

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF DIACONATE DIRECTORS REGION ONE WEBINAR SERIES

A Pathway For Healing and Racial Reconciliation

In A Time of Pandemic and Racial Discord

Presenter: Fr. Warren J. Savage, Diocese of Springfield, MA



NATIONAL DIRECTORY FOR THE FORMATION, MINISTRY, AND LIFE OF PERMANENT DEACONS

Diaconal formation should appropriately emphasize the social dimension of the Gospel.

“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.”
BROTHERS AND SISTERS TO US, U.S. Catholic Bishops Pastoral Letter on Racism (1979)

Practical Aspects of Charity – Social Dimension of the Gospel

The social encyclicals of the Popes, and the significant documents promulgated by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops on the integrity of human life from conception to death, on the economy, on racism, on immigration, on peace have focused attention on the social dimension of the Gospel. In a world that seeks to privatize religious commitment, diaconal formation should appropriately emphasize the social dimension of the Gospel, its concern for human life, for justice in the marketplace, and for peace in the world. (National Directory, n. 146)

Formation for Ministry in a Multicultural Church

Deacons are called to serve a multiracial, multiethnic, multicultural Church. (ND, n. 144)

Appropriate Inculturation

As an ordained servant-leader the deacon is called to welcome and embrace all people.

Racism arises when—either consciously or unconsciously—a person holds that his or her own race or ethnicity is superior, and therefore judges persons of other races or ethnicities as inferior and unworthy of equal regard.

*Open Wide Our Hearts, the enduring call to love a pastoral letter against racism
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (2018)*

As an ordained servant-leader in a Church called to welcome and embrace all people, the deacon should be a living example of that spirit, particularly conscious of the potential for misunderstanding and alienation that can occur when cultural, ethnic, or racial diversity occasions discrimination rather than social harmony. (ND, n. 145)

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When this conviction or attitude leads individuals or groups to exclude, ridicule, mistreat, or unjustly discriminate against persons on the basis of their race or ethnicity, it is sinful.

Open Wide Our Hearts, the enduring call to love a pastoral letter against racism

The Church in the United States is enriched by the diversity of its cultural, racial, and ethnic communities. (ND, 161)

Diocesan Support Structures for the Formation Program

Advisory structures ought to reflect the variety of cultures, ethnic and racial groups.

Members of advisory structures should be representative of the pastors, deacons, deacons' wives, religious, and laity. Whenever possible they ought to reflect the variety of cultures and diverse ethnic and racial groups in the diocese. (ND, 281)

Preaching the Sunday Homily and the Current Pastoral Context of the Church in the United States

“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” He said to him, “

‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’

This is the greatest and first commandment.

*And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’
On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”*

Matthew 22:36-40

Although there have been advances made to overcome the sin of racism, we still have attitudes of prejudice that violate the dignity of the human person.

Preaching the Mystery of Faith, The Sunday Homily, (USCCB, Washington, D.C. 2012), 5.

Racist acts are sinful because they violate justice.

They reveal a failure to acknowledge the human dignity of the persons offended, to recognize them as the neighbors Christ calls us to love (Matthew 22:39).

Open Wide Our Hearts, the enduring call to love a pastoral letter against racism

Scratch the surface and we see that racism and its vestiges persist. America’s “original sin,” as it has been called, must be not only acknowledged but vigorously resisted and corrected...People of good conscience must never turn a blind eye when citizens are being deprived of their human dignity and even their lives. Indifference is not an option. As bishops, we unequivocally state that racism is a life issue.

Most Reverend Edward B. Scharfenberger, Bishop of Albany, *Statement in The Evangelist*, (June 2, 2020).

We recognize that the Catholic Church in the United States must contend with our historical complicity in slavery and our need for racial healing. However, an important part of the legacy of the Catholic faith is our social teaching. The Catholic Church is a community of people of all colors, nationalities and ethnicities.

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Catholic moral teaching is based on the fact that all people -- without regard to race, religion, ethnicity or nationality -- are created in the image of God. This teaching rejects any form of racism, personal or systemic. Our faith calls us to leadership in breaking down barriers and standing against injustice. To violate human dignity is to dishonor the presence of Christ in each person.

Going forward, the reality of racism in our society and the moral imperative of racial equality and justice must be incorporated in our schools, our teaching and our preaching. We must uphold the commitments to equal dignity and human rights in all institutions of our society, in politics, law, economy, education. Catholic teaching on social justice measures the way a society acts fairly or not. Our work will not be done until African American men, women and children are treated equally in every aspect of life in the United States.

Sean Cardinal O'Malley, OFM, Cap., Archbishop of Boston, MA, *"The 'Evil and Moral Cancer' of Racism" in The Boston Pilot, Echoes*, (June 9, 2020).

The Truth of Jesus Christ has no room for racism, no tolerance for bigotry, and no place for hatred. You and I must courageously challenge people who perpetuate such hateful ideas. We must work to reform the structures that continue to repress our brothers and sisters. We must build bridges of mutual respect and trust in our society, so that we can move forward together as one family in Christ.

Most Reverend Frank Caggiano, Bishop of Bridgeport, CT, *We Cannot Stand Silent Before Any Form of Hatred in Fairfield County Catholic*, (June 1, 2020).

I have been giving much thought to a pastoral response to the present violence and upheaval in our country sparked by the recent death of George Floyd at the hands of police in Minneapolis, Minnesota... Please join with me in prayer and peaceful action to renew our commitment and fulfill our nation's sacred promise — "to be a beloved community of life, liberty and equality for all."

Most Reverend Christopher J. Coyne, Bishop of Burlington, VT, *Message in Vermont Catholic*, (June 3, 2020).

Our efforts to build a culture of life needs to include a commitment by all of us to combat racism and its effects in our civic and social institutions. This commitment needs to bring to an end the indifference that has allowed the evil of racism to persist. Some may believe it is enough to be non-racist, but history has shown the need for more. We need to be actively anti-racist.

Most Reverend Edgar M. da Cunha, S.D.V., Bishop of Fall River, MA, *Statement on the Death of George Floyd and its Aftermath*, (June 3, 2020).

We all need to be concerned, and also very vigilant, about the diabolical seeds of division and hatred that are springing up, or finding renewed growth, in our country today on the basis of race and ethnicity. Harboring prejudices is part of a sinful fallen world, but as St. Paul says, we have been "called out of darkness into light."

We have been given the grace of Christ to overcome the fear of the "other" as some kind of threat to us and to "our own kind." As we grow in faith, we learn not to act on the prejudices we may have formed, at times subconsciously, during life, but strive instead to see and embrace each person as a beloved daughter or son of God.

Archbishop Leonard P. Blair, S.T.D., Archbishop of Hartford, CT, *A Message About Racism*, (September 2-3, 2017).

***What is the common message embedded in the statements of the Pastors of the Church?
How can your Bishop's Statement be a starting point for eradicating racism in the church?***

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The time is upon us as a society to take responsibility for our actions. Racial injustice, bigotry, scorn and intolerance against individuals based upon their religion, ancestry, ethnicity or skin color must end now. Excuses for hate filled behavior can no longer be tolerated. We are all created equal in the eyes of God and all human lives are to be valued and protected. It is upon us to make that human equality the norm — not the exception.

A Statement of the Roman Catholic Bishops of Massachusetts Regarding Police Reform Legislation, (September 15, 2020).

In God's holy presence, then, we can respond to such times as these in a truly human way, so that the *Imago Dei* (the Image of God) guides us away from wrong thinking and opens the door to right judgment, where every human life is seen as a creation of God equally present before us. In doing so, we stand with Our Lord himself.

Most Reverend Anthony Libasci, Bishop of Manchester, NH, *"We Stand With the Lord in Fighting Racism", Parable Article, (September/October 2020).*

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, *"the time is always right to do what is right."* We are each called to transform our hearts; to raise our consciousness; to put into action what it means to "love one another" as the Lord Jesus commands us. Addressing the scourge of racism is, essentially, a pro-life issue. As Pope Francis recently stated, *"We cannot tolerate or turn a blind eye to racism and exclusion in any form and yet claim to defend the sacredness of every human life."*

Most Reverend Michael Cote, Bishop of Norwich, CT, *Statement in Four County Catholic, (June 10, 2020).*

It is very clear that there are pressing issues in our society that urgently need to be addressed and corrected – including racism, inequality, and discrimination – whenever, wherever they occur. The Catholic Church fully supports those who are promoting these values in legitimate and peaceful ways.

Most Reverend Thomas Tobin, Bishop of Providence, RI, *Statement on Behalf of the Diocese of Providence, (June 2, 2020).*

As a people of faith who believe firmly in the sanctity of life and that racism is a sin, let us pray for an end to this violence and the beginning of a meaningful effort to address the underlying currents of the racial divide found everywhere in our country, a dialogue in which we listen attentively to hear and acknowledge the voices of those who deal with racial injustice in their daily lives. Then work to achieve real change in our communities.

Most Reverend Mitchell T. Rozanski, Bishop of Springfield, MA, *Statement on Racial Division, (June 1, 2020).*

Justice cannot be served when the fundamental dignity of a person is not respected. The ugly reality of racism, which was demonstrated in the brutal treatment of Mr. George Floyd, cannot be tolerated because we are all humanly diminished when we are not outraged at the mistreatment of others because of the color of their skin.

Most Reverend Robert McManus, Bishop of Worcester, MA, *Statement in Telegram and Gazette, (June 2, 2020).*

Racism lingers as a perennial issue...The Catholic Church's concern for racial justice stems from the conviction that Christians must confront racism if our claim to preach the gospel is to be credible.

Racism tarnishes the gospel. There is no other way to view it.

Archbishop Wilton D. Gregory, "Uncommon Faithfulness, The Witness of African American Catholics" in M. Shawn Copeland, Editor, *Uncommon Faithfulness, The Black Catholic Experience*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009), 177.

Is your heart ready to preach about the evil and sin of racism?

Are you committed to work for racial justice, healing, and reconciliation?

What do you need to help you confront the sin of racism in the church in society?