



open wide our hearts

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

Activity for College Campus Communities

Objectives

Students should be able to:

- Identify key points of *Open Wide our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love*.
- Think critically about where racism and injustice are present on their campus.
- Articulate real-life examples of Catholic Social Teaching in practice.

Quotes from *Open Wide our Hearts*

- "Overcoming racism is a demand of justice, but because Christian love transcends justice, the end of racism will mean that our community will bear fruit beyond simply the fair treatment of all."
– U.S. bishops, Open Wide Our Hearts
- "Racism is a moral problem that requires a moral remedy—a transformation of the human heart—that impels us to act. The power of this type of transformation will be a strong catalyst in eliminating those injustices that impinge on human dignity."
- "The roots of racism have extended deeply into the soil of our society. Racism can only end if we contend with the policies and institutional barriers that perpetuate and preserve the inequality – economic and social – that we still see all around us. With renewed vigor, we call on the members of the Body of Christ to join others in advocating and promoting policies at all levels that will combat racism and its effects in our civic and social institutions."

"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. ... In Christ we can find the strength and the grace necessary to make that journey."

Additional Resources for the Educator

- USCCB backgrounders on [racism and employment](#), [housing](#), [wealth](#), [education](#), [criminal justice](#), [voting](#), and the [Native American experience](#)
- [A Prayer Service for Racial Healing in Our Land](#)
- [Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love. A Pastoral Letter Against Racism](#)
- [Discrimination and Christian Conscience: A Statement Issued by the Catholic Bishops of the United States](#)
- [What We Have Seen and Heard: A Pastoral Letter on Evangelization from the Black Bishops of the United States](#)

Outline of activity

Begin with a short prayer like [this](#) one.

Welcome the group and thank them for coming. Introduce the focus of today's gathering:

- As you know, the Catholic bishops of the United States have just released a new pastoral letter calling all of us to conversion and action to disentangle the evil of racism from our lives, families, faith institutions, and communities. Our goal today is to begin a conversation to talk about racism in our community and why, as people of faith, we are compelled by the Gospel to not only be *aware* of the existence of racism in our country, but *actively work* against it. This can be a difficult conversation, and that's ok. It's important that we start this conversation, even though it might be difficult or uncomfortable.
- Set up ground rules for the conversation. Name any potential uncomfortable feelings and invite students to adopt a generosity of spirit when listening and sharing.
- In order to set the tone for the conversation, invite everyone into a short Scriptural reflection.

Read Genesis 4:8-10 or a similar passage. Invite students to reflect on the passage using *lectio divina* or another method of prayerfully engaging the Word of God.

Ask:

- The story of Cain and Abel is a gruesome one. Beyond the obvious sin of the murder of his brother, what is problematic with Cain's attitude toward Abel?
- What does it mean to be "my brother's keeper"?
- What does being our brother's keeper have to do with our relationship to one another and the call to ensure that the dignity of others is respected?
- Why do you think the bishops chose this story to weave throughout their Pastoral Letter Against Racism?

Ask students to share (with a partner or at their tables) why they chose to come to this conversation.

Have students start by reading, in silence, a short portion of the pastoral letter, perhaps the last few pages (beginning at the section titled “Conversion of All,” or ideally, if time allows, you could start even earlier at “Being Open to Encounter and New Relationships”). Alternatively, the group could read this short handout about the letter.

- Ask students to share, briefly:
 - What stood out to you?
 - What struck you about what you read?

Divide the students into small groups. Distribute to each group one of the backgrounders on racism (topics include: criminal justice, voting, housing, employment, economic inequality). Explain that each is an example of a way racism is still very much impacting the lives of many today.

- Ask the table members to read through the backgrounder. Then, ask them to use their phones/laptops (one device per group or pair) and look up a news article that exemplifies the issues at play in their backgrounder. If the library or a computer lab is accessible and preferable, that would work as well. Note that each backgrounder contains a number of links that provide more context and information. The ideal article not only includes information about the issues, but also the story of a person or persons who have been impacted.
- Ask each group to discuss the news article and why/how it relates to their backgrounder issue.
 - How are members of the Body of Christ impacted by this issue?
 - As people of faith, why should we care?
 - What interconnections do you see between this and other justice issues?
- Ask groups to report back to the larger group.

Lead a conversation around this question: “Why is racism an important issue for people of faith?”

- What does the Catholic tradition have to say about the evil of racism?
- Why is addressing racism an essential part of our call as people of faith?
- What are specific ways we can work as individuals and as a community to heal racism?

Have small groups brainstorm ways to respond, and then to share one or two ideas with the large group.

If time allows, you could invite students to explore the seven themes of [Catholic Social Teaching](#). Additional materials are [here](#).

- Invite students into a deeper reflection about CST and how CST is being violated in each of these issues.
- [As an alternative, watch these videos about CST.](#)

Select quotes from the Pastoral Letter Against Racism and provide them to the groups. Ask groups to identify one quote in particular that speaks to them. Share why.

Summary and Final Activity

End in with a short examination of conscience (one example is at the end of [this prayer service](#)) followed by a closing [prayer](#).

Additional ideas for Campus Communities

- Ask students to read the summary handout about the Pastoral Letter Against Racism.
- Lead students in a conversation about what issues of racial injustice they see on their campus.
 - Where have you seen or experienced individual racism? Where have you seen or experienced systemic or institutional racism?
 - Where have you seen or experienced genuine desire to appreciate, celebrate, and encounter across cultures, traditions, language or ethnic group?
 - What are you willing to do in order to help end racism on campus? In the larger community?
 - Why is it important to talk about racism as an issue of faith?
- Research any diocesan-sponsored efforts to engage Catholics on the topic of racism. Research also what local faith-based organizations work on anti-racism initiatives. Is there a [Catholic Campaign for Human Development-funded](#) group doing work on [racism in your community](#)? Learn more about this group. Why is the work of this group related to Catholic Social Teaching?
- Alternatively, ask students to research stories of hope on [PovertyUSA](#).
 - How does that work exemplify Catholic Social Teaching?
- Find out what other faith-based anti-racism work is going on in your community and how you can contribute.
- Work with students to plan a prayer service for the campus community like the prayer service for [healing racial division from the USCCB](#).

