

# PEACE AND JUSTICE



## open wide our hearts

the enduring call to love *a pastoral letter against racism*

### Article – 3

**The following excerpt was taken from: [https://www.usccb.org/resources/open-wide-our-hearts\\_0.pdf](https://www.usccb.org/resources/open-wide-our-hearts_0.pdf)**

At significant times in our history, the bishops have written to express their pastoral concern over the scourge of racism, which some have called our country's original sin. In 1958, the bishops wrote to condemn the blatant forms of racism found in segregation and "Jim Crow" laws.<sup>6</sup> Ten years later, they wrote to condemn the scandal of racism and the policies and actions that led to so much frustration that violence erupted in many cities.<sup>7</sup> In 1979, the bishops wrote on how racism still affected so many of our brothers and sisters, highlighting the structural and institutional forms of racial injustice evident in the economic imbalances found in our society.<sup>8</sup>

With the positive changes that arose from the civil rights movement and related civil rights legislation, some may believe that racism is no longer a major affliction of our society—that it is only found in the hearts of individuals who can be dismissed as ignorant or unenlightened. But racism still profoundly affects our culture, and it has no place in the Christian heart. This evil causes great harm to its victims, and it corrupts the souls of those who harbor racist or prejudicial thoughts. The persistence of the evil of racism is why we are writing this letter now. People are still being harmed, so action is still needed. What is needed, and what we are calling for, is a genuine conversion of heart, a conversion that will compel change, and the reform of our institutions and society. Conversion is a long road to travel for the individual. Moving our nation to a full realization of the promise of liberty, equality, and justice *for all* is even more challenging. However, in Christ we can find the strength and the grace necessary to make that journey. In this regard, each of us should adopt the words of Pope Francis as our own: let no one "think that this invitation is not meant for him or her."<sup>9</sup> All of us are in need of personal, ongoing conversion. Our churches and our civic and social institutions are in need of ongoing reform. If racism is confronted by addressing its causes and the injustice it produces, then healing can occur. In that transformed reality, the headlines we see all too often today will become lessons from the past. How do we overcome this evil of rejecting a brother or sister's humanity, the same evil that provoked Cain's sin? What are the necessary steps that would lead to this conversion? We find our inspiration in the words of the prophet Micah: You have been told, O mortal, what is good, and what the LORD requires of you: Only to do justice and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God. (Mi 6:8)<sup>8</sup>

To do justice requires an honest acknowledgment of our failures and the restoring of right relationships between us. "If we acknowledge our sins, [God] is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from every wrongdoing" (1 Jn 1:9). To love goodness demands pursuing "what leads to peace and to building up one another" (Rom 14:19). It requires a determined effort, but even more so, it requires humility; it requires each of us to ask for the grace needed to overcome this sin and get rid of this scourge. In what follows, we hope to provide a Christian call for all of us in this country to "walk humbly with our God" so that, by his grace, racism will be eradicated.

In Christ,  
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