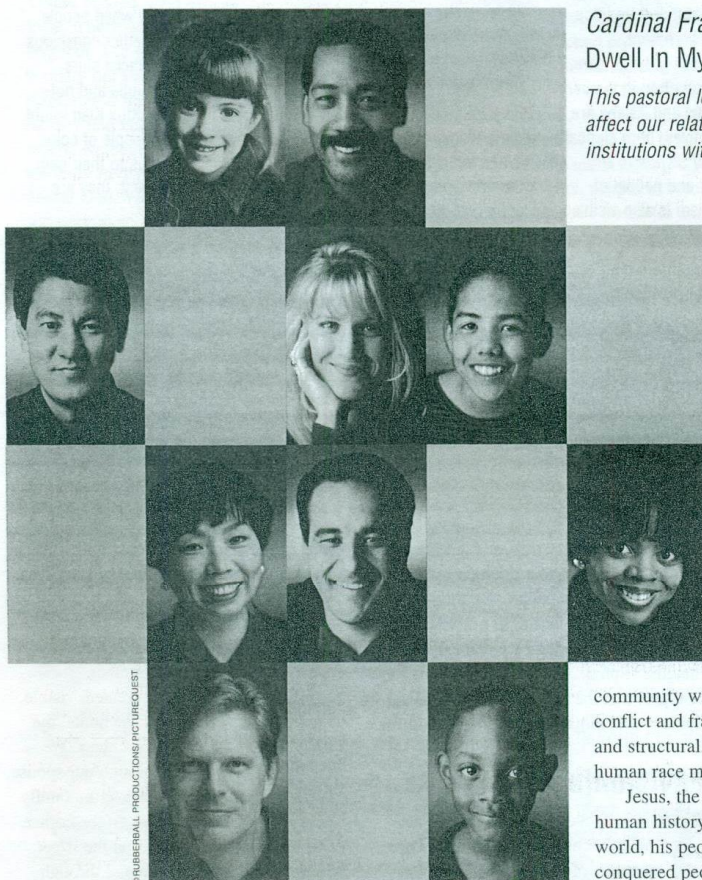


## RACIAL RECONCILIATION

*Cardinal Francis E. George's Pastoral on Racism,  
Dwell In My Love, in Condensed Form*

*This pastoral letter addresses one of the many sins which  
affect our relationships among ourselves and infect, as well,  
institutions within our Church and society: the sin of racism.*



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**T**he Book of Genesis reveals God as the Creator of a vast universe teeming with a rich diversity of plants and animals, surrounded by the sea and sky. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit create out of infinite love the universe and all that fills it. The culmination and high point of God's creative energy is the creation of the human race on the sixth day: "God created man in his own image; in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them... and God saw everything that he had made, and it was very good..." (Gn 1:27; 31).

Though God intended that all creation live in the harmony and love that unites it as one, human beings, exercising their free will, defied the will of God and replaced the divinely planned harmony with division, the divinely willed unity with conflict, the divinely intended community with fragmentation. One form of human division, conflict and fragmentation is racism: personal, social, institutional and structural. Racism mars our identity as a people, as the human race made in the image and likeness of God (Gn 1:27).

Jesus, the incarnation of the eternal Son of God, entered human history two millennia ago. When Jesus came into the world, his people, God's people, the Jewish people, were a conquered people, often despised by their foreign rulers. Jesus



# FOUR TYPES OF RACISM



The face of racism looks different today than it did 30 years ago. Overt racism is easily condemned, but the sin is often with us in more subtle forms. In examining patterns of racism today, four forms of racism merit particular attention: spatial racism, institutional racism, internalized racism and individual racism.

**SPATIAL RACISM.** Patterns of metropolitan development in which some affluent whites create racially and economically segregated suburbs or gentrified areas of cities, leaving the poor—mainly African-Americans, Hispanics and some newly arrived immigrants—isolated in deteriorating areas of the cities and older suburbs.

**INSTITUTIONAL RACISM.** Sustaining institutions that privilege people like themselves and habitually ignore the contributions of other peoples and cultures. This “white privilege” often goes undetected because it has become internalized and integrated as part of one’s outlook on the world by custom, habit and tradition.

It can be seen in most of our institutions: government, associations and clubs, business, education, housing, healthcare, sports and the arts. In the Church as well, “all too often in the very places where blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans and Asians are numerous, the Church’s officials and representatives, both clerical and laity, are predominantly white” (*Brothers and Sisters to Us*, p. 11). Higher rates of abortion among the poor and people of color result in a less diverse United States. Racism is also visible

in imprisonment and in the administration of the death penalty. Indifference to rates of violence against the lives of blacks, Hispanics, Asians and Native peoples is another sign.

**INTERNALIZED RACISM.** Many blacks, Hispanics, Asians and Native Americans are socialized and educated in institutions which devalue the presence and contributions of people of color and celebrate only the contributions of whites. Thus, people of color can come to see themselves and their communities primarily through the eyes of that dominant culture. They receive little or no information about their own history and culture and perceive themselves and their communities as “culturally deprived.” Seeing few men and women from their own culture or class in leadership roles, they begin to apply to themselves the negative stereotypes about their group that the dominant culture chooses to believe.

**INDIVIDUAL RACISM.** This perpetuates itself quietly when people grow up with a sense of white racial superiority, whether conscious or unconscious. Racist attitudes find expression in racial slurs, in crimes born of racial hatred and in many other subtle and not-so-subtle ways. People who are horrified by the Ku Klux Klan might quite readily subscribe to racial stereotypes about people of color. When individuals automatically award superior status to their own cultural group and inferior status to all those outside it, they are acting as racists.

gave us the means to find our way back to his Father, whom he taught us to call our Father. Jesus, the new Adam, went to his death on the sixth day to recreate us by redeeming us from sin and Satan. We are again to walk in unity, as one people enjoying the variety of plants, animals and human cultures which constitute the world redeemed by Christ.

Through his preaching and healing, through the pattern of discipleship he called people to follow, through his bodily resurrection from the dead, the Lord Jesus literally embodies for us a new way of life, which conforms to the will and reign of God. Jesus transcends, challenges and transforms everything that divides the human community (Gal 3:28). He calls us back to a communion with one another, a unity, which reflects the communion of God’s own Trinitarian life.

Racism, whether personal, social, institutional or structural, contradicts the purpose of the incarnation of the Word of God in the womb of the Virgin Mary. Racism contradicts God’s will for our salvation. We cannot claim to love God

without loving our neighbor (Mt 22:34 ff.). Since racism is a failure to love our neighbor, only freedom from racism will enable us to be one with God and one another.

The vision of a community dwelling in God’s unconditional and universal love may sound like an impossible dream, but in God all things are possible (Mk 10:27). The radical conversion needed to overcome the sin of racism is made possible by the Holy Spirit. Sent by the risen Christ, the Holy Spirit dwells in our hearts and in our midst to empower us to live truly as God’s people. By the power of the Holy Spirit acting in us, we can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine (Eph 3:20). Jesus assured his disciples that the abiding presence of the Spirit would empower them to be faithful.

## Envisioning our future

**T**he gospel compels us to love our neighbor as ourselves, to abandon patterns of seeing those who are racially or culturally different from ourselves as strangers and to recognize

them as our brothers and sisters. Even those who have suffered at the hands of others, individually or collectively, must pray to overcome hostility, forgiving those who have offended them and asking forgiveness from those whom they have offended. We must embrace one another as formerly estranged neighbors now seeking reconciliation.

Maintaining current patterns of ethnic, cultural, racial and economic isolation and hostility tarnishes our call as Church to be a universal sacrament of salvation. Consciously changing these patterns returns us to our fundamental identity as a community called to universal communion with God and with one another.

We meet God in the created, visible, tangible surroundings of the home, the neighborhood and the workplace. We encounter God in and through our spouse, children, brothers and sisters, the family next door, the shopkeeper on the corner, our teachers, the stranger on the street. In short, we meet God in and through people of every color, ethnic background, religion, class and gender. God is active



in and through the people, places and circumstances that constitute our ordinary daily life.

This belief places upon us the mission to transform all relationships into instances of love and justice. Our love of God, expressed in prayer, pilgrimages and other acts of devotion, must be made visible in our practice of the love of neighbor, expressed by establishing patterns of right relationships in our daily lives, in our work and everyday encounters. Loving and just relationships are the manifestation of our communion with God.

Ethnic, cultural and racial diversities are gifts from God to the human race. In Jesus, we are called to a radical love — to love of the stranger as our neighbor (Lk 10:25-37). Others may be different from us in every respect except one: each man, woman or child we encounter is also a child of God, a brother or sister in the Lord, whom we should welcome as our neighbor. The stranger whom we encounter is really our neighbor in Christ. Through communion with our neighbors who are racially and culturally distinct from ourselves, we begin to live, as a community, the unity in diversity that is the life of the Triune God. We can learn to live, work and pray in solidarity with the stranger now recognized as our neighbor.

#### **Living with our neighbor**

Our neighborhood is the first place we encounter those with whom we are to dwell in love. A just neighborhood must be open to all people — black and white, Hispanic

and Asian, young and old, wealthy and poor, Christians and people of all faiths. Access to housing, in particular, needs to be fair and open. In a society that is still structurally racist, open housing cannot be taken for granted; it must be achieved.

We confront racist patterns in housing sales and rental markets through programs that help establish and maintain diversity throughout a community. To be successful, such programs require collaboration among neighboring communities, towns and villages. The goals are clear. Neighborhoods must be safe and free of discrimination and hate crimes; schools must provide a good education for all students; transportation must be accessible. The means to reach the goals involve cooperating across racial and cultural divisions.

#### **Working with our neighbor**

Although the phenomenon of racism can exist independent of economic factors, it is bound up with entrenched poverty, which persists despite our national affluence. Most poor people are white; but blacks, Hispanics and Native Americans are disproportionately poor. As our U.S. bishops wrote in 1986, "Despite measurable progress during the last 20 years, people of color still must negotiate subtle obstacles and overcome covert barriers in their pursuit of employment and/or advancement."

And, as Bryan Massingale wrote in 1998, "Church teaching on economic justice insists that economic decisions and institutions be judged on whether they protect or undermine the dignity of the

human person. We support policies that create jobs with adequate pay and decent working conditions, increase the minimum wage so it becomes a living wage, and overcome barriers to equal pay and employment for women and minorities."

#### **Supporting cultural diversity**

The ability to live and work in a culturally diverse environment equips us to work toward universal peace and justice. Our efforts to encourage judicial and political systems, social and professional organizations, healthcare facilities, educational institutions, labor unions, small and large businesses, major corporations, the professions, sports teams and the arts to be welcoming will be more credible when the Church truly becomes a model of what she advocates.

Our desire as disciples of Jesus is to support people of every race and ethnic group in enjoying their human rights and freedom. We are called to promote love, justice and what Pope John Paul II has called a "culture of life." Until all are free to live anywhere in our society without fear of reprisal or violence, none of us is completely free.

### **Dwelling with God in his Church**

The Second Vatican Council acknowledged and supported cultural diversity in the Church when it encouraged the "fostering of the qualities and talents of the various races

## **EIGHT WAYS TO FIGHT RACISM**



1 Foster hospitality, especially to those who are culturally different from most in the parish.

2 Participate in civic and ecumenical/interfaith organizations that work to promote racial justice.

#### **AT WORSHIP**

The liturgy should make visible the unity which incorporates the diversity of Christ's people. It makes intercession, through Christ, for the forgiveness of our sins, including the sin of racism, and gives us the means to become a holy people.

Develop liturgical resources to celebrate unity in diversity and express the sinful nature of racism.

3 When appropriate, celebrate liturgies where the expression of our faith is reflected in the religious symbols, music and history of the many different peoples that make up our dioceses.

4 Include prayers for racial reconciliation and an end to racism in the intercessory prayers at the weekend liturgies.

#### **IN YOUR COMMUNITY**

5 Support the Catholic Campaign for Human Development.

6 Watch real estate, housing and land-use policies in order to oppose economic segregation and foster the development of affordable housing.

7 Advocate for "fair share housing," in which a percentage of subsidized housing units are reserved for poor people in every municipality.



and nations" and the "careful and prudent" admission into the Church's life of "elements from the traditions and cultures of individual peoples" (*Sacred Liturgy*, 37, 40). The use of vernacular languages and cultural symbols and adapted rituals within the Church's liturgy is a sign of Catholic unity and serves to bring all peoples and cultures into the worship of God, who rejoices in the beauty of everything he has made.

Vatican II also called the local Churches to bring into their life "the particular social and cultural circumstances" of the local people. This requires that priests, religious women and men and lay ecclesial ministers are called forth from among all the various cultural and racial groups which constitute the Church (*Missionary Activity*, 10, 19).

To speak of oneself as Irish Catholic, German Catholic, Polish Catholic, Hispanic Catholic, African-American Catholic, Lithuanian Catholic is not divisive, provided each of these differences is lived and offered as a gift to others rather than designed as an obstacle to keep others out. Catholic universality is marked by the contributions of all cultures.

Loving only people who are just like ourselves, loving only those who are members of our biological family or who share our own ethnic or cultural background, our own political views or our own class assumptions, does not fulfill the challenge of the gospel: "If you love only those who love you, what reward can you expect; even the tax collectors do as much as that (Mt 5:46-48; Lk 6:32-34; 36).

Striving to be a witness for Jesus Christ as a good neighbor to all is difficult. To embrace the vision proclaimed in Jesus' preaching of the Reign of God, we need to see new patterns and possibilities. Too often, when Church-planning decisions are being made, the persons around the table do not adequately reflect the rich cultural diversity that shapes our Church, city, nation and world.

As we continue to struggle against racism within the Church, we see a time when all of God's children will be contributing to the governance of our local dioceses. Constructing socially just patterns of relationships within our ecclesiastical institutions presents the same difficulties met in being a good neighbor anywhere; but, as Christians seeking to be true disciples, we can never

abandon our efforts to embody the love and justice given us by Christ. Most of all, we can count on his grace to bring power to the vision faith gives us.

## Eucharist: Sacrament and means of communion

**W**e are most ourselves in the celebration of the Eucharist. Our sacramental worship unites us and makes us a community of believers. The Mass calls us to communion with one another in Christ Jesus. The proclamation of God's holy Word and reflection on it within the celebration of the Eucharist, which is Christ's life poured out for us, cannot help but deepen our spiritual unity and make our social solidarity possible.

Too often, however, the pattern of culturally and racially homogenous parishes, sometimes established in the wake of "white flight," contributes to Catholic parishes being instances of racial and cultural exclusion. Sunday, it has often been noted, is the most segregated day of the week in the United States. "We have preached the gospel while closing our eyes to the racism it condemns" (*Brothers and Sisters to Us*, p. 11). Our failure to live the gospel of God's unconditional and universal love in culturally and racially inclusive parishes and communities contributes to our society's failure to confront the sin of racism.

## The Spirit's empowering gifts

**F**rom diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds, we accept and embrace in faith the love of God that compels us to dwell together in love. After reflecting on the historical, social and economic dimensions of our complicity with the sin of racism, we ask as Catholics for the grace of conversion from the sin of racism, which has separated us from our neighbor and from God.

The Church was born with the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Virgin Mary and the apostles and on the nations gathered in Jerusalem for Pentecost. Since that moment 2,000 years ago, the indwelling of the Spirit in the Church and in each of her members pulls us toward dwelling

together in love. The gifts the Spirit brings transform all our relationships.

The Church in any society is to be a leaven. The Church is always more than any particular place or society. She finds her identity as Catholic, all-embracing. If she is faithful to her Lord, the Savior of the world, the Church will not only proclaim who he is but will herself act to become the womb, the matrix, in which a new world can gestate and be born.

Listening and welcoming, the Church is a place of encounter, of racial dialogue and intercultural collaboration. In a context of universal mutual respect born of love, the Church offers the gifts that transform the world and bring salvation in this life and the next. ■

*Cardinal Francis E. George, O.M.I., is archbishop of Chicago. This condensation of Dwell in My Love is offered as an introduction to the pastoral's major themes. We recommend that you study the entire document, published at [www.archdiocese-chgo.org](http://www.archdiocese-chgo.org), or available in print from the Archdiocese of Chicago's Office for Racial Justice at 312-751-8336.*

**NEXT: Vocations: How Is God Calling Me?**  
(by Fidelis Tracy, C.D.P.)

## UPDATE

### Question Box

- 1) How has racism affected you?
- 2) Why is racism offensive to God?
- 3) Name a practical step you can take to encourage racial reconciliation.

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