

# Calling the Marianist Family to Renounce the Sin of Racism



**MSJC**

**Marianist Social Justice Collaborative**

A VOICE OF THE MARIANIST FAMILY ON SOCIAL JUSTICE

# **A Call to Action from the Marianist Family Council of North America**

## **Produced by the Marianist Social Justice Collaborative (MSJC)**

All of us in the Marianist Family cannot stand by and pretend that racism is no longer a problem in our American society. With this updated Call to Action, the Marianist Family Council of North America is asking all those in the Marianist Family to once again affirm their commitment to eradicate racism wherever it still festers.

### **Call to Action**

The Marianist Family Council of North America, representing the leadership of the three branches of the Marianist Family, calls everyone in the Family to commit to ending the sin of racism. Our Marianist charism calls us to build communities of gospel life and to recognize all people as made in the image and likeness of God. We call on all members of the Marianist Family to consider and act on the following:

- increase Marianist presence at gatherings that are racially diverse;
- recognize the leadership gifts of all people, as a reflection of our Marianist commitment to the discipleship of equals, by practicing shared leadership and power to include people of color;
- break the pattern of silence and the fear of acting against racism;
- preach and teach the understanding and acceptance of ethnic diversity;
- speak out against injustices and violence, particularly when they are directed toward ethnic and racial minorities;
- engage in local reform efforts for needed change in policing and the criminal legal system;
- join in prayer that we might have the courage and conviction to stand for racial justice;
- develop greater cultural solidarity by supporting the initiatives, businesses and organizations led by people of color in our local areas;
- be active participants (anti-racists) in the work of dismantling racism;
- ensure pastoral dialogue and discussion on systemic racism.

Each of us in the Marianist Family must commit to taking these actions in our daily lives, and also in our communities, our schools, our retreat centers, our parishes and other ministries.

## Actionable Next Steps

Statements without actions are hollow. We encourage all persons who are a part of the Marianist Family, and each Marianist community, group and institution, to consider how you can respond. What follows are some ideas for action. Consider these or others as you decide what steps you can take to respond to racism.

1. Inform yourself and your community about racism. Read *Uprooting Racism: How White People Can Work for Racial Justice* by Paul Kivel, *The Hurricane of Racism* by Fr. Ted Cassidy (available through the North American Center for Marianist Studies on its website – [www.nacms.org](http://www.nacms.org)), or other books aimed at building racial justice. Participate in a workshop aimed at countering institutional racism such as Undoing Racism (<http://www.pisab.org/programs>), Racial Sobriety (<http://www.racialsobriety.net/index.php>) or Crossroads Anti-Racism Workshops (<http://crossroadsantiracism.org>). Visit the [MSJC Racial Justice Issue Team site](#) for additional books, workshops, films and more.
2. Study Church documents on this topic. Some of these might include [Open Wide Our Hearts](#) Pastoral Letter Against Racism ([usccb.org](http://usccb.org), 2018), *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church* by Fr. Bryan Massingale (2010), [Brothers and Sisters to Us](#) Pastoral Letter ([usccb.org](http://usccb.org), 1979), and [Gaudium et Spes](#) Pastoral Constitution by Pope Paul VI ([vatican.va](http://vatican.va), 1965).
3. Engage in social analysis and theological reflection with your community, school, church or institution to determine the best action to take to dismantle the racism that is present and to build a more hospitable community. For educators, this may include critiquing the curriculum and reviewing the books students are reading for possible racial bias.
4. Develop/Build/Cultivate friendships across cultures while actively seeking out local doctors, caregivers, service providers, and professionals of color for your daily needs and support, making a conscious effort to build diverse and inclusive networks.
5. Monitor the rules, procedures, bylaws, structures, etc. of the communities, systems and institutions we are part of so that they reflect shared power, control, decision-making, privilege and wealth with individuals who are marginalized.
6. Educate ourselves about the existence of implicit bias, white privilege and the ways people of color continue to experience racism in their day to day lives.

7. Display artwork in your community, home, school, and church depicting people of various cultures, backgrounds and traditions.
8. Celebrate cultural heroes, holidays and events in your community, home, school and church. Attend cultural events in your community that promote understanding of the culture, life and history of different racial or ethnic groups such as heritage month celebrations, speaker series events and more.
9. Be public about your commitment to end racism. This might include writing letters to the editor, involvement in interracial groups in your community, standing with the victims of racism, or some other public effort that addresses the evil of racism.
10. Investigate voting patterns. Evaluate political candidates on their stance and actions in opposing racism in all forms. When voting, ensure your choices reflect a commitment to combating discrimination and fostering a more equitable community or society.
11. Cultivate an appreciation for books, music, films, and TV programs that actively convey the values and perspectives of diverse cultures by exploring, engaging with, and reflecting to learn from them.
12. Plan ways for your community to meet and work with people of other cultures.
13. With sensitivity and where appropriate, draw on the heritage of various cultures and races for community prayer. Be sure to include diverse voices at the table when you are planning for this.
14. Examine the composition of any boards and advisory groups with which you are associated and promote greater racial, cultural, gender and economic diversity among their members.
- 15. Please let the Marianist Social Justice Collaborative know how you are using this resource and where we might connect to you by completing this short survey: [Resource Engagement Form](#).**

We believe that by undertaking these kinds of actions, both individually and in our communities, we will move closer to renouncing the insidious and oftentimes unconscious racism that afflicts our society. Intentional actions like these form the building blocks for eliminating racism.

## Background on This Document

In 2016, the Marianist Social Justice Collaborative (MSJC) issued A Call to Action that addressed the continuing reality of racism in our country. The MSJC Steering Committee met in Baltimore that year in part because of that city's struggle with racism and the committee's desire to better understand ways to be involved in countering institutional racism. The document from 2016 is updated here

### Marianist Prayer for Ending Racism

Holy Mary, to whom we have consecrated our lives, we join with you in prayer. We seek the grace and understanding to be converted from the sin of racism that has infected our society for so many years.

Help us not be in denial of the power systems that still give some privileges at the expense of others.

Help us to use our power and influence in our communities, families, schools, parishes and other institutions to assure appreciation and respect for all cultures.

We are grateful for our call to live and spread the community spirit in which the Body of Christ flourishes and celebrates various gifts and talents. Show us the steps we must take to counteract racism.

We pray in the name of Jesus, asking your intercession.

Amen.

because many of the issues faced by people of color persist to the present day, and the call for social justice and equity is not limited to Baltimore.

This work to become anti-racist is best viewed as a journey on the path toward a more whole United States of America. It is a process that spans multiple generations, past and future. To quote Martin Luther King Jr, "Let us realize the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice." Given the long-term focus that success in the fight for social justice requires, this working document will be reviewed and updated as needed going forward.

## **What is Racism?**

Racism involves prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against someone of a different race, nationality, culture or ethnicity based on the false belief that one's own race is superior. It can be explicit (manifest in active mistreatment), or it can be implicit (manifest in subtle, often unconscious biases and bigotries).

Racism itself is deeper than its connection to prejudice, bias and attitudes. Racism is the collective actions of the dominant racial group, moving bias and prejudice to the underpinnings and actions of systems and institutions in our society. These racist actions give power and privilege to the dominant culture merely because of their race and in turn, limit the power of non-dominant racial groups.

As a dysfunctional social system, racism is a powerful negative force that divides the human family, and all forms of racism need to be addressed for progress to be realized. From a national and systemic perspective down to the individual level, a solution cannot be realized until the problem is recognized and understood for what it is.

Racism is both a personal sin (experienced and or expressed by individuals) and a systemic evil (proliferating within government, Church, and societal policies, practices and worldviews). Some struggle to accept or understand systemic racism as an issue for the U.S. because the sentiment is that we have passed laws that ensure equal and fair treatment for all. It is important to state that no personal intent is required when the evil of systemic racism is expressed and favors the dominant culture over others. Systemic racism persists to the present

day and examples of systemic racism include discrimination in housing, education, employment, healthcare, law enforcement and the penal system.

To denounce racism, we must take an honest look at our culture, practices, and social beliefs. While it is true that laws have been passed to address racism, laws only address de jure racism where discrimination is codified by law. However, it is the practices, procedures and norms of those in power within institutions or systems that can drive discrimination (de facto or “in practice” discrimination). For example, students from minority groups are often suspended at a much higher rate than white students for similar offenses, people with African American sounding names are more quickly dropped from hiring lists, people of color are incarcerated and given longer sentences than white counterparts for similar offenses – these are but a few examples.

While such practices and norms may not be literally illegal, they can have the same devastating effect on people of color as the discriminatory laws of the segregation era. People of color are treated differently, are discriminated against, simply because of the color of their skin or their place of origin, and these racial disparities contribute to the perpetuation of racism within our society. We understand that equity and equality are not synonymous, and that equal opportunity does not necessarily mean equal success. Even when racism is not intentional, the results are the same to the victims as if it were deliberate. It can involve prejudice and the use of religious, social, political, economic, cultural and other institutional powers to keep one race in a superior position. The white race has been in the privileged position, and a goal for anti-racist work is to create a country and world that is equitable for all.

## **Progress Made but a Long Way to Go**

Clearly, gains have been made on the path to justice from the end of the legal trading of oppressed people to today, but unfortunately, we have a long way to go in protecting and promoting civil rights for all people in our country. Trends for hate crimes against people that are not part of the dominant culture are on the increase with the FBI reporting an increase of over 19% from 2016 – 2019 (1). More recent data only continues to support the growth in hate based crime. We are increasingly aware of instances of violence against people of minority communities, including violence by those who are sworn to protect and defend us.



The year 2020 was an inflection point when the world witnessed on video the horrific death of George Floyd as a police officer kneeled on the neck of an unarmed citizen for 7 minutes, 46 seconds. This incident sparked world-wide protests against police violence. There was world-wide demand for police reform since officers take an oath to protect and serve all people regardless of race or origin. The now common occurrence of recording devices and use of social media has resulted in a movement for police reform in at least 16 states (2).

In addition to the death of George Floyd, there have been numerous and ongoing examples that support the need for police reform and highlight the racial disparities in policing. We must move beyond politicizing police reform and operate from a place that supports the common good. While honoring our police and acknowledging that most officers carry out their duties with professionalism and courage in situations that can put their own lives in danger, *the system is broken.*

The sheer number of deaths of people of color at the hands of the police points to the critical need for police reform and that includes holding officers accountable for their actions. If reform is done in alignment with Catholic Social Teaching, which calls us to stand in Solidarity as one, community relations would improve between the police and the people that they serve. As Pope Paul VI taught, "if you want peace, work for justice." (3).

The inclusion of a few people of color as tokens is not the same as engaging in shared leadership. Anti-racism work must entail focusing on policies that change our institutions' and communities' rules, procedures, bylaws, and structures so that our systems reflect shared power, control, decision-making, privilege, and wealth between those who currently hold power and with currently marginalized individuals and communities. We must work toward selecting leaders that embrace and promote social justice and equity for all.

Today, our better understanding of the nature of racism gives us opportunities to undo structures and attitudes that separate us and replace them with communities that unite. We see the need to grow in understanding the nature and value of culture and in appreciating our own personal cultural heritage and that of others. This is one way to fight the recent rise in hate speech, blatant racism, and a resurgence of white supremacist organizations. This means that each of us who respond to this Call to Action must be willing to engage in



critical analysis of the situations in which we live and work. We must be willing to speak up, to raise questions and to voice concerns. With God's blessings and the gift of our Marianist charism, we will prevail.

## Contact

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## References

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- (2). Weihua Li and Humera Lodhi. 2020. [Which States Are Taking on Police Reform After George Floyd? | The Marshall Project](#)
- (3). United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. [Solidarity | USCCB](#)