



# THE JOURNEY TO RACIAL JUSTICE

*— Repentance, Healing, and Action —*

• A Pastoral Reflection •

Most Reverend William E. Lori, Archbishop of Baltimore



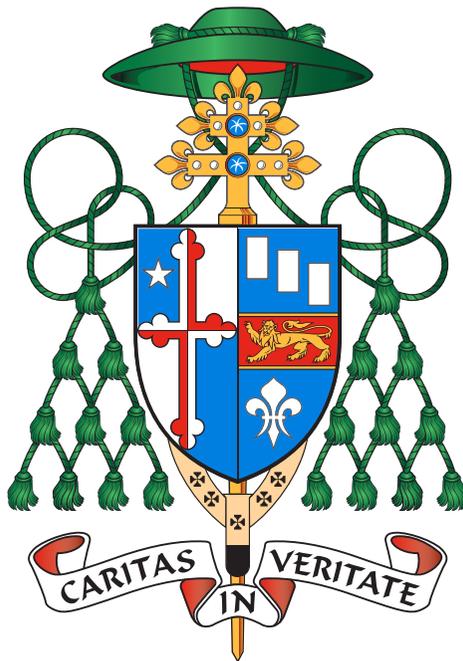


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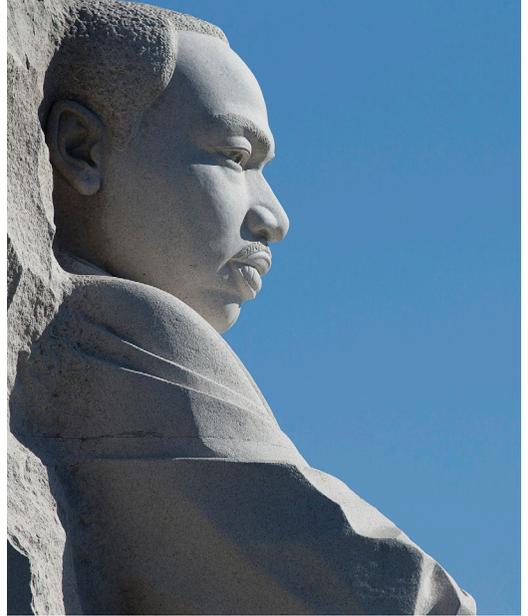
# THE JOURNEY TO RACIAL JUSTICE

## – *Repentance, Healing, and Action* –

As our country this month commemorates the birth of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., one of our nation’s most revered champions of racial justice, we cannot help but question whether his dream of racial unity will ever be attained. Even as we Americans celebrate his inspiring example, we feel the shame of witnessing public demonstrations of racial and ethnic violence and hatred such as we have not seen in decades.

Whether racism manifests itself in these blatant offenses against the dignity and humanity of people of color, or more subtly in the systemic racial inequities that persist in our current society — in the criminal justice system, in employment, education, housing, healthcare, and political enfranchisement — the national conversation confirms that there is still a great deal of work to be done.

While it has only been a year since I wrote a pastoral statement on Dr. King’s principles of nonviolence, there is a continued urgency to address the issue of racism, especially given the ongoing rise of horrifying incidents of racism, anti-Semitism and intolerance toward newcomers to our country. The urgency has also been highlighted through the recent publication of a national pastoral letter against racism, *Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love*, in which the U.S. bishops forthrightly recognize racism as a sin: “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). ... Every racist act — every such comment, every joke, every disparaging look as a reaction to the color of skin, ethnicity, or place of origin — is a failure to acknowledge another person as a brother or sister, created in the image of God. In these and in many other such acts, the sin of racism persists in our lives, in our country, and in our world.”

Also within the past year, the Church has been rocked by a crisis of a magnitude many of us never thought possible. The people of God’s faith in the institutional Church, and most especially its leaders, has — rightfully — been shaken to the core. As I have participated in consultations, listening sessions, conversations, and moments of prayer since this crisis first erupted, I have come to realize in a new and clearer way an important truth: wherever the people of God are suffering is where I belong, at their side, listening, sharing compassion, and discerning how the Holy Spirit is calling me to take action.

And so it is with this heart that I wish to turn again to the issue of racism, and to my sisters and brothers who continue to suffer from the effects of this sin — in our Catholic community, in the City of Baltimore, and throughout the territory of the Archdiocese. The earlier pastoral on Dr. King is an important first step in this conversation, but as the rhetoric of intolerance and hatred continues to spiral in our local and national communities, it is clear there is still much more to say, and still much, much more to do.

Recognizing always our need for redemption, we must keep at the foundation of our journey forward the conviction that the best solutions to the sin of racism and the social and political ills that racism engenders will be centered in the teachings of Jesus Christ and led by His Holy Spirit. Again and again, we must take the words of Jesus to heart: “I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another” (Jn 13:34).

As the U.S. bishops declared in their recent statement, “What is needed, and what we are calling for, is a genuine conversion of heart, a conversion that will compel change, and the reform of our institutions and

society. Conversion is a long road to travel for the individual. Moving our nation to a full realization of the promise of liberty, equality, and justice for all is even more challenging. However, in Christ we can find the strength and the grace necessary to make that journey.” And so I invite all of the Catholic faithful throughout the Archdiocese of Baltimore to forge ahead on this journey together.

# ACKNOWLEDGING THE PAST

In reflecting on how entrenched the issue of racism appears to be in our American society, we must first take the necessary step of engaging in an honest examination of our own past. While today we witness the effects of racism against many ethnicities and people of color, the historical roots of racism against African-Americans in our country cannot be ignored. We must therefore acknowledge the Church's historical involvement in a society in which the institution of slavery was deeply embedded. No doubt, in looking back at the history not only of our Church, but also of our nation, one may justly say that racism is the original sin of our country, our state, and our local dioceses, and its deep roots continue to plague us. As we are so painfully aware in the midst of the current crisis in the Church, without acknowledging the sins of the past, we cannot hope to understand and heal the wounds of the present.

While Maryland is recognized as the Cradle of Catholicism in this country, it was also one of the first regions where slavery was introduced. Thus the inception of the Catholic Church here in Maryland, like so many other institutions that trace their roots to the founding of our country, was squarely ensconced in a society mired in racial injustice. No credible treatment of the history of the establishment of the Catholic Church in the United States can be told without also acknowledging the reality of the early Church's direct involvement in slavery.

When the State of Maryland was in its infancy, Catholics, including both clergy and laity, allowed the mantle of the society in which they lived to supersede the fundamental tenet of their faith: all of us are children of God, all are redeemed by Christ. Among them were four of the first Roman Catholic bishops in Maryland — Archbishops John Carroll, Leonard Neale, Ambrose Maréchal, and Samuel Eccleston — who openly participated in the institution of enslavement. We know from previously published research that Archbishops Carroll, Maréchal, and Eccleston possessed enslaved persons, which included making provisions for their manumission or sale. Father Leonard Neale, who later became Archbishop,

was a member of the Society of Jesus who made decisions affecting the lives of the enslaved persons held by the Jesuits. Records show that lay members, religious communities, and individual clergy held enslaved persons and that the Church benefited from their labor not only in general parish work – the maintenance of churches, residences, convents, cemeteries, and so on – but also from the profit of their labor on plantations and farms owned by Church entities.



# THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN THE ERA OF LEGAL SEGREGATION

Once the institution of legal enslavement ended, the era of legal segregation and “Jim Crow” laws ensued in America, including within the institutions of the Catholic Church. Following the culture of the society in which they existed, the Church continued to fall short of its professed adherence to the teachings of Jesus Christ. Catholic schools, religious education classes, lay associations, and social services, including hospitals and orphanages, were segregated. In multi-racial parishes, black Catholics sat in the back of the church or in the balcony. They waited until white Catholics made their confessions before receiving the sacrament, sometimes in separate confessionals. They received Communion after white Catholics, also at times from separate sacred vessels reserved for them. Some parish cemeteries had sections reserved for whites and blacks, segregating parishioners even in death.

Despite the harsh reality of segregation, the Light of Christ continued to burn through many holy servants of the Church, who



despite enduring oppression and opposition themselves, continued to minister to the African-American community in Maryland. These brave leaders led the way in empowering those they served to find a path to true self determination both within and without

the Church. Individuals such as our beloved Mother Mary Lange, who founded the Oblate Sisters of Providence, a religious order of African-American women, is renowned for her efforts to open schools for black children in Baltimore and Washington, D.C. The Mill Hill Fathers, known later as the Josephites, came to Baltimore at the invitation of Archbishop Martin Spalding to minister to black Catholics, and within 50 years, were staffing African-American parishes across the country. Later in the 19th century, the Franciscan Sisters of Mill Hill, later of Baltimore, arrived to minister to various needs of African-Americans, staffing and opening schools and orphanages. The Light of Christ was indeed kept burning brightly in the efforts and good works of these pioneers of racial justice, and we have much to learn today from their example.



At the same time, however, the makeup of Maryland's Catholic community was being transformed by waves of immigrants, themselves victimized by ethnic prejudice and anti-Catholic sentiment. Yet those national parishes of German, Polish, and Italian immigrants, as well as other immigrant congregations of the faithful, were still influenced by the racist tendencies of the general society. As the Church welcomed and supported these European immigrants who today enjoy a remarkable



ascendancy in American society, candor compels us to admit that the Church did not respond to the needs of African-Americans as enthusiastically, nor did it pursue efforts to bring white and black Catholics together in our parish communities. The Catholic Church in Maryland, itself under attack from strong American nativist, anti-Catholic forces, had fully embraced the immigrant but it had not yet fully embraced the African-American.



# LIGHT

Efforts to more truly embrace the Gospel call began to emerge prior to and during the era of the Civil Rights Movement, which continues today. Decades before the Civil Rights movement blossomed, Church leaders in Maryland, including Baltimore Archbishop Michael Curley<sup>1</sup>, Cardinal Patrick O’Boyle of the Archdiocese of Washington<sup>2</sup>, and Bishop Edmond Fitzmaurice<sup>3</sup> of the Diocese of Wilmington worked to integrate the Catholic community through a variety of efforts, and desegregated Catholic schools throughout the state, all before *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* in 1954. As Cardinal O’Boyle stated, the bishops “[saw] no reason why a black child was not just as much entitled to a Catholic education as a white child.”



As the Civil Rights movement galvanized the country to achieve a greater degree of racial justice, Baltimore Cardinal Lawrence Shehan emerged in Maryland as a fervent leader for racial justice, and his pastoral letter, “On Racial Justice,” continues to inspire its readers. Within the Church, Cardinal Shehan oversaw the integration of all archdiocesan institutions by 1965, and in 1966 established the Archdiocesan Urban Commission charged with addressing discrimination within the Archdiocese. He appointed Charles Tildon, a community activist, public

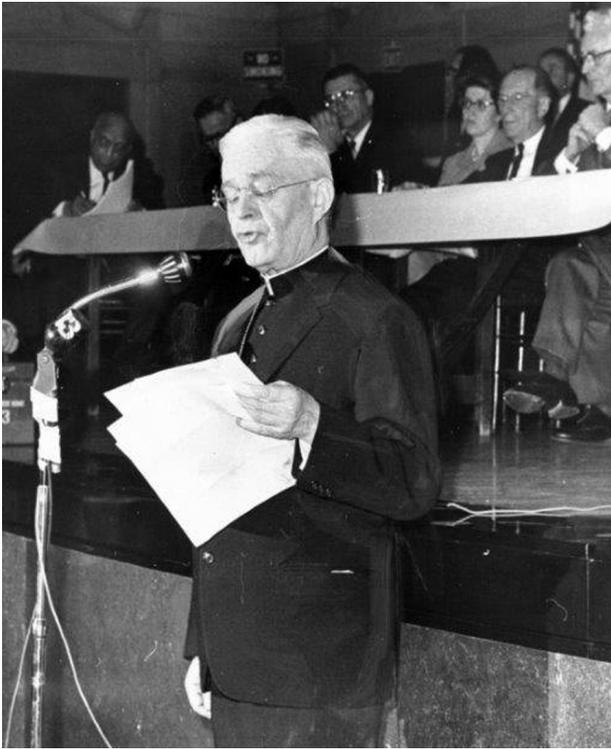
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1. The Most Reverend Michael Curley served as Archbishop of Baltimore from 1921 to 1947, and also as Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Washington when it was created in 1939.

2. Cardinal O’Boyle was installed as Archbishop of Washington in 1948.

3. Bishop Fitzmaurice served as Bishop of Wilmington, 1925-1960.

servant, and educator,<sup>4</sup> to head the commission, marking the first time a layman had been appointed to a major archdiocesan post. Beyond the boundaries of the Catholic community, Cardinal Shehan sometimes confronted withering criticism for his vocal advocacy for the social justice concerns of African Americans in Baltimore, particularly racial disparities in housing. As many Catholic men and women, including many priests and nuns, participated in the Civil Rights movement over the ensuing years, they joined the many efforts, sacrifices, and achievements fueling the hope that the country was finally “fixed” on policies and programs that would achieve racial justice on a grand scale.



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4. See [www.archbalt.org/catholics-remember-charles-g-tildon-jr/](http://www.archbalt.org/catholics-remember-charles-g-tildon-jr/)

# RACISM IN THE CHURCH TODAY

Without a doubt, many members of the Catholic Church today have continued to devote themselves to addressing racial injustice in our Church and society. Through the work of Catholic Charities and many other Catholic social service providers, the Church continues to minister to communities suffering from the effects of racial injustices, empowering them to attain an equal footing and lives of self-sufficiency. Despite financial challenges, perhaps one of the Church's most effective efforts is its commitment to addressing the educational needs of African-American children in inner cities. Here in the City of Baltimore, the Archdiocese has maintained this commitment especially through our Community Schools<sup>5</sup>, and for the first time in nearly 50 years, will be opening a new school, Mother Mary Lange School, in Baltimore City in the next two years. The local Church continues to explore various models of sustainability, such as Mother Seton Academy operated by several orders of women religious, the Cristo Rey Schools in Maryland operated by the Jesuits and Salesians, and increased financial support for disenfranchised students through private sector and government-supported scholarship programs.

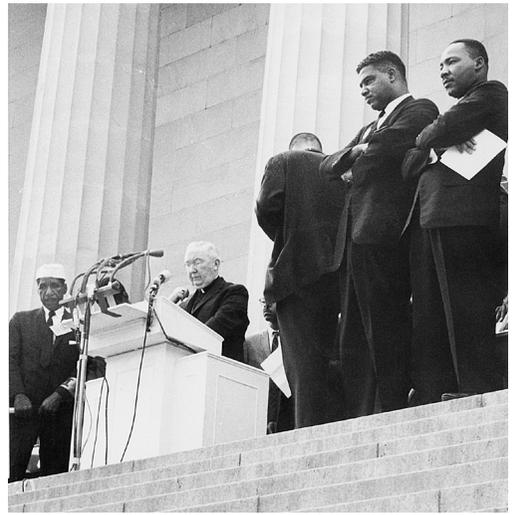
These efforts, encouraging as they may be, cannot by themselves end racial injustice, nor can they be causes of complacency. As the U.S. bishops noted in their pastoral letter:

*Too many good and faithful Catholics remain unaware of the connection between institutional racism and the continued erosion of the sanctity of life. We are not finished with the work. The evil of racism festers in part because, as a nation, there has been very limited formal acknowledgement of the harm done to so many,*

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5. The Community Schools operated by the Archdiocese of Baltimore include Archbishop Borders, Cardinal Shehan, Holy Angels, and Ss. James and John Catholic Schools.

*no moment of atonement, no national process of reconciliation and, all too often a neglect of our history. Many of our institutions still harbor, and too many of our laws still sanction, practices that deny justice and equal access to certain groups of people. God demands more from us. We cannot, therefore, look upon the progress against racism in recent decades and conclude that our current situation meets the standard of justice. In fact, God demands what is right and just.*



Just as society at large has been unable to sustain its fight against racial injustice, so too has the Church at times fallen short. Have the efforts that were made in the 20th century truly resulted in a fully integrated Church in Maryland, or have we perhaps become less vigilant over the years in this important work? Have we lapsed, like our society at large, into a situation of *de facto* segregation? If we can still easily identify the “black” and “white” parishes of our archdiocese, have we truly accomplished the goal of racial equity we claim to embrace? Most importantly, as we gather together at the table of the Lord to share in our common faith in the presence of His Body and Blood, are we certain that those who look or speak differently than us feel welcomed as fellow worshipers?

We must continue to ask these questions with renewed commitment and fresh ears today, because recent racially charged events have made clear to us that once again, we Americans seem to have lost our footing on the journey to racial justice. The politically charged voices of hatred and racism are more virulent than many Americans imagined possible. Awakened by this outcry throughout our country and state, we join the U.S. bishops in urging reflection, listening, prayer, and action to move the Church into the leadership role which befits her in such an important moral situation. To summarize in the words of the U.S. bishops:

*It is time to acknowledge the many times when the Church has failed to live as Christ taught — to love our brothers and sisters. Acts of racism have been committed by leaders and members of the Catholic Church — by bishops, clergy, religious, and laity — and her institutions. We express deep sorrow and regret for them. We also acknowledge those instances when we have not done enough or stood by silently when grave acts of injustice were committed. We ask for forgiveness from all who have been harmed by these sins committed in the past or in the present.*

Indeed, silence itself becomes complicity; we, as Church leaders, have an obligation to speak out against the evil of racism. As Jesus reminds us, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.” (Mt 7:21). As Pope Francis reminded us in his speech to the United States Congress in 2015, “The contemporary world, with its open wounds which affect so many of our brothers and sisters, demands that we confront every form of polarization.” Now more than ever, we need to be the servant leaders Jesus calls us to be, by acknowledging and sharing the burden of those who have for too long suffered from the sin of racism, as we move forward on this journey together.

# CONCRETE ACTIONS

Acknowledging the wrongs of the past is only the first step toward genuine repentance, reconciliation, and healing. As individual Catholics and as an institution, we also must pursue concrete actions to address the wrongs that continue today both within and without

the Church, and to lift up and be guided by those who are most in need, who feel themselves devoid of hope owing to racial injustice and racial prejudice. While the Church and its members are already involved in many positive steps toward racial justice, there is always more work to be done. Again, the call of the U.S. bishops is clear:



*We must invite into dialogue those we ordinarily would not seek out. We must work to form relationships with those we might regularly try to avoid. This demands that we go beyond ourselves, opening our minds and hearts to value and respect the experiences of those who have been harmed by the evil of racism. Love also requires us to invite a change of heart in those who may be dismissive of other's experiences or whose hearts may be hardened by prejudice or racism. Only by forging authentic relationships can we truly see each other as Christ sees us. Love should then move us to take what we learn from our encounters and examine where society continues to fail our brothers and sisters, or where it perpetuates inequity, and seek to address those problems.*

To that end, as the leader of the Archdiocese of Baltimore, I am committed to continuing to listen to the voices of those who suffer racism, and to speaking up and condemning racism and bigotry whenever it is manifested. Here in the Archdiocese of Baltimore we must fully engage in

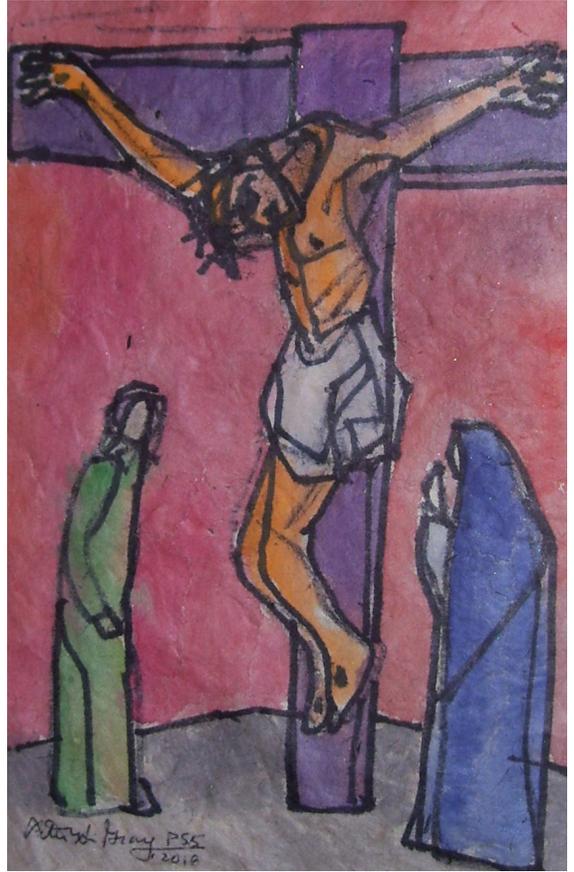
answering the U.S. bishops who have called upon all levels of the Church to, “fight the evil of racism by educating themselves, reflecting on their personal thoughts and actions, listening to the experience of those who have been affected by racism, and by developing and supporting programs that help repair the damages caused by racial discrimination.”

In response to that call, working collaboratively with diocesan personnel, clergy, religious, and the laity, I specifically commit to the following concrete actions:

- Organizing training and resources for conducting forums throughout our institutions to discuss and address the issue of racism;
- Examining the diversity of our institutions, including archdiocesan leadership, seminaries, clergy, parishes, schools and social service programs, and enhance efforts to further diversify our institutions where needed;
- Strengthening existing efforts to attract new members of the church and candidates for priesthood and religious life from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds;
- Identifying archdiocesan staff responsible for carrying out these identified goals.

# CONCLUSION

As we reflect on the sins of our past, we recognize we are powerless to undo the harm that so many suffered, and that God alone has the power to provide healing for worlds gone by. We can and do pray for those victims of old, for their awful plight; we pray that in the end, God has embraced them with the love and mercy that their fellow Christians all too often withheld from them. In a spirit of gratitude, we also acknowledge the many African-American Catholics today who have carried on the faith of their enslaved ancestors in spite of the wrongs they endured.



And so, in a spirit of repentance and prayer, we seek healing as we turn to the redeeming and reconciling love of Jesus with the hope of building a Church that is journeying toward a better future as we work side by side with those who are victims of racism today.

Looking back at the lay leaders, religious orders, and clergy who devoted their lives to racial justice, we hold up men and women from whom we must take encouragement if we are to bring genuine change in this day and age. They are the leaders who saw children of God in every human being, even in the very people opposing them. Looking forward, we seek today to take our places alongside those leaders in that tradition of change and conversion which is rooted in the Gospel teaching of Jesus.

Let us keep our gaze firmly set on the Kingdom of God, and our hearts burning with the fire of the Holy Spirit's love, as we continue to share the journey toward racial justice. May we venture forward in a new spirit of brotherhood and Catholic unity, praying with one heart that Jesus, our Savior, will guide our feet into the way of His peace.



*+William E. Lori*

MOST REVEREND WILLIAM E. LORI  
ARCHBISHOP OF BALTIMORE

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Peter Wm Gray, PSS, Artist  
2018

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2018

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