



## INSIGHTS FROM CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING ON Racial Justice

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), in their 2018 pastoral letter *Open Wide Our Hearts*, identifies racism as one of the country's original sins, recognizing that while legal (de jure) discrimination may no longer exist, de facto discrimination continues to permeate various aspects of society. These include the criminal justice system, economic inequality, racial profiling, and disparities in education, housing, and employment opportunities for communities of color.

Catholic Social Teaching (CST) urges all Catholics to reflect deeply on their own hearts and consciences, guided by the principle of solidarity, which emphasizes the shared responsibility for the well-being of all individuals. Recognizing the inherent human dignity in each person, CST calls for active engagement in dismantling the structures and cultural beliefs that perpetuate racism.

Pope Francis, in his encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, powerfully states that racism is a "virus" that mutates and hides, awaiting opportunities to resurface. This underscores the urgency of ongoing vigilance against racism in all forms. The Church must demonstrate empathy and be willing to listen to those suffering from racial injustice, rejecting silence, indifference, or the acceptance of the status quo. The fight against racism, as emphasized by the bishops and Pope Francis, requires concrete action and a refusal to be complicit in sustaining harmful systems.

### Reflections from Catholic Social Teaching

But any kind of social or cultural discrimination in basic personal rights on the grounds of sex, race, color, social conditions, language or

religion, must be curbed and eradicated as incompatible with God's design. — *Vatican II Council, Gaudium et Spes, 29*

Each of us as Catholics must acknowledge a share in the mistakes and sins of the past. Many of us have been prisoners of fear and prejudice. We have preached the Gospel while closing our eyes to the racism it condemns. We have allowed conformity to social pressures to replace compliance with social justice. — *USCCB, "Brothers and Sisters to Us," 1979*

The evil of racism festers in part because, as a nation, there has been very limited formal acknowledgment of the harm done to so many, no moment of atonement, no national process of reconciliation and, all too often a neglect of our history. — *USCCB, "Open Wide Our Hearts," 2018*

Racism is a sin; a sin that divides the human family, blots out the image of God among specific members of that family, and violates the fundamental human dignity of those called to be children of the same Father. Racism is the sin that says some human beings are inherently superior and others essentially inferior because of races. It is the sin that makes racial characteristics the determining factor for the exercise of human rights. It mocks the words of Jesus: "Treat others the way you would have them treat you." Indeed, racism is more than a disregard for the words of Jesus; it is a denial of the truth of the dignity of each human being revealed by the mystery of the Incarnation. — *USCCB, "Brothers and Sisters to Us," 1979*

## Statistics on Racial Justice

- As of 2022, national poverty rates differ across racial and ethnic groups: 25% of American Indians, 17.1% of Black Americans, 16.9% of Hispanics, 8.6% of Asians, and 8.6% of whites were living below the poverty line, with the overall poverty rate for all races at 11.5%. *Source: Statista – Poverty rate in the United States in 2022 by race and ethnicity; United States Census Bureau*
- By the end of 2022, 68% of the prison population was made up of people of color. According to a 2021 report from The Sentencing Project, Black Americans were incarcerated in state prisons at nearly five times the rate of white Americans, while Hispanic individuals were imprisoned at 1.3 times the rate of their white counterparts. *Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics; The Sentencing Project; Pew – Racial Disparities Persist in Many U.S. Jails*
- Nationwide, Black individuals make up 62% of drug offenders in state prisons and are incarcerated for drug charges at 13 times the rate of Whites. Though only 5% of illicit drug users, African Americans account for 29% of drug-related arrests and 33% of incarcerations. *Source NAACP – Criminal Justice Fact Sheet, Human Rights Watch Report.*
- A dataset of nearly 100 million traffic stops across the United States reveals that Black drivers were approximately 20% more likely to be stopped than white drivers. Additionally, Black drivers were searched 1.5 to 2 times more often than their white counterparts. *Source: The Stanford Open Policing Project*
- Black Americans are more than twice as likely as white Americans to be killed by police officers. Police killed at least 1,247 people in 2023. Black people were 27% of those killed by police in 2023 despite being only 13% of the population. *Source: Statista - Number of people killed by police in the United States from 2013 to December 2023, by ethnicity, Mapping Police Violence, Black Lives Matter, The Washington Post.*

## Questions for Candidates to Public Office on Racial Justice

- How will you address the current problems of police brutality? What types of reforms would you seek to institute to combat cases of systemic bias by law enforcement and the court system?
- After serving their sentences, formerly imprisoned individuals face numerous challenges, including the inability to vote in many states, difficulties finding employment, lower wages, and housing instability. These issues disproportionately impact Black and Latinx communities and contribute to high recidivism rates. How can the government better facilitate re-entry and reintegration?
- The "school-to-prison pipeline" refers to the pathway from schools to the juvenile justice system, marked by rising out-of-school suspensions, in-school arrests, and increased police presence. Black students face disproportionate disciplinary actions for subjective behaviors like "disrespect." Research shows that suspended or expelled students are three times more likely to enter the juvenile justice system. How will you help dismantle this pipeline and prevent the criminalization of youth?
- Would you support a national dialog on reparations, restorative justice, affirmative action, or other policies that aim to make amends for centuries of racial discrimination, hatred, and violence that continue to affect communities today?



## Catholic Resources

- 21-Day Ignatian Racial Equity Challenge: [bit.ly/racialequity21dayISN](https://bit.ly/racialequity21dayISN)
- USCCB - Combatting Racism Educational Resources: [bit.ly/3Y818F5](https://bit.ly/3Y818F5)
- Black Catholic Saints on the Road to Sainthood: [bit.ly/3ZFyldg](https://bit.ly/3ZFyldg)
- USCCB Pastoral Letter - *Open Wide Our Hearts* (2018): [bit.ly/47MZ3Ta](https://bit.ly/47MZ3Ta)
- USCCB Pastoral Letter - *Brothers and Sisters To Us* (1979): [bit.ly/3TTTDjx](https://bit.ly/3TTTDjx)

## Education For Justice Resources

- Film Discussion on *Going Home Like A Shooting Star*: [bit.ly/3UdWWm3](https://bit.ly/3UdWWm3)
- Book Discussion on *Birth of a Movement*: [bit.ly/3Y2jWGP](https://bit.ly/3Y2jWGP)
- Setting Norms for Challenging Conversations: [bit.ly/4gLMBao](https://bit.ly/4gLMBao)
- Prayer for My White Colleagues in Education: [bit.ly/3Bn4I6u](https://bit.ly/3Bn4I6u)