

Am I afraid of people? Who am I afraid of? Do I exclude certain people from my life and judge them? Do I take time to know and understand my neighbor? Can I admit that I have certain prejudices and that sometimes I discriminate against others?

Am I willing to change my attitude toward my neighbor? Am I willing to avoid all forms of hatred, prejudice, and bigotry? Am I willing to pray for greater harmony and respect among God's people?

Do I believe in the healing power of love? Will love bring true peace and understanding to the world?

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## ERADICATING RACISM

Here are some Promising Practices to help eradicate the sin of racism in our neighborhoods, communities, and world.

Take the time to examine your attitudes about others, and work to change fearful, negative attitudes into loving, positive attitudes.

Refuse to allow others to use racial slurs in your presence.

Help organize an interfaith prayer vigil to pray for those who have been or continue to be oppressed by racism.

Increase your understanding of other races and cultures by reading about them.

Look for opportunities to welcome, speak to, and offer hospitality to people from a different race, culture, or ethnic background.

Create celebrations around significant cultural events in the community.

Participate in a community dialogue on racism.

Join a local grassroots Anti-Racism initiative.

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## THOUGHTS FOR REFLECTION

"The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line, the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea" (W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*)

"The structures of our society are subtly racist, for these structures reflect the values which society upholds" (*Brothers and Sisters to Us*).

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself" (Luke 10:27).

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# ERADICATING THE SIN



# OF RACISM

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A Program of  
**Project Reach Out**

## THE SIN OF RACISM

"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" (*Brothers and Sisters to Us: U.S. Bishops' Pastoral Letter on Racism*).

All of humanity is made in the image of a compassionate, merciful, and loving God. We are called to see God's image in the people around us. We must believe in our hearts that humanity is fundamentally good, that all people are intrinsically good. We want to be loving imitators of God, but sometimes fear gets in our way. It's hard to reach out to and love others when we are afraid of people.

Where do our fears originate? From those who raised us. From those who hurt us. From those who taught us. From our own physical experiences.

Fear is not a bad emotion. Healthy fear keeps us safe from harm. Healthy fear tells us when it is time to leave a dangerous situation. Healthy fear helps us to learn our limitations.

Unhealthy fear narrows our perspective of others and our worldview. Unhealthy fear distorts our self-image and image of others. Fear also affects the way we feel and think about people. Unhealthy fear blocks our hearts from loving and being loved, from understanding and being understood.

At various points in our history, men and women of all backgrounds have worked for the eradication of racism. Racism is a sin: it is a manifestation of our fear and failure to love one another.

## RACISM IS A VIOLATION

When a person is the object of our scorn, hatred, rage, indifference, disdain, prejudice or anger, we are violating that person. When we forget that we are all children of God and neglect to make a person the subject of our love, we are violating that person.

We are subtly, or not so subtly, taught that people whose features or skin are different from ours are not really children of God, are not as good as us, and are not to be trusted. We look for opportunities to make ourselves look superior, and we often generalize about a whole group of people based on a narrow, biased experience-or on someone else's opinion. We prejudge others by their physical appearance and are afraid to open our eyes and hearts to look at each person we meet with love for another child of God. We are afraid of being vulnerable.

When we are unwilling to do anything personally to heal the hurt and anguish caused by racism, we perpetuate the evil of racism. We rationalize that racism is not our problem; we protest that we did not invent racism, and therefore we are not responsible for doing anything about it. We are afraid to address the issue at all in case we open ourselves to criticism and the hatred of others.

Some of our fear also stems from the fact that we do not feel capable of eradicating racism on our own. When each of us focuses on transforming our own unhealthy fears and attitudes about others, however, then we are beginning to eradicate the evil of racism and beginning to love our neighbor as Jesus loves us.

## CONFRONTING RACISM

One of the ways to confront the sin of racism is to keep a journal of the times we become aware of thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and behaviors that perpetuate racism and prejudice around us. The following reflection questions aim to stimulate the process of self-examination.

Do I ever struggle to feel worthwhile? to feel lovable? to feel accepted and appreciated? Am I a member of a minority group in a larger community? Have I ever been despised and ignored in public? Have I ever despised and ignored others in public?

Do I reject anyone based on race, culture, nationality, religion, sex, ethnic background, or way of life? Have I ever been rejected, ridiculed, or despised because of my race, culture, nationality, religion, sex, ethnic background, or way of life? Do I believe that we are all sisters and brothers in God's eyes?

Do I take the risk to love those who have been prejudged unacceptable by others? Do I want to imitate God by being compassionate, love, and merciful? Can I make a conscious choice to treat everyone I encounter with loving kindness and respect?