



Created in God's Image

**a Pastoral Letter on the Sin of Racism
and a Call to Conversion**

*By the
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Jeremiah 18:6



Bishop of Gary

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**August 28, 2003
Feast of St. Augustine**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I believe that those who derived the most benefit from last year's Pastoral Letter, "The Many Faces of Our Church: a Letter to Our Catholic Faithful Regarding Cultural Diversity," were those who reflected upon it in the October parish-based discussion groups, and who discussed it, once again, during Lent in the inter-parish discussion groups.

I am pleased that you have committed yourself to reflecting upon this Pastoral Letter: "Created in God's Image: a Pastoral Letter on the Sin of Racism and a Call to Conversion" in either a parish or an inter-parish faith-sharing group.

I am confident that the Holy Spirit will speak to your heart through the words of the Pastoral and also through the experiences of others in your group. It is very important to begin each session with a prayer and to be attentive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit throughout the course of each evening. With the grace of God, you will be able to become more deeply in touch with any sin, pain, bitterness, or resentment in your heart, let go of any bondage, and grow more deeply in love, which is the bond of perfection.

This is the acceptable time. This is the time for salvation. The Lord is calling all of us to work together to dismantle racism wherever it manifests itself within our hearts, in our institutions, or in our culture.

Thank you for summoning up the courage to open your heart to Jesus' call to deeper conversion. Thank you for your determination to help address the sin of racism so that we might be the people the Lord has destined us to be.

With prayers and all best wishes, I am

Sincerely yours in the Lord Jesus,

**Most Reverend Dale J. Melczek
Bishop of Gary**

How to Use This Discussion Guide

This discussion guide is designed for four weekly sessions. While most groups will probably meet in the evening, this guide can easily be adapted for daytime use. We encourage you to use the format we have provided for your sharing sessions in order that you and those with whom you are meeting will make the best use of your time.

- 1.** Each session should last 90 minutes, beginning promptly at 7 p.m. and ending at 8:30 p.m. Daytime sessions should also run for 90 minutes.
- 2.** Each group should include between 8 and 12 people. Please meet with the same group members each session. The relationship you establish with others will encourage a frank discussion of the issues and enable you to move in a rhythmic pattern through the sessions.
- 3.** Every group will have a facilitator, whose responsibility is to help move the group easily through each session and to maintain an orderly discussion.
- 4.** Each week's discussion will begin with the prayer on Page 2, followed by the reading of the Scripture text at the beginning of each session.

Ice Breaker

The following exercise should be done at the beginning of Session One, immediately following the reading of Scripture.

- 1.** Facilitator introduces his/herself to group. Participants each briefly introduce themselves.
- 2.** Pair up with another person from the group and spend a few minutes describing yourself to one another. Include the following:
 - Where were you born and raised?
 - Where do you live presently?
 - Did you learn attitudes of prejudice or tolerance growing up?
 - Where did you learn these attitudes? Parents? Neighborhood? Church?
 - What has changed in your understanding over the years?
 - Why are you here today?

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Session I

Opening Prayer

Good and Gracious God, Source of all Life, all creation is charged with your Divine Energy. Ignite us with the wisdom and power of the Holy Spirit, that we may know ourselves as truly human and holy, made in your Divine Image. Help us to see your presence in all creation, but especially in our fellow brothers and sisters.

Our minds cannot fathom the depth of your love, and our hearts can only respond in awe, praise and gratitude. Forgive us, we pray, our ignorance and insecurities, which blind us to that great love. May we always walk gently upon this earth, in right relationship with each other, nurtured by your love. Grant us the strength and courage to see all people as our brothers and sisters through Jesus Christ, our Lord. We ask this in Christ's name. Amen.

Scripture

"There was a scholar of the law who stood up to test him and said, 'Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' Jesus said to him, 'What is written in the Law? How do you read it?' He said in reply, 'You shall love the Lord, your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.' He replied to him, 'You have answered correctly; do this and you will live'" Luke 10:25-28.

Dialogue

An important first step in this process is to create opportunities for dialogue. Some would question what merit exists in dredging up painful memories or initiating a dialogue which may not lead to a fruitful conclusion. However, as in any dysfunctional family, unless the members are willing to admit to the dysfunction and begin talking about their feelings, there is no movement toward health. Dialogue is the first step in addressing the dysfunction of racism in our human family. It helps us step out of denial and give voice to the reality of how racism influences us personally.

Although much has changed for the good within our culture and society, racism continues to express itself. When it does, it takes very little to trigger the memory of those experiences, to reopen past wounds and reignite the sorrows and hurts, the anger and resentment, the sense of indignation and outrage that were experienced.

It is impossible for people to forget injustices suffered. Nor is it wise to try to do so, lest we forget what caused them and allow them to be repeated. But it is possible with God's grace, albeit with great difficulty, to move beyond that realm wherein pain, bitterness, and resentment dwell and to climb to a higher spiritual level. St. Paul reminds us in the third chapter of his Letter to the Colossians, verses 12-14:

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“Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so also you must do. And over all these put on love, that is the bond of perfection.”

Question 1: Name one way that racism has negatively impacted your life.

Question 2: Is the “Baby-boomer Generation” making their problem of race relations the problem of their children?

It is imperative that those coming to the tables be willing to “let go” of their bondage to the pain of past experiences in order for this dialogue to occur. St. Paul reminds us in the 12th chapter of Romans, verses 17-19, 21:

“Do not repay anyone evil for evil; be concerned for what is noble in the sight of all. If possible, on your part, live at peace with all. Beloved, do not look for revenge but leave room for the wrath; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’...Do not be conquered by evil but conquer evil with good.”

Question 3: Suggest some ways we can move beyond our bondage to the pain of those past experiences.

Those brave souls who summon the courage to do so will be among the pioneers who build a bridge across which others can traverse when they, too, become ready. This bridge will bring opportunities to live and move in each other's world until the day arrives when those worlds have become so welcoming of one another that the bridge becomes unnecessary. On that day, the chasm of ignorance, insecurity, and fear which had been bridged by people who dared to move out of their inner hurt will be filled with a greater knowledge of one another, a confidence in our ability to live in peace, and the courage to shape our future together in solidarity and friendship.

Racism is a Sin

Racism is a sin, and its practice is contrary to the teaching of Scripture and the Church. The story of creation in the first chapter of the Book of Genesis, verse 27, teaches that all men and women have been created in the image and likeness of God:

“God created man in His image, in the divine image He created him; male and female he created them.”

Consequently we have a responsibility to respect every human being. This is a teaching which Christians, Jews, and Muslims share in common.

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Furthermore, as Christians we believe in the Incarnation of Jesus. In becoming man, Jesus identifies with all human beings and declares every human life sacred. The Second Vatican Council's *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* attests to this:

“For by His incarnation the Son of God has united Himself in some fashion with every man. He worked with human hands, He thought with a human mind, acted by human choice and loved with a human heart. Born of the Virgin Mary, He has truly been made one of us, like us in all things except sin.”

The notion of racism, which teaches that one race is superior to another, is contrary to these teachings. Our Holy Father, John Paul II, said:

“Racism is a sin that constitutes a serious offense against God. Every honest conscience must decisively condemn racism in whatever heart or place it makes a home. Unfortunately, it is emerging in new and unexpected forms, offending and degrading the human family.”

In 1979, our United States Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a Pastoral Letter on racism titled, *Brothers and Sisters to Us*. In that letter, they said:

“Racism is a sin: a sin that divides the human family, blots out the image of God among specific members of that family, and violates the fundamental human dignity of those called to be children of the same Father. Racism is the sin that says some human beings are inherently superior and others essentially inferior because of race. It is the sin that makes racial characteristics the determining factor for the exercise of human rights. It mocks the words of Jesus: ‘Treat others the way you would have them treat you.’ Indeed, racism is more than a disregard for the words of Jesus; it is a denial of the truth of the dignity of each human being revealed by the mystery of the Incarnation.”

Those who signed the Declaration of Independence further witnessed to the theological assumption of the sanctity of human life when they said that “all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” Whether or not they had personal reservations in the cases of some ethnic groups, today Americans interpret the words “all men” to mean *all men and women regardless of ethnic background*.

Question 4: While it is very clear both in our faith life and in the Declaration of Independence that racial differences were never meant to exist, how can we reconcile this with the fact that we do make choices based on a person's gender or race?

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A very important point to note is that biologists and anthropologists maintain that the concept of race cannot be justified scientifically. The notion of viewing people from the standpoint of race is relatively new in the history of humanity. It was introduced by Europeans early in the history of the Americas to justify the existence of slavery and the exploitation of the land inhabited by Native Americans. Dividing groups of people into different races made it possible for those who held power to rank certain groups as more or less important than others. They appealed to science as a means of justifying the difference.

Question 5: Can our focus on cultural diversity sometimes be a cause of racism?

In fact, science has shown that there exists more variation within a particular ethnic group than between so-called "races." Even new DNA technology points to that fact that we all have a common ancestry that originates in Africa. Actually, to speak of any of us in terms of belonging to another race than that which we call human is erroneous. Regardless of ethnicity or color of skin, we really all are members of the same human race. We continue, however, to use the term when speaking of groups because it has become so embedded in our culture.

Question 6: Do you agree or disagree with the statement that there really is only one race — the human race?

Question 7: Is racism a problem of the past, or is it still alive and active in our world today?

Prayer

*Heavenly Father, we are reminded in Sacred Scripture that
You created all men and women in Your own Divine Image.*

This important truth is why Jesus says:

"Love your neighbor as yourself."

*May we open our hearts to your heavenly grace
that it may rid us of all ignorance, insecurity, and fear.*

*May Your grace enable us to perceive
Your Sacred Image in everyone we meet.*

*Then may we come to understand
that "loving your neighbor as yourself"
is important precisely because*

my neighbor is myself.

We are all a reflection of the Divine Image.

We are all One in You.

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Session II

Opening Prayer

Turn to Page 2.

Scripture

“From that Place He went off to the district of Tyre. He entered a house and wanted no one to know about it, but He could not escape notice. Soon a woman whose daughter had an unclean spirit heard about Him. She came and fell at His feet. The woman was a Greek, a Syrophoenician by birth, and she begged Him to drive the demon out of her daughter. He said to her, ‘Let the children be fed first. For it is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs.’ She replied and said to Him, ‘Lord even the dogs under the table eat the children’s scraps.’ Then He said to her, ‘For saying this, you may go. The demon has gone out of your daughter.’” Mark 7:24-29.

What is the Sin of Racism?

We truly are all members of the same human family, and each of us is sacred by virtue of the fact that we are a reflection of our God. This is a fundamental religious truth and the grounds for respecting all human life. However, the fact remains that racism continues to exist in a variety of forms in American society. It is a tangible expression of Original Sin and negatively impacts every American citizen. It exhibits itself in three primary ways: 1) American culture, 2) personal decisions, and 3) the institutions of our society. It may be said that in each of these ways, we are held in bondage to this sin.

Racism and American Culture

We grow up within a culture, and consequently are influenced by it. This culture has been shaped by those who had their roots in Europe. Their influence on American culture affects how we view aspects of life in America today.

For example, each year our country celebrates Columbus Day, recalling the *discovery* of the so-called “new world” by Christopher Columbus. Since this land was already inhabited by Native Americans, it follows that he did not really discover a “new” world. However, ascribing the discovery to Europeans made it possible for them to justify the confiscation of land belonging to Native Americans. Since the dominant group in our country has its roots in Europe, this seeming anomaly is not upsetting to most people.

On the other hand, it is greatly disconcerting to Native Americans, and it should be to all of us. Soon thereafter, the concept of race was utilized in America to justify the enslavement of African-Americans.

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Question 1: How might a Native American tell the story of Columbus arriving in America? Would a Native American call it a "discovery"? Would you?

The fact that we commemorate Columbus Day without question is an example of how our American culture has influenced the way we think and how we often can play a part in perpetuating racist thinking, without knowing it. It also illustrates that our history has been taught completely from a White European-American perspective.

Question 2: What kind of thinking are we reinforcing when we celebrate Columbus Day? Does the commemoration of this day indirectly reinforce racist thinking? How would you tell the story of Columbus to your children?

Question 3: Can you think of any other examples where the history you learned was told from a biased viewpoint?

Racism is so bound up with our culture that it affects our self-image. It is as though you have been given a passport at birth including a photograph of yourself. *The photograph is the most important part of the passport.* This photograph conveys an image of who you are from the standpoint of "race" and "color." We refer to this photograph as the "racialized self." It is one's identity in society from the standpoint of race. It is an image that is defined by the assumption in American culture that the worth of an individual is measured by the color of his or her skin. Our culture regards your photograph as the indicator of what type of membership you will have in society and what access you will have to goods and services and opportunities for economic and educational advancement as well as political participation. Although the passport indicates that you are an American citizen, that is not, in itself, enough to guarantee that you will always be treated fairly.

Question 4: Describe to the group the identity which your passport picture has assigned to you (White, Person of Color, male, female). Are you included or excluded from the dominant cultural group? Do you feel your image has helped or hindered you in life?

Question 5: To what goods, services, and opportunities does the picture of your "racialized-self" entitle you in our society? Has that passport picture denied you any of the same?

The ranking which is assigned to you in the "color scheme" also affects your self-image. The self-image that you internalize many times has nothing to do with your real personality, or the moral quality of your character, or the fact that you are a child of

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God. We are social beings looking for acceptance, and oftentimes our self-image is determined by how we are regarded by others. In this case, the term "others" refers to the dominant cultural group.

The passport which has assigned to us an image, and upon which our own self-image is based, unfortunately opens the doors of opportunity only to some and not to others.

Whites are afforded full membership in the dominant culture with the rights and privileges which accompany membership. *This reinforces a positive self-image.*

People of Color are afforded a partial membership in the dominant culture with limited access to opportunities and privileges. *A negative image of self-worth is reinforced.*

This differentiated status automatically sets up a tension between Whites and People of Color, as well as among the subgroups of the latter.

Question 6: Low self-esteem can sometimes cause a person to settle for less than they deserve. Similarly, a negative self-image (regardless of the reason) can cause a person to do things which are self-destructive. This is unhealthy thinking. Can you think of any examples where this has happened?

Communities which are often located in poor areas with high crime and little employment or property ownership and no voice in the political process are often environments in which people feel a sense of meaninglessness. The individual and communal self-image is negative. Frustration and anger abound. When some incident involving race occurs, often there is an outburst of violence which sometimes turns inward on the community itself. Examples are the recent turmoil in Benton Harbor, Michigan, or the riots that took place in Los Angeles and Detroit.

Question 7: In the racial incident involving Rodney King some years ago, community residents destroyed their own neighborhoods and businesses within the community. In what ways do you think a negative self-image contributed to that action or to similar actions in other cities since?

Question 8: What are some of the causes of tension among different groupings of People of Color?

Racism and the Individual

As a dysfunction in the human family, racism has influenced us psychologically in ways that we often do not understand but which are manifested by our personal behavior. Although we like to think that every decision we make is freely made and totally ours, more often than not those decisions are culturally influenced. In other words, we are all products of our environment: the influences of our parents, siblings and extended fam-

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ily, the values and taboos of our culture, media advertisement, role models from the world of sports and entertainment, and the "times" in which we live. All of these influence our thinking and behavior.

Sometimes our blind adherence to cultural assumptions causes us to make decisions that actually perpetuate racism without our knowing it. *At other times, our willingness to abandon reason and submit to ignorance, insecurity, or fear causes us to freely choose to act in a racist manner.* Choosing not to hire a person on the basis of one's skin color would be an example of such behavior.

Racism has also manifested itself in the telling of demeaning stories and jokes, stereotyping, profiling, and acts destructive of property. Not only have African-Americans and Latinos experienced this, but American citizens of Middle Eastern or Asian background have become the most recent victims of these crimes. Sometimes demeaning remarks are made about immigrants as a result of their inability to speak English well, or their desire to speak their native language when they are with members of their family or cultural group. The irony is that immigrants often speak at least two languages and sometimes more. There are countless other examples.

Question 9: *A child of five or six years of age, observing the world about him/her in Northwest Indiana, might incorrectly conclude that the reason Whites and People of Color live separately from one another is because this is how each prefers to live. This obviously would be a conclusion made in ignorance of the facts.*

Give some examples of how ignorance of the true nature of things might have at one time affected your thinking about race or race-relations.

Give some examples of racist remarks you have heard or actions you have witnessed which were performed out of ignorance.

Question 10: *What are some ways you can react to a person who makes a racist statement in your presence? Since silence can often be mistaken for consent, is it important for you to respond? What should you do or say?*

Question 11: *People often demean others who are different from themselves out of a personal sense of insecurity. Give an example you have witnessed.*

Question 12: *What part has fear played in contributing to racism, particularly in Northwest Indiana? Have you experienced any of these fears? Are the fears expressed really justified?*

Racism and Institutions of American Society

The common institutions of our society are family, Church, government, education,

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business, and the media. When our culture and the people who are a part of it become influenced by racism, that racism finds itself becoming part of the institutions of our society as well. It influences family in the sense of who a person can date and marry. It has taken form in the passage of laws, such as the "Jim Crow Laws" which prevented access to those same things which were regarded as rights by other members of our society, e.g., voting. It has an impact on the policies which determine membership in a church, where a person may attend school, what kind of health care that person will receive, what kinds of jobs will be open to that individual, what types of loans will be made to that person by financial institutions.

The media plays a very strong role in influencing public opinion by the time and attention they give to "news items" and the slant they take on reporting the stories. As an institution in society, it has the power to shape and mold culture. It can act as a two-edged sword: reinforcing existing cultural assumptions or challenging them.

Question 13: Where and when have you seen the media reinforce racist assumptions in our culture?

Question 14: How has this occurred with regard to the City of Gary or other cities in Northwest Indiana?

Civil Rights legislation has helped to eliminate most institutional racism from the standpoint of law. But there is still much work to do to root out the policies and procedures of institutions which are in some cases still racist.

Question 15: Where do you continue to see racism institutionalized in America today? Give examples of laws, policies, regulations and procedures of institutions such as the family, Church, government, education, business and media.

Question 16: The University of Michigan recently conducted a test sending resumes out to corporations in which applicants possessed similar educational backgrounds and experience. The only differentiation was that made with regard to names. Names chosen attempted to reflect different racial backgrounds. The survey discovered that those who were White received decidedly more responses than those of People of Color. Racial discrimination in hiring practices is clearly against the law. This test showed that there are certainly "unwritten policies" that exist in our institutions which perpetuate racism. Give examples of other "unwritten policies" or "procedures."

Question 17: Give examples of how the Church contributed to racism in

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Northwest Indiana. In what ways has the Church sought to be a moral leader? Give examples of how you think it can be more inclusive.

Racism is a Social Sin

Racism is not just the sin of individuals, but it has become so ingrained in the institutions of society itself that it is a social as well as personal sin.

A glaring example of the confluence of cultural, personal and institutional racism in Northwest Indiana today is seen in the existence of segregation in housing.

Culturally. We have been told that we belong to different races, and consequently each is given a separate status in society. One way in which this is demonstrated is in segregated housing.

Personally. Whites often will indicate in unmistakable ways that People of Color are not welcome in the same neighborhood.

Institutionally. Loans may be made difficult to obtain by People of Color when seeking to move into a neighborhood.

Prayer

Please turn to Page 5.

Session III

Opening Prayer

Please turn to Page 2.

Scripture

"I, then, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love, striving to preserve the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace: one body and one Spirit, as you were also called to the one hope of your call; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" Ephesians 4: 1-6.

What Does it Mean to be White?

The roots of racism run deep within the cultural psyche of our land. They are nurtured by an attitude which holds that White European-Americans are superior to any other group of people. This understanding becomes the justification for "White dominance."

This type of thinking became rooted within our culture immediately upon the arrival of Europeans to the shores of this country. Adventurers and colonists alike, from Spain, Portugal, England, France and Holland immediately took possession of the land they

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surveyed as if by "divine right."

Often religious justification was given by references made to a "new promised land" (consult the preface for the celebration of the Eucharist on Thanksgiving Day). The Church sometimes officially and sometimes tacitly sanctioned the process.

The term "White" refers to more than color. It refers to what constitutes membership in the dominant cultural group in society. It designates a "class of people" who are set apart from others.

Originally, since English settlers were the dominant group in the land, they were considered to be the purest form of "White." To be English and Christian was to be at the pinnacle of the racial pyramid. To be African-American or Native-American and non-Christian was to be at the base of the pyramid.

Other groups from Europe were slowly assimilated into the dominant group and given the status of "White." The French, German, Irish, Spanish, etc., slowly made their way into the dominant group. Later the Italians, Hungarians, Polish, Lithuanians, Slovaks, Czechs, Russians, Croatians, Greeks and others made their way into the mainstream. It is interesting to note, however, that when each new ethnic group first arrived on these shores they were NOT considered "White." Only with the passage of time and acceptance of the culture of the dominant group did they eventually gain "White status."

Question 1: In what ways did European immigrants gradually work their way into the mainstream dominant group of the society which we call "White"?

Question 2: People of Color were not accepted into the dominant cultural group. Why did the same things not work for them? How has this affected them?

There are some who question how they could be mistaken for anything else but White. However, the term "White" does not refer so much to color of skin (although skin color is included) as it does to a classification of people to determine who "fits" in society.

We are all familiar with the term "WASP" (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant). Early in our history this defined who belonged to the dominant cultural group. In time, this definition slowly gave way to include those who were neither Anglo-Saxon nor Protestant, but the classification of "White" as opposed to "non-White" still remained. It is a classification whose meaning shifts in time, but it is safe to say that people know whether or not they are accepted as "White" by how they are treated in society.

Those who read this and consider themselves part of mainstream "White America" today should realize that their ancestors were not considered "White" upon arriving here. It demonstrates how arbitrary and artificial is this designation, and how descriptive it is of who really controls power in our society. In fact, there is probably not one

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person who belongs to the Catholic Church today in Northwest Indiana who would have been considered "White" in the early history of this country. All of us would have been outside of the dominant group in power.

It is an unfortunate fact that as each new ethnic group eventually gained "White status," the memory of prior exclusion and persecution waned. In many cases their standard of living often did not improve. However, the new-found status became cause for identifying with the dominant power and looking with contempt and disdain upon the next ethnic group trying to raise its own status.

White Status and Economic Class

It has been the history of those who have held power in this country to divert attention away from themselves as the cause of misfortune for others. This is usually done by creating the illusion that the real cause is another group, which always is perceived as being further down the ladder racially, socially, or economically.

This is how Southern plantation owners were able to persuade poor Whites, who held no slaves, to fight in the Civil War. The plantation owners appealed to the low self-esteem of the poor Whites, convincing them that African-Americans were inferior racially. Poor as they may have been, their "Whiteness" was enough of a privilege to give them self-worth and reason to embrace the Southern cause.

Question 3: How did the forces of insecurity and fear on the part of poor Whites play into the hands of Southern plantation owners? Was this same strategy used by corporations in the early history of labor unions in this country?

Question 4: How do people who have power in society reinforce the same tension between Whites and People of Color today?

In the same way, the powerful today seek to convince the "new Whites" that the most recent arrivals are inferior and their quest for employment, education, housing and health care is the reason there is not enough to go around for all. They are persuaded to take leave of their own common sense. Instead of focusing on those who control wealth and power as the obvious cause of their problems, they look to the new immigrants, trying to improve their lot in life, as the cause of blame. They choose to believe an illusion because it gives them a false sense of superiority over someone. Just as in years gone by, the illusion usually works.

The poorest suffer persecution, while those in control become even more powerful. So has been the case with each ethnic group that has arrived on these shores. There are many people today, usually second generation or later, who dismiss this as simply a necessary part of the rite of passage for new immigrants. Sooner or later, they say, hard work and determination will gain everyone "White status."

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Whites should be sympathetic of new immigrants and understanding of their desire to continue to be nourished by their culture, as they gradually become incorporated into the society and the larger culture. Whites should not allow their ignorance of other cultures and the languages which are spoken by other ethnic groups in the U.S. to awaken the ever-present fear and insecurity within us that would lead to rejecting these groups. We should appreciate the importance which each immigrant ethnic group attaches to its own culture.

Question 5: *In what ways can Americans learn from the past as they welcome new immigrants to this country?*

Question 6: *Regardless of what border one crosses to arrive in America, the Statue of Liberty stands as a symbol for all immigrants. What do you think it symbolizes to immigrants today?*

Question 7: *Do the words written on the Statue of Liberty ("Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses, yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore"). still hold true today or are they merely a reflection of a bygone era?*

It is also important that the Church reach out to those who have arrived in Northwest Indiana undocumented. Their motivation for coming to America was the same as it was for so many of our own ancestors. They seek a better quality of life for themselves and their children. It is simply inhospitable and un-Christian for us to turn a blind eye or deaf ear to them. As the Priestly authors remind us in Leviticus 19:33-34:

"When an alien resides with you in your land, do not molest them. You shall treat the alien who resides with you no differently than the natives born among you; have the same love for him as for yourself; for you too were aliens in the land of Egypt. I, the Lord, am your God."

White Privilege

The importance in achieving "White status" is the ability to enjoy privileges and benefits which flow from it. However, it is impossible for *People of Color* to achieve this status. This means that there are opportunities which are afforded *Whites* that *People of Color* simply do not share.

Whites can generally move into whatever neighborhood they choose as long as they can afford it. There will be no repercussions as is usually the case when it is a *Person of Color*. This also means they have the opportunity for better schools. With that usually comes better police protection and other services.

Whites will not be stereotyped, but judged on their merits or lack thereof. Opportunity for employment and advancement in employment is generally better and the level of pay higher. *Whites* will be stopped by police less often than *People of Color* for

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suspicion of committing a crime.

The following questions are divided into two groups because there are obviously two points of view regarding this issue. It is the intent of the questions to try to elicit BOTH points of view.

For those who are *White*:

Question 8: Give examples of benefits and privileges you enjoy from "White status."

Question 9: Do you feel that "White status" can discriminate against People of Color? Give some examples.

Question 10: In addition to the benefits, are there any ways in which you feel that you are a "victim" of the culture of "White privilege"?

For *People of Color*:

Question 11: Give examples of benefits and privileges you see bestowed on Whites because of "White status."

Question 12: Give examples of how exclusion from "white status" has affected your life?

The Problem of a White Culture

We, in Northwest Indiana, are blessed with People of Color from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, including African-Americans, Latino Americans, Asian Americans, Arab Americans, and others. It is important for us to remind ourselves that these groups oftentimes struggle to obtain the same things that are easily obtained by others. Being a *Person of Color* in a *White* world is a difficult task to say the least.

To the extent that our American culture holds up "White status" as a sign of full membership and "White privilege" continues to exist, it is fair to say that our American culture has been poisoned with the sin of racism. Like a body seeking to be free from its ailment, so the soul of our culture cries out to be set free from this sin.

Prayer

Please turn to Page 5.

Session IV

Opening Prayer

Please turn to Page 2.

Scripture

“For those who are led by the Spirit of God are Children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received a spirit of adoption, through which we cry Abba, ‘Father!’ The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if only we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him” Romans 8: 14-17.

The Redemptive Process

The influence of racism is not always conspicuous. It is so delicately interwoven into the fabric of our American culture that it manifests itself in often quiet and insidious ways. It is akin to a cancer, which goes unnoticed for a time, as it invades and permeates the body.

It is difficult to admit, yet nonetheless true, that all Whites bear some responsibility for racism. I know that oftentimes many of our Catholic faithful will say that they are not responsible for the institution of slavery. Many, especially in Northwest Indiana, will point out that their ancestors arrived here in the 1900s, well after slavery was abolished. They further insist that they contribute in no way to the racist practices in the present day, and should not be held responsible for the conditions which led to them. These same people, in good conscience, even declare their abhorrence of racism in American society. They feel unjustly attacked when they are included in any culpability for racism today. The NCCB Pastoral Letter, *To Live in Christ Jesus*, says:

“The absence of personal fault for an evil does not absolve one of all responsibility. We must seek to resist and undo injustices we have not caused, lest we become bystanders who tacitly endorse evil and so share in guilt for it.”

In addition, we sometimes overlook just how powerful the cultural influences are that mold our lives. Neither the residents of Northwest Indiana nor their ancestors share in any responsibility for the existence of slavery. Nevertheless, our culture has been deeply and profoundly influenced by the racism which led to slavery and the racism that continues to exist to this day.

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Many Catholic faithful were born in the United States and have been raised under the very powerful influence of this culture. If American culture has been tainted by the sin of racism, then it follows that we too have been influenced.

Question 1: In what ways can you see how our culture has influenced our thinking with regard to race and racism?

Question 2: What are some of the things we have learned by way of family, Church, media, government, and our American history that have encouraged racist thinking or action?

For example, the ancestors of most *Whites*, who have their roots in Europe, immigrated here to find freedom and to escape tyrants whose authority was based upon a culture of aristocracy. It is sadly ironic that this same dominant group has replaced an aristocracy of birth with an aristocracy of color.

It is sadder still that their children and grandchildren, who pride themselves so much in extolling the equality of all people in our country, at the same time, collude with a culture that continues to perpetuate a class system based upon color. Although this may be done unwittingly, it nevertheless exemplifies how much we have been influenced by our culture.

Just as our culture stands in need of liberation from this sin's subtle but powerful control, so does each one of us who are represented in the dominant cultural group.

Question 3: Have you ever thought about our class system as being another form of aristocracy?

The first step toward liberation is to submit the forces which influence our culture to critical analysis. We need to acquire knowledge about how racism has influenced our American culture, our personal decisions and the institutions of our society.

That knowledge assists us in dealing with our "racialized-self" and freeing ourselves of its grip. It enables each of us to more accurately identify ourselves in terms of who we really are as children of God and as individuals of worth as opposed to the image of how we are perceived by a culture corrupted by racism.

However, it is not enough just to know how racism has influenced our culture and our self-awareness. There is yet another task for those who believe that we have been created in God's image and likeness.

The second step for every Christian is to submit to a *metanoia* or personal conversion of heart by which we die to the "old Adam" who embodies racist thinking and rise to the "new Adam," the image of Christ, so that we view every person, regardless of race or ethnicity, as our brother and sister. St. John reminds us:

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“Anyone who says I love God and hates his brother is a liar, since the man who cannot love the brother that he can see, cannot love God whom he cannot see. So this is the commandment that He has given us, that anyone who loves God must also love his brother” (1 John 4:20-21).

Our Holy Father tells us that a conversion of heart is necessary, and that the starting point is prayer. He also reminds us that prayer to God is unworthy if those praying engage in discrimination against other groups of people. This conversion of heart, as the bishops instructed in *Brothers and Sisters to Us*, also requires attuning oneself to the image of Christ.

“The ultimate remedy against evils such as this will not come solely from human effort. What is needed is the recreation of the human being according to the image revealed in Jesus Christ. For He reveals in Himself what each human being can and must become.”

Question 4: What seem to be the barriers to making a “conversion of heart”? What holds us back? What do we need to overcome?

The third step in the liberation process is for all of us, *Whites* and *People of Color*, to work together in solidarity as vehicles of God's grace to eliminate every trace of racism from our culture and the institutions of our society. As pointed out earlier, racism has so permeated our culture and the institutions of our society that it is a social as well as personal sin. Just as individuals stand in need of conversion, so do the institutions of our society.

Question 5: This third step calls for more than “toleration.” What is the difference between “tolerance” and “working together in solidarity”?

Tools for the Redemptive Process

Dialogue

Continuing the dialogue process is extremely important. As this process continues among our Catholic faithful and later with members of other denominations in “study circles,” we widen the circle of those who have come to realize the need to eliminate racism and seek unity. In so doing, we continue to build a larger group of allies.

This is not just talking about the same old issues again. It is welcoming new people into the process of examining their own thinking and the culture and institutions of the society in which they live. If we are to succeed in eliminating racism one day, we need to continuously add new hearts and minds to the movement. Dialogue is the first step toward engaging in the process.

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Question 6: How can we keep the dialogue ongoing after these discussion sessions?

Retreat Experience

Following the dialogue phase, there will be a program, modeled in the form of a retreat experience, for those who may want to become more actively involved in dealing with racism in a spiritual and psychological way. Such a program would enable *Whites* and *People of Color* to come together to examine the cultural effects of *White privilege* and racism on each of us. It would address the self-image racism bestows on us and how it influences us to regard others. This is proposed as a means of empowering all of us to break free from the bondage of the "old Adam" so as to rise to a new way of thinking about ourselves and our relationship to others. Such an experience would also facilitate a process of healing so very much needed by us all.

White Cultural Awareness

In conjunction with the retreat program open to all, opportunities must be provided for *Whites* to be able to reflect on how our American culture has influenced our lives and how deeply rooted racism has become in the American cultural psyche. We seldom take the time to examine the components of our cultural conditioning and are so busy with the tasks of survival that we simply react to life. Yet, those reactions, themselves, are influenced by our culture.

We, can in many ways, be unwitting participants in perpetuating racism. Only taking time to examine how that happens will enable us to begin taking measures to deal with it. There is no program in our area which presently enables *Whites* to engage in this process. This is an entirely new way of thinking for people in the *White* majority. We will develop a program for this kind of experience of cultural examination with a view to reaching the personal *spiritual conversion* alluded to earlier.

Action

We need more than mere tolerance. We need more than a simple "live and let live" mentality. We need to join together, *Whites* and *People of Color*, in fraternity and solidarity in an Anti-Racist approach to building the Kingdom of God. We must realize our interdependence upon one another.

The dialogue, the retreat experience, and the "White Cultural Awareness" program will help us address the sin of racism as it exhibits itself in personal and cultural ways. In terms of institutional racism, our parishes need to build coalitions with other parishes (perhaps by way of their Parish Pastoral Councils and Peace and Social Justice Commissions) to identify issues pertaining to racism and to begin to strategize how to address them.

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It is also a priority that Catholic individuals, parishes, and diocesan institutions work in concert with other groups within Northwest Indiana to aggressively dismantle racism wherever it manifests itself in an institutional manner such as in hospitals, universities, businesses, social organizations, political organizations, banking, and any institution which affects the quality of life of the people of Northwest Indiana. We need to work in broad coalitions to leverage the power necessary to deal with the most blatant manifestations of racism in our institutions today.

“The ultimate remedy against evils such as this will not come solely from human effort. What is needed is the recreation of the human being according to the image revealed in Jesus Christ. For He reveals in Himself what each human being can and must become.”

The issues regarding racism which need to be addressed in Northwest Indiana must be identified by people at the grassroots level. Any proposals by either the Church or any other institutions could be regarded as being biased and not representative of the wider community. What the Church can offer, however, is an existing organizational structure to help effect institutional change and the moral leadership to help guide it.

Question 7: What are some positive efforts I intend to make to address racism in my own heart?

Question 8: What are some concrete ways I can help address the sin of racism in my own community?

Question 9: What are some possible issues around which Whites and People of Color could gather to work in solidarity to create a better Northwest Indiana?

Housing?

Education?

Regional Transportation?

Environmental Racism — toxic waste located in low income areas?

Health Care?

Question 10: What role might the Catholic Church play in addressing these issues?

Prayer

Please turn to Page 5.

Created in God's Image - The Future

Where do I/we go from here?

The natural question arises: Where do I/we go from here?

It is important that as new people come forward with the willingness to address this sin of racism in themselves and in our area, that opportunities be provided for them to enter into discussion with others, just as you have done. It is important to provide for ongoing dialogue groups for our Catholic faithful.

Widening the dialogue outside the circle of our Catholic faithful is imperative if we are going to be effective in dealing with racism in Northwest Indiana. Joining a "Study Circle" discussion group will give you the opportunity to dialogue with a diverse group of people from Northwest Indiana who are also interested in eradicating racism. These opportunities will be advertised shortly.

There will be opportunities in 2004 to participate in a retreat experience designed for *Whites* and *People of Color* to address the meaning of the racial image which each of us has been given by our culture and to learn how to deal with it in a manner befitting a healthy, fully-functioning person.

Whites will also be afforded an opportunity beginning in 2004 to participate in a retreat-style experience which enables each person to examine something which all Whites take for granted — what it means to be "White" in America.

In addition to addressing the sin of racism in our own hearts and within the culture which nurtures us, we are also concerned about institutionalized racism. To that end, caucus groups will be formed to identify specific issues of racial injustice and to identify the groups within Northwest Indiana that would serve as partners in addressing those issues.

If you are interested in becoming a member of one of these groups, please leave your name and phone number with your group facilitator. One of the unique advantages we have as the Catholic Church is a highly-organized infrastructure within our diocese. Parish Pastoral Councils and Peace and Social Justice Committees can provide the organizational network necessary to organize and represent our Catholic faithful as we work together with other religious and civic organizations to address racial inequality in our area and promote a more just and loving manner of life for all.

It is important to note that the single **most important** thing that we can do to help eradicate racism from our culture and society is to begin with removing it from our own hearts. To that end, prayer, the grace of God, and the opportunities described above for personal transformation will provide the much needed fuel to arrive at our destination.

This discussion guide for "Created in God's Image: A Pastoral Letter on the Sin of Racism and a Call to Conversion" was prepared by: Rev. John Ambre, Rev. Derrick Dudash, and Rev. Charles Mosley. It was published in cooperation with the Diocese of Gary's Office of Communications. Use of the material in this study guide outside the Diocese of Gary is encouraged, but only with permission.

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