



open wide our hearts

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

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 *Evangelii 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.

“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*

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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