

Discussing racism can lead to understanding, healing  
Pamela Harris

Are ongoing conversations on racism still relevant?

The answer is “yes, absolutely.” Such conversations have been and are occurring. Understanding these efforts empowers our diocese and its people in combating the sin of racism and leading all in the Church toward recognizing one another as God’s children.

In 2017, the Ad Hoc Committee Against Racism was established by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) in response to a resurgence of racism. In 2018, the bishops approved the most recent pastoral letter against racism, “Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love.” I say “most recent” because several were written prior to this one:

- “On Racial Harmony,” A Statement Approved by the Administrative Board, National Catholic Welfare Conference, 1963.
- “Brothers and Sisters to Us,” U.S. Catholic Bishops Pastoral Letter on Racism, 1979.
- “What We Have Seen and Heard,” A Pastoral Letter on Evangelization From the Black Bishops of the United States, 1984.
- “The Racial Divide in the United States,” A Pastoral Letter by The Most Rev. Edward K. Braxton, Diocese of Belleville, Illinois, 2015.
- “Reconciled Through Christ,” On Reconciliation and Greater Collaboration Between Hispanic American Catholics and African American Catholics, 2016.

This list does not include the many letters and statements from bishops across the nation calling for peace and reconciliation – a call that we all echo, to adopt a non-violent response to the racial injustices in our country. With this call is an opportunity to share our experiences and stories on how racism continues to impact our families and communities. We are invited to accompany one another effecting positive change in our society and Church.

The Ad Hoc Committee Against Racism, in its work to promote justice and equality in the Catholic Church, conducted a listening session in the Diocese of Columbus in June 2019. The

participants completed a survey that was submitted to the committee at USCCB for a national report. The diocesan report included the following recommendations:

- To provide diversity and inclusion training for all staff, clergy and seminarians.
- To promote solution-oriented sessions in which acts of racism and their causes are discussed.
- To foster the sharing of stories and personal experiences in venues throughout the diocese such as the Men's and Women's Conferences, youth and young adult conferences and parish presentations.
- To offer training on how to talk with someone in the family, at work or in the parish about racism.
- To encourage all Catholics to foster cross racial dialogue and build intercultural competencies with one another

The diocesan Ethnic Ministries Office continues to collaborate with other diocesan offices, parishes and schools to promote the rich diversity of the Church, to foster peace and justice in our communities and to “be doers of the word and not hearers only” (James 1:22). We do this by conforming ourselves to the will of God and walking in the footsteps of Christ.

Right now, there is an urgent need to focus on the lives of Black people. We can address the needs of the African American community without ignoring the valid injustices of other marginalized groups. Our commitment to advocating for a just and equal society for all people is a testimony to our solidarity with one another.

I invite you to participate in the courageous conversations on racism. I also invite you to view the listening session diocesan report in its entirety on our webpage, [www.columbuscatholic.org/cem](http://www.columbuscatholic.org/cem). Let us together, as a people of God, be open to honest, meaningful and productive dialogue, so that we can have lasting healing in our community.

*Contact Pam Harris, [ethnicministries@columbuscatholic.org](mailto:ethnicministries@columbuscatholic.org), to schedule a courageous conversation on racism.*