



Resolutions To Action

LCWR Global Concerns Committee

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Racism

by Barbara A. Moore, CSJ

Assisted by Catherine Marie Kreta, CSJ; Diana Oleskevich, CSJA; and Diane Zigo, CSJ

“Racism is not merely one sin among many, it is a radical evil that divides the human family and denies the creation of a redeemed world. To struggle against it demands an equally radical transformation, in our own minds and hearts as well as in the structure of society.”

-- *Brothers and Sisters to Us: US Bishops Pastoral Letter on Racism in our Day*
(Washington D.C.; United States Catholic Conference, 1979)

EXPERIENCE

Racism is systemic and permeates virtually every US institution – judicial, political, social, medical/healthcare, education, labor, small and large businesses, the professions, sports teams, the arts, and the church. Reflection on racism indicates a mixed message of progression and regression over the years. Following are a few recent excerpts from events and articles which demonstrate the pervasiveness of racism:

- ▶ Two public-policy groups have charged that racism is the primary cause of racial disparities in healthcare, not biology or socioeconomic status. (*Modern Healthcare*, 8/25/05)
- ▶ Prison rates and administration of the death penalty reflect a disproportionate number of people of color.
- ▶ America’s racial rift was re-

opened with Katrina and its aftermath. Incidents were reported in the media.

▶ Almost all the desperate-looking victims on the television news were African-American.

▶ Some felt using the term “refugees” for those seeking refuge from the hurricane was racist.

▶ Picture captions described African Americans as “looting” and whites as “finding” goods.

▶ Wade Henderson, a panelist on a TV program led by Gwen Ifill, stated, “I think the legacy of racial discrimination in this country helped to produce the population of people who were left behind... You can’t have a situation with historic discrimination on the basis of housing, education and employment and not have a legacy which is present in New Orleans.”

- ▶ Increasing signs of hostility toward immigrants are reflected in laws that limit or deny access to benefits not

only to the undocumented but also to legal immigrants.

There has been progress in addressing racism in the Catholic church and in society. However, there has been little progress towards achieving increasing the number of people of color in administrative, professional and support positions of the diocesan level and nationally. (*The Catholic Peace Voice*, 1-

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www.lcwr.org

LCWR
8808 Cameron Street
Silver Spring, MD 20910
301-588-4955
fax: 301-587-4575
mlucey@lcwr.org

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2/2005) The status quo does not reflect demographic realities.

SOCIAL ANALYSIS

Twenty-five years have passed since the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) issued the pastoral letter *Brothers and Sisters to Us*. The pastoral directed the faithful to examine their covert and overt attitudes and behaviors that discriminate on the basis of race. Also, the faithful were instructed to resist the “social structures that inhibit the economic, educational, and social advancement of the poor.” (1979:10) Hispanics, African-Americans, refugees, and Native Americans continue to suffer from dehumanizing treatment and

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the lingering effect of the sin of racism. From 1990-2000, 21 documents in the form of episcopal letters and statements on racism were issued.

Racism in its institutional form continues because some people assume, consciously or unconsciously, that white people are superior. Therefore, the dominant race of whites develop and maintain institutions that privilege people like themselves and give less credibility to the contributions of other peoples and cultures. White privilege often goes unnoticed because it has been internalized and integrated as part of one's outlook on the world by custom, habit and tradition.

Peggy McIntosh, author of *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*, wrote about her experiences of white privilege. Her education gave her no

training in seeing herself as an oppressor and advantaged person. Any work to benefit others was to allow “them” to be more like whites. She described white privilege as similar to an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, assurances, tools, maps, guides, codebooks, passports, visas, clothes, compass, emergency gear, and blank checks.

Social rules about what work is, who works for whom, how work is compensated, and the social process by which the result of work is appropriated operate to establish relations of power and inequality. These relations are reinforced by a systematic process in which the energies of the have-nots are continuously expended to maintain and augment the power, status, and wealth of the haves. This structural relationship between social groups is exploitation. (Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*)

REFLECTION

At the center of all Catholic social teaching are the transcendence of God and the dignity of the human person. Those who disrespect and disregard the sanctity and dignity of human beings violate this truth.

The Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights all affirm that ev-

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eryone is entitled to certain rights and freedoms without distinction. Systemic issues are at the core of becoming a just world. The work of dismantling racism is a very difficult challenge. Excessive economic, social and cultural inequali-

ties among peoples arouse tensions and conflicts, and are a danger to peace.

There are signs of hope. Many communities of women religious, lay organizations and dioceses are mandating and empowering anti-racism teams to help them transform their institutional structures.

ACTION

Each person has dignity. Each person has something to share. Our diversity rests in the individual perspective each brings, enriched by our culture, creed, race and gender. Every member is a unique facet of light for the society.

1. If you are white, reflect on the attitudes and behaviors that influence your relationship with people of color.
2. Use opportunities to become better acquainted with persons of different races by reading books by authors of other races, participating in discussion groups, working together on community projects and teams, sharing in cultural celebrations, events and interfaith activities.
3. Write letters to the editor when you perceive racial bias in reporting.
4. Examine policies, procedures and practices at your sponsored and closely affiliated institutions. Promote full participation and shared power in your institutions.
5. Recognize white privilege in your life and in society. Engage in activities to eradicate racism locally and globally in society and every level of the Church.
6. Advocate with Senators and Representatives to extend the Voting Rights Act which comes up for renewal in 2006.
7. Do not engage in or tolerate racial slurs and jokes.
8. Educate and advocate about Catholic Social Teaching; read *Brothers and Sisters to Us* and *The Hispanic Presence Challenge and Commitment from USCCB*.