

## ADDRESSING RACISM: WHAT WILL IT TAKE?

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In recent times, there is a growing awareness of the need to address racism in its many forms. In Racine, Wisconsin, a Committee was established in 2005 called "Coming Together Racine" to look at the state of Racine in terms of racial equity. The vision is to "create a genuine interracial community where all people have equality of voice and access to resources and opportunities." A community-wide approach is being taken to address racial issues and to make systemic change in response to the need. Crossroads Anti-racism Organizing and Training has taken a lead role in facilitating gatherings and in training.

### WHAT IS RACISM?

Sometimes racism is understood as bigotry and prejudice. Racism in its full meaning, goes well beyond that understanding. It implies a belief that one race or group of people is superior to another. Judgments are made about groups and individuals. Such attitudes by the dominant group will lead to discrimination and conflict. Racism implies prejudice as well as power and privilege which do not disappear without a deep and prolonged struggle. Some church leaders have called racism the major sin of the 21<sup>st</sup> century which imprisons and diminishes both oppressed and oppressors and hinders full human growth and development.

The first task is to identify racism at an individual and organizational level. How can we take down the walls that have divided us for centuries? Will we have the courage and the will to join hands with others in the struggle over the long haul, and work to allow the dignity and freedom of all people to flourish. It is not just a Black-White issue. It also affects people of other cultures, a growing number of immigrants coming to our shores, and a large Latino population. The United Nations has declared that "preferences based on race, color or national origin cannot be perpetuated and must be eradicated."

### CAN WE CREATE AN INCLUSIVE, PLURALISTIC SOCIETY FOR THE GOOD OF ALL PEOPLE?

First we need to recognize that laws and rules were created by humans and can be changed by humans. "Come and be like us" is not enough to create a just, multicultural organization. Neither can the groups that are in power and control be the only ones to benefit from the system. We must make a

consistent effort to use the gifts and perspectives of all people and allow all to benefit from the decisions made.

Rev. Joseph Brandt, a pastor of a church in the Bronx, affirms that it will be a challenge to bring such changes about in all our institutions – in schools, churches, businesses, and government. Rev. Cornell West, professor at Princeton University poses this Question: “How much do we care about the quality of life together?” Is it a low priority or are we willing to put some effort into it?” We also need to see the strong link between poverty and racism which continue to undermine our nation’s promise of “liberty and justice for all people.” Catholic Charities USA noted in their study that “poverty is a scandalous affront to the Christian conscience and endangers the social peace and future prosperity for our nation. Any effort to reduce poverty in America must at the same time see the deep connection between racism and poverty.”

#### WHAT IS NEEDED TO ADDRESS RACISM?

First of all, we need to walk with those who are destroyed by poverty and racism and help them reclaim their dignity and open doors of opportunity for them. Martin Luther King, Jr. reminded people that they should not let poverty or racism define who they are, but they should claim their dignity and worth as full human beings, and work with others to find ways to create a pluralistic, inclusive and healthy community where all can develop their full potential. Each organization and structure can build from their gifts and the perspective of all- Black, White, Brown - and let all enjoy the fruits of their efforts. It will not be easy, but it will be well worth the effort. It will restore hope in all aspects of life and benefit both giver and receiver. We need to address racism in a holistic way by naming, facing, denouncing and dismantling it. Then people must work together to create a community that is whole, inclusive and just.

#### WHAT ARE SOME OF THE WAYS TO ADDRESS RACISM?

- Use Diversity Circles to look at ethnicity, age, gender and race and to foster greater understanding, cooperation and community participation in the local area.

For information, contact [Roseann.mason@uwp.edu](mailto:Roseann.mason@uwp.edu). Everyday Democracy is the national umbrella organization for diversity issues. Check out [info@everyday-democracy.org](mailto:info@everyday-democracy.org).

- Study various institutions such as education, government, business, non-profit groups and faith communities. One good resource is

Crossroads Ministry which has done training worldwide. They can be contacted at Crossroads Anti-racism Organizing and Training, P.O. Box 309, Matteson, Ill. 60443, Tel 708-503.0804. E mail: [info@crossroadsantiracism.org](mailto:info@crossroadsantiracism.org).

- Study the relationship between poverty and racism, both locally and nationally. Catholic Charities USA has some good resources in this regard.
- Convene a group to study racism. One such video that could be used is “True Colors”, and the viewing can be followed by using a discussion guide. Check with your local library to identify other resources.
- Request local clergy and other faith leaders to address racism.
- Involve children and youth in the study of racism.

The US bishops’ pastoral letter on racism offers this motivation to address the issue:

“There must be no turning back along the road of justice, no sighing for bygone times of privilege, no nostalgia for simple solutions from another age. For we are children of the age to come, when the first shall be last and the last first, when blessed are they who serve Christ the Lord in all His brothers and sisters, especially those who are poor and suffer injustice.”

Another world is possible. Let us begin today to realign our world more closely with God’s design for all people.