

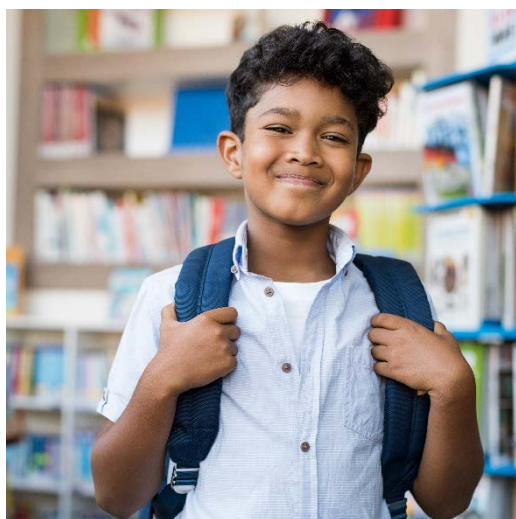


open wide our hearts

the enduring call to love *a pastoral letter against racism*

Racism and Education

In the November 2018 Pastoral Letter Against Racism, *Open Wide Our Hearts*, the Catholic bishops of the United States urge all Catholics to acknowledge “the scourge of racism” that still exists in our hearts, words, actions, and institutions. Racism can be individual, when persons fail to recognize certain groups as created in the image of God and equal in dignity, or it can be systemic, where practices or policies treat certain groups of people unjustly. One area of systemic racism is lack of access to quality education for persons of color.



As children of God, all persons have a God-given right to flourish and develop their potential, so they may lead lives of dignity and contribute to the common good. The right to education has been cited in Papal encyclicals for over a century.

Unfortunately, millions in the U.S. were denied that right. Before Emancipation in 1863, teaching enslaved black people to read

“The poverty experienced by many . . . communities has its roots in racist policies that continue to impede the ability of people to find affordable housing, meaningful work, adequate education, and social mobility.”

– U.S. bishops, *Open Wide Our Hearts*

and write was illegal. After slavery ended, for the next century, almost every school in the U.S. was segregated. Further, public schools for minorities were given limited resources. By the 1960s, the great majority of African-Americans, Native Americans, and Latino students, were educated in segregated and underfunded schools. Most colleges had few, if any, minority students.

During the Civil Rights Movement of the late 1950s and the 60s, school desegregation was a major issue, [causing bitter, sometimes violent, struggles](#). In 1954, the Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v Board of Education of Topeka* that all U.S. schools be integrated.

Regrettably, [recent studies](#) have shown that after initial gains, [schools are now as segregated](#) as they were before the *Brown* decision. [Today](#) in schools located in high-poverty areas, the majority of the students are African American, Hispanic and Latino. Because public schools chiefly [depend on local real estate taxes](#) for funding, [schools in](#)

areas with high housing values can offer more to students, often leaving many minority students out of the equation.

The U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights has studied the critical gaps of these inequitable funding structures. The recent data from that office shows consistent problems for minority students, such as limited access to early learning, lack of teacher equity, limited access to courses and programs that lead to college and career readiness, and low rates of teacher retention. Schools on Native American reservations face a host of additional barriers to student success.

Without quality pre-school programs, many minority students start grade school at a disadvantage. Inexperienced teachers and teachers with limited professional development opportunities are twice as likely to teach in minority public schools. Many African Americans and Latinos attend schools that do not offer the intensive writing classes and upper level math courses needed for college admission, and these schools do not offer adequate college and career counseling. Without resources, consistent support and mentoring, minority students drop out of school at much higher rates than white students—recent statistics show that while 62% of white students get a

college degree in 4-6 years, only 38% of Black students, 45% of Latino students and 13% of Native Americans do.



Catholic schools, in fulfillment of their mission on behalf of all children of God, must strive to increase enrollment of underserved populations, including Hispanic/Latino and African American students, in order to ensure that high-quality educational opportunity is available to all students. We must work together as people of faith to improve educational opportunities for all our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Pray with St. John Paul II

“Lord God, our Father, you created the human being, man and women, in your image and likeness, and you willed the diversity of peoples within the unity of the human family. At times, however, the equality of your sons and daughters has not been acknowledged, and Christians have been guilty of attitudes of rejection and exclusion, consenting to acts of discrimination on the basis of racial and ethnic difference. Forgive us and grant us the grace to heal the wounds still present in your community on account of sin, so that we will all feel ourselves to be your sons and daughters.” (Universal Prayer on the Day of Pardon)



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