

**Diocese of Austin
National Conference Call
Thursday, February 2, 2017**

Discussion Questions

Question 1: What has been the response of the Church in your diocese to the news of excessive force and/or deadly encounters with law enforcement?

As a result of the multitude of shootings of young Black men, we approached the Bishop of Austin, Most Reverend Joseph Vásquez in January of 2015, and advised him that we wanted to hold meetings in the Diocese of Austin to discuss what can be done locally to address this issue. We received the blessing of the Bishop and moved ahead with “Courageous Conversations on Racism”. Our first meeting was held on January 22, 2015 and we have had monthly meetings since and are entering our 3rd year of meetings. The first meeting had over 100 attendees and our most recent meeting last week had over 100 attendees and has averaged about 60 attendees. We have had in attendance local Law enforcement officers and a representative from the one of the City Council members. We also had an Iraq veteran and other veterans to discuss Racism in the United States Armed Forces. The meetings have now morphed into discussions on Racism what actions can be done to address and combat racism. The attendees are majority White and Catholic, but we now have other denominations that are involved with the Conversations. Churches of different denominations have been host to the meetings, but they are facilitated by the Social Justice Committee of Holy Cross Catholic Church and the Office of Black Catholics.

Question 2: What structure(s) in your diocese address(es) these concerns? Are you represented or do you have access to these structures?

The Diocesan Office of Black Catholics, Office of Social Concerns and the Social Justice Committee of Holy Cross Catholic Church in Austin are the organizations that approached the Bishop. The meetings are advertised each month to the entire Diocese by the Diocesan Communications Office. The impetus of these meetings was for the attendees to take the information discussed in the meetings back to their respective congregations and encourage their pastors to speak on the issues raised. We developed a Mission Statement and shared this with the attendees to the meetings also.

Question 3: What diocesan programs or initiatives have been hosted or are scheduled in 2017?

The Courageous Conversations on Racism will continue in 2017. The Mayor of Austin recently established a Task Force on Institutional Racism & System Inequities and last week we invited the Task Force Leaders to speak and receive questions and concerns from the attendees. Their goal is to receive a list of recommendations to dismantle institutional racism and system inequities across five core areas: Criminal and Civil Justice, Education, Health, Finance/Banking/Industry and Real Estate/Housing. We will continue to receive feedback on the progress of this city-wide initiative from the Task Force.

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Question 4: What resources have you found most helpful (i.e., print, video, online or other media)?

We have shared the Bishops 1979 Pastoral Letter on Racism, "Brothers and Sisters to Us". We have also had a presentation on Fr. Bryan Massingale's book, "Racial Justice and the Catholic Church" and several of the attendees purchased his book through Holy Cross Catholic Church. We also viewed and discussed the 3 part PBS series "Race-the Power of an Illusion".

Question 5: What further suggestions or lessons learned would you offer?

There is still a major problem in getting Archbishops, Bishops, and Pastors to address racism in their homilies. Racism and its elimination need to become more of a concern to them so that they share and guide their congregations in knowledge and elimination of Racism.