

"We cannot tolerate or close our eyes to any kind of racism or exclusion and claim to defend the sacredness of every human life." -Pope Francis on the murder of George Floyd

## Healing the Deep Wound of Racism

In the month since George Floyd was murdered by a Minneapolis police officer in the presence of other police officers and members of the public, Catholic clergy and laity have spoken out with many statements and calls for action. Below are just a few of those Catholic voices calling us to address the sin of racism.



A woman religious holds a placard in the June 8 prayerful protest in Washington, where hundreds of Catholics joined the national protests against racial injustice. (CNS photo/Bob Roller)

*"Can't we agree that injustice, anger, violence, prejudice and racism must not define who we are as the sons and daughters of God?"*

*-[Bishop Salvatore Matano](#)*

"The anger, emotions, and outrage must be followed by effective solutions that do more than just penalize murderous actions, but eliminate future ones. The ink has run dry on writing statements, and it is now time to write laws, to write policies, to write sentences."

*-[Knights of Peter Claver](#)  
Black Catholic fraternal order*

"I will not pretend to speak with any authority about the challenges people of color experience in our society. I do not share the fear they put on when they and their children leave their homes every day. I do not know what it means to be "other." But I know there is a way to fix it. And the fix begins when we stop talking about the proportionality of "their" response and start talking about the proportionality of "ours."

Surely a nation that could put a man in space, his safety assured by the brilliance of black women, can create a fair legal system, equitable education and employment opportunities and ready access to health care...

The COVID-19 pandemic has been... a great revealer of societal cancers as deadly as the virus. As others have pointed out, health insecurity kills, and poverty is poison. We can and must make a society that views the soaring of a child's potential with more joy than the soaring of a rocket...

[W]e need to take up the hard work of healing the deep wound that has afflicted our people since the first slave ships docked on this continent. And we need to start today."

*-[Cardinal Blase J. Cupich](#)  
[Archbishop of Chicago](#)*

"It's painful. It's really, really painful to watch that [video of George Floyd's murder] and it's even more painful for people to just disregard it, for Catholics to just disregard it and say, 'Oh yeah, it was bad, but other things are bad too.' It's like, no, let's stop. As disciples of Jesus Christ, let's just stop, and let's grieve together that one of our brothers, one of God's beloved sons, was killed. Can we just please stop and grieve together and not dismiss his life as if it was nothing? This is a life we're talking about."

If the disciples of Jesus Christ could come together, then we could be used by God to combat this evil that has just brought about so much damage to the body of Christ, and to men and women made in the image of God in the United States of America, for hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of years."

*-Fr. Josh Johnson, pastor of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary Catholic Church in the diocese of Baton Rouge in an [interview](#) with the Catholic News Agency.*

"When [racism] is acknowledged, it is only with bland sentiments of concern that are calculated to not disturb white Catholics. Church leaders rarely have the courage to address how central white racial resentment and fragility are in shaping our public life. They are more concerned with the comfort of white people than the terror that racism forces people of color to live with."

*-[Fr. Bryan Massingale](#)  
Professor, Fordham University*

## It's not enough to not be a racist. We need to be anti-racist.



Many people of color are calling on white people to actively engaged in the work of dismantling racism. While any group's discrimination of any other group is wrong, the effects of racism in the U.S. predominantly favor white people. Apologies if that hurts. But facing up to the reality that white people benefit from the status quo is one step towards changing it. That doesn't mean that, if you're white, you personally are mean or disrespectful to people who don't look like you. But inherent bias hides within all of us; we absorb it from our upbringing and our culture without even knowing it. Moreover, systemic racism exists, whether we like it or not. We didn't create it but it's our job as Christians to work to un-do it. A few suggestions on how:

1. **Read** and educate yourself on the effects, impacts, and other structures of racism.
2. **Reflect** on what this education means for you as someone developing an antiracist identity.
3. **Remember** how you participate in the thoughts, beliefs, and actions that uphold racism, whether you intend to or not, and, if you're white, how you "forget" that racism exists. Identify internalized racial attitudes you have about people of color, regardless of your own racial identity.
4. Take **risks** to challenge racism when you see it or realize when you are participating in it. Interrupt racial stereotypes when you hear them, and support people of color in your personal and professional settings when they speak out about their experiences with racism.
5. **Rejection** is something you'll experience as an antiracist, as sometimes you will make mistakes and "get it wrong" when it comes to identifying and challenging racism. If you're white, it will sometimes be tough to identify how something you are doing may be harmful to people of color. And people of color may reject what you are saying and even more so hold you accountable for these missteps. Learn to understand and accept rejection. People of color have justified anger about racism, and they may reject you or white people harshly because of it. If this happens, understand that this is the product of their treatment at the hands of a racist system. Don't take it personally; rather, help them if you can and continue to stay in the fight against racism.

6. **Relationship building** is a part of what you do along the way—with white folks and people of color who are somewhere on their journey from nonracist to antiracist.

*Taken from a [hand-out](#) from the [Racial Healing Handbook: Practical Activities to Help You Challenge Privilege, Confront Systemic Racism, and Engage in Collective Healing](#) by Anneliese A. Singh, PhD, LPC*

### A few video resources and articles for educating ourselves on racism:

[Open Wide Our Hearts](#)— The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' pastoral letter against racism, and additional materials: [Practical Steps for Eradicating Racism: An Invitation](#) and [backgrounders on racism](#)

[Uncomfortable Conversations with a Black Man](#)— podcast hosted by sports commentator Emmanuel Acho

[What Can Catholics Do to Overcome Racism?](#) - a recent conversation between two young Franciscan priests

[Black Catholics: Words Not Enough as Church Decries Racism](#) - a call to invest in Black neighborhoods, teach Black history and "combat racism with the same zeal the church shows in opposing abortion."

#### Justice & Peace Ministry Staff of Catholic Charities:

**Monroe:** Marcus Ebenhoe 585-546-7220 ext. 6202 Marcus.Ebenhoe@cfrochester.org;  
**Chemung/Schuyler/Tioga:** Kathy Dubel 607-734-9784 ext. 2135; Kathy.Dubel@dor.org  
**Cayuga/Ontario/Seneca/Yates/Wayne:** Robert Vona 315-253-2222 ext. 102 Robert.Vona@dor.org  
**Livingston:** Brandy Swain; 585-658-4466; Brandy.Swain@dor.org  
**Steuben:** Gina Reagan 607-776-8085 ext. 2216; Gina.Reagan@dor.org).  
**Tompkins:** Laurie Konwinski 607-272-5062 ext. 12; Laurie.Konwinski@dor.org

**Diocesan Life Issues Coordinator:** Shannon Kilbridge 585-328-3228 ext. 1218 Shannon.Loughlin@dor.org