](#), learn about [systemic](#) racism, use the [adult education resources](#) for yourself or a group of friends, watch or read *Just Mercy* (or another book or movie) with a group and use this [study guide](#), or join a community organization or activity. Start small or start big, and pray for our conversions and that of our nation.

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