

# Opening our Hearts to the Pain of Racism

By Carey Dabney

Over the past several years we have witnessed an increase in explicit racist behavior. This behavior, fueled primarily by anti-migrant rhetoric and an increase in the activity and visibility of white supremacist groups, has heightened the sense of urgency for the Church to address this growing social trend in our nation.

In the fall of 2018, the Bishop's Conference released *Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love*, a pastoral letter to address racism in our nation. Unlike prior pastoral documents on racism, which primarily addressed racism between the African American community and the Church, this document includes Native American and Hispanic experiences alongside African American experiences; thereby expanding the horizon to include all those harmed by racism.

Various critics of the letter have noted that the letter lacks frank language about the reality of systemic racism. While it does appear to some readers that the letter itself does not detail the long and complex development of systemic racism in our nation, it is important to acknowledge that the letter does provide concrete suggestions that are to be implemented in our various houses of formation, schools, and parishes.

In addition, the letter introduces us to the Ad Hoc Committee Against Racism. This Committee is tasked with providing the resources needed to listen and advocate for those harmed by racism. Unlike previous documents on racism, following the release of this letter, the Committee has immediately produced various catechetical resources to specifically address both systemic and personal racial biases that exist in our nation and in our Church. These resources are easily found on the USCCB webpage and are available for a variety of audiences in our schools and parish communities.

In the fall of 2015, Pope Francis stood before the US Congress and stated, "The effects of unjust structures and actions are all too apparent. Our efforts must aim at restoring hope, righting wrongs, maintaining commitments and thus promoting the well-being of individuals and of peoples."<sup>1</sup> *Open Wide Our Hearts* is an endeavor by our bishops to address the harms experienced by racial biases, both in the recesses of our hearts and through the systems and institutions of our nation and our Church.

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, "Address to US Congress," September 24, 2015.