

Catholic Church teaching regarding

## RACISM

*(The following is an excerpt from the USCCB Pastoral Letter “Open Wide Our Hearts” which is available on the USCCB website.)*

Holy Scripture boldly proclaims, “See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God. Yet so we are” (1 Jn 3:1). This love “comes from God and unites us to God; through this unifying process it makes us a ‘we’ which transcends our divisions and makes us one, until in the end God is ‘all in all’ (1 Cor 15:28).”

By the work of the Holy Spirit, the Church is called to share with all the world this gift of love. As Pope Francis points out, “The salvation which God has wrought, and the Church joyfully proclaims, is for everyone. God has found a way to unite himself to every human being in every age.” Through his Cross and Resurrection, Christ united the one human race to the Father. However, even though Christ’s victory over sin and death is complete, we still live in a world affected by them. As bishops of the Catholic Church in the United States, we want to address one particularly destructive and persistent form of evil. Despite many promising strides made in our country, racism still infects our nation.

### What Is Racism?

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. 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. 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 (Mt 22:39)

### Racism and Voting

In the November 2018 pastoral letter against racism, *Open Wide Our Hearts*, the Catholic bishops of the United States urge all Catholics to acknowledge “the scourge of racism” that still exists in our hearts, words, actions, and institutions.

Racism can be **individual**, when persons fail to recognize certain groups as created in the image and likeness of God and equal in dignity, or it can be **systemic**, where practices or policies treat certain groups of people unjustly.

One example of **systemic racism** is lack of access to the vote for some communities of color. The Church teaches that all persons have both a legal right and a responsibility to have their voice heard in the public square to promote human dignity and the common good of society. As people of faith, we have the obligation to help shape the moral character of society by voting and other acts of public participation. We also must act to ensure that the right to vote is protected for all citizens. This has often been threatened for many minorities in the U.S.

Injustices prompted the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which was initially successful in eliminating many of the barriers to voting for minorities. However, a 2018 Report by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights detailed a decline in the Act’s enforcement. The report suggests Latino Americans, Native Americans, and African Americans are facing new barriers to voting. Some Catholic voices are raising concerns about voter identification laws seen in many states in recent years. The Maryland Catholic Conference opposed one such legislative proposal in 2017, which would “make voting more difficult for people with disabilities, the elderly, and the poor,” who “have already established their identities via voter registration.” State Catholic conferences have also been vocal about other issues related to access to voting, including gerrymandering and restoration of voting rights. Others raise concerns about restrictions on early voting, lack of local and accessible registration opportunities and precinct voting locations and illegal purges of voting rolls, which disproportionately affect African American and Latino American voters. One in ten Latinos have been harassed at polling places.

Today, too many barriers to the right to vote remain for minorities. In response, we are called to work to ensure that all are able to exercise their rights, as faithful citizens, to raise their voices in the public square.