

Calling the Marianist Family to Renounce the Sin of Racism



**A Call to Action
From the
Marianist Social Justice Collaborative**

Calling the Marianist Family to Renounce the Sin of Racism

A Call to Action from the Marianist Social Justice Collaborative

August 2016

BACKGROUND

The MSJC Steering Committee met in January in Baltimore, Maryland. Our choice of Baltimore as the location stemmed from that city's struggle with racism and urban violence and our desire to better understand ways that we could be involved in countering institutional racism. The death of Freddie Gray while in police custody is both a symptom of a much larger problem and an example of how racism still exists within our criminal justice system.

There have been many other deaths recently of unarmed black men at the hands of the police, some in cities with a sizable Marianist presence: John Crawford in Beavercreek, Ohio; Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri; Samuel Dubose in Cincinnati; and Norman Cooper in San Antonio. Unfortunately, police officers have also been targeted and killed in a spiral of violence.

With heavy hearts and a solemn commitment to peace across the United States, we acknowledge the heinousness of the killings of police officers as well as black men and women within our country. Law enforcement officials work tirelessly to protect and serve, often at enormous risk to themselves, and assuring their safety is an important part of building a just society.

We took one day to meet both with longtime community activists and inner-city students so that we could understand the reality of racism. Because we in the Marianist Family cannot stand by and pretend that racism is no longer a problem in our

American society, the Steering Committee chose to revise and reissue a Call to Action that was originally developed about 10 years ago. We are asking all those in the Marianist Family to once again affirm their commitment to eradicate racism that still festers in our midst.

CALL TO ACTION

We, the Steering Committee of the Marianist Social Justice Collaborative, wholeheartedly commit ourselves to ending the sin of racism. The 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 do the following:

- be more intentional about welcoming people of color into our midst;
- 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 with people of color, instead of only including them as tokens;
- 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;
- ensure pastoral dialogue and discussion on this matter;
- join in prayer that we might have the courage and conviction to stand for racial justice;
- develop greater cultural solidarity by working with people of color on projects or opportunities in our local areas;
- increase Marianist presence at gatherings that are racially diverse.

WHAT IS RACISM?

Racism is both a personal sin (experienced by us as individuals) and a systemic evil (proliferating within the practices, policies, and worldviews of society). It 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 also involves the domination of one group of people over another. It can be explicit (manifest in active mistreatment), or it can be implicit (manifest in subtle, often unconscious biases and bigotries).

As a dysfunctional social system, racism is a powerful negative force that divides the human family. Unfortunately, we have a long way to go in protecting and promoting civil rights in our country. We are increasingly aware of instances of violence against minorities, including violence by those who are sworn to protect and defend us.

Racism infects our criminal justice system. Those whom the justice system has failed disproportionately fill jails and death rows. We are witnessing politicians trying to dismantle civil rights and diminish the participation of minorities in our political system. The justice system and economic conditions of our country have a much different and often more negative impact on minorities than on the white majority.

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. Historically the white race has been in this privileged position.

The inclusion of a few people of color as tokens is not the same as engaging in shared leadership. Anti-racism work must entail changing our institutions' rules, procedures, bylaws, or structures so that our systems reflect shared power, control,

decision-making, privilege, and wealth with marginalized individuals.

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.

With God's blessings and the gift of our Marianist charism, we will prevail.

SOME 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 action examples. 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), or other books aimed at building racial justice. Participate in a workshop aimed at countering institutional racism such as Undoing Racism (www.pisab.org/programs), Racial Sobriety (www.racialsobriety.net/index.php) or Crossroads Anti-Racism Workshops (www.crossroadsantiracism.org).

2. Do social analysis and theological reflection with your community, school, church or institution to determine the best action to take to dismantle racism and build a hospitable community.
3. Monitor the rules, procedures, bylaws, structures, etc. of the systems and institutions we are part of so that they reflect shared power, control, decision-making, privilege and wealth with marginalized individuals.
4. Invite people of diverse cultures to an evening where ethnic foods and stories of cultural background are shared.
5. Display artwork in your community, home, school, and church depicting people of various cultures.
6. Develop friendships with persons of other cultures and races.
7. 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.
8. 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.
9. Investigate voting patterns. Evaluate political candidates on their stance and actions in opposing racism in all forms.
10. Develop an appreciation for books, music, films and TV programs that express the values of diverse cultures.

11. Plan ways for your community to meet and work with people of other cultures.
12. Draw on the heritage of various cultures and races for community prayer.
13. 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.

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.

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.

CONTACT

Marianist Social Justice Collaborative

www.msjc.net

523 East Southern Ave

Covington KY 41015

859-291-6197

jimvogt2@yahoo.com