

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day 2024

It is obvious the sin of racism continues to plague our world. Like Dr. Martin Luther King, Pope Francis continues to challenge us to an examination of conscious seeking ways to understand the origin of this sin of separation. In the United States Conference of Catholic Bishop's document **Brothers and Sisters to Us**, a pastoral letter addresses this ongoing issue within the United States. The document thoroughly describes racism as a "sin that divides the human family" and needs to be addressed by society and the Church.

Dr. King's famous quote, "I have a dream that my children will live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but the content of their character" speaks of the value given by our Creator and the Constitution of the United States that all human beings are created equal. The reality in our society contradicts that belief. People continue to be judged, rejected, and abused due to their ethnicity. A recent conversation with a work colleague shocked me when he identified a person with a racial slur. Even more stunning is the fact he is raising children. Is this a rarity? No. Such blatant racism is more common than we acknowledge. Many recent events again call us to action. Racism is a sin against humanity.

The following are eight ways to combat racism, taken largely from the aforementioned U. S. Bishops' Pastoral on Racism, **Brothers and Sisters to Us**.

1. Be open to a change of heart, asking God's Spirit to remove all traces of racial prejudice from our hearts and learn to detect and overcome even those hidden cultural biases we are not aware of.
2. Don't give in to xenophobia, an unfounded fear or hatred of strangers, foreigners, members of other ethnic groups. Learn to appreciate, affirm and celebrate, rather than distrust, the distinctive cultural values of each ethnic community.
3. Avoid racial stereotypes, slurs, jokes, Correct any expressions or racist attitudes among family members and friends.
4. Speak out against racial inequities everywhere. For example, raise your voice against unjust housing practices and institutions, including those of the Church, which are not equal opportunity employers.
5. Examine racial attitudes within the Church. Help see that members of all races get equal honor, respect and fair representation in leadership and decision-making positions on all levels.
6. Support Catholic schools in the inner city. Help bolster our commitment to Catholic education in minority neighborhoods.

7. Back public policies which foster racial equality. Support legislation aimed at authentic full employment, decent working conditions, adequate income, housing, education and health care for all.
8. Keep the dream of a united world alive. Work for the day when all races and nations can live side by side in peace, abhorring exploitation and joyfully sharing each other's precious yet diverse gifts.

Within each of the above are the seven principles of Catholic Social Teaching: The dignity of the human person, call to community, rights and responsibility of the human person, dignity of work and the rights of workers, options for the poor and vulnerable, solidarity, and care for the earth. Listen to the readings every week and you will find a connection to those principles which includes ways to combat racism. And always, study, learn and research authentic and accurate history. For it is in the learning that our vision becomes clearer.

Plan now to commemorate Dr. Martin Luther King holiday in reflection and action. Find ways to make a difference. There are many local opportunities to do so. Truly then will Dr. King's words come alive.

Submitted by Annetta M. Sutton, member of Saint Odilia's Social Justice Council and Racial Equity Committee