



CALIFORNIA
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE

CALIFORNIA BISHOPS ANNOUNCE INITIATIVE TO ADDRESS PERSONAL, COLLECTIVE SIN OF RACISM

**Statewide, Year-Long Effort Begins with Listening Session with
African American Catholic Community to Examine the Impact of Racism**

**For Immediate Release
September 9, 2020**

“Conversion is a long road to travel for the individual. Moving our nation to a full realization of the promise of liberty, equality, and justice for all is even more challenging. However, in Christ we can find the strength and the grace necessary to make that journey.”

- Open Wide Our Hearts, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2018

Today, on the Feast of St. Peter Claver, we, the Roman Catholic Bishops of California, are meeting with African American Catholic leaders to begin a journey aimed at converting our hearts to more fully understand the extent and nature of the sin of racism in ourselves, our Church and our nation. This journey is intended to offer tangible change, in which the Bishops, together with the clergy, religious and faithful of California participate.

This journey must necessarily begin for each of us with a personal reflection. We heed the words of St. Pope John Paul II, who reminds us to look at our own role as we attempt to understand and right the wrongs of our larger society:

“[I]t is not out of place to speak of "structures of sin," which...are rooted in personal sin, and thus always linked to the concrete acts of individuals who introduce these structures, consolidate them and make them difficult to remove. And thus they grow stronger, spread, and become the source of other sins, and so influence people's behavior.” Sollicitudo Rei Socialis (n. 36)

Forming Conscience for Faithful Citizenship [22-23] brings this concretely home to us when the U.S. Bishops write:

[A]cts that directly violate the sanctity and dignity of human life are also intrinsically evil. These must always be opposed. Other direct assaults on innocent human life...can never be justified. Nor can violations of human dignity, such as acts of racism...ever be justified.

Opposition to intrinsically evil acts, which undercut the dignity of the human person, should also open our eyes to the good we must do, that is, to our positive duty to contribute to the common good and to act in solidarity with those in need. As St. John Paul II said, "The fact that only the negative commandments oblige always and under all circumstances does not mean that in the moral life prohibitions are more important than the obligation to do good indicated by the positive commandment" (Veritatis Splendor, no. 52). Both opposing evil and doing good are essential obligations.

The preliminary elements of our journey to address the sin of racism have been sketched out over the summer in consultations with African American faith leaders and California Bishops. It will be modified and enhanced as we move forward in three overlapping phases:

Change requires **listening, dialogue, and action**. Therefore, over the next year, the dioceses of California are committing to measures aimed at understanding and combating the sin of racism by examining our own conscience and probing civil society and our own institutions for signs of the structures of sin.

First, we resolve to listen to African American men, women and children from our Catholic community and beyond. To this end, we are committing to listening sessions to start the process of formulating an action plan. These sessions will be designed to understand the impact on individuals of racism in our nation, our society and our Church so that we can address it and eliminate it wherever we can. These sessions will take place at the parish, diocesan and state level.

Second, we resolve to dialogue. We will then urge all Catholics in our state to take the results of these sessions and hold fruitful dialogue sessions on the sin of racism – as individuals, as a society and as a Church. This dialogue may include members of the African American community but should take place in all homes, parishes, small faith communities and other Catholic organizations. It should include religious and laity, students and teachers, young and old.

Finally, we resolve to act. Assembling what has been shared during the months of listening and dialogue, in 2021 we will implement strategies that root out racist thinking and practices and foster a “culture of encounter” within all aspects of our dioceses, parishes, places of education and homes. Our action plan will include education, advocacy, and ongoing listening and dialogue sessions with an emphasis on purifying the Church of the sin of racism and its consequences.

The listening and dialogue sessions will lead to further steps for continuing education, preaching and evangelization, measures to combat structural racism and reform society and our Church. We must bring about a change of heart and cultivate new habits of the heart that will transform our communities with the wisdom and mercy of Jesus.

We realize the road ahead will be challenging but these are steps we as a Church must take. We rely on the Good Shepherd to guide all of us in this journey, asking for the gifts of his charity, wisdom, humility and forgiveness. May the Lord Jesus lead us in constant prayer, with an abiding spirit of conversion and reconciliation. We urge the faithful to continue to pray to end racism and for a new beginning of hope.

St. Peter Claver, Pray for Us.

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.

Amen.

The California Catholic Conference (www.cacatholic.org) represents the Catholic community in the State's public policy arena. There are nearly 11 million Catholics in California and the Catholic Church is the largest private provider of health care, social services and education in California. Those Catholic institutions include 42 hospitals, which annually assist 7.7 million patients; 12 colleges and universities, which enroll 48,600 students; 115 Catholic high schools, which serve 73,000 students; 558 Catholic elementary schools, which enroll 162,000 children; and the 12 diocesan Catholic Charities agencies.