

LIVING OUR FAITH at St Philip Neri

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Racism. Last year marked the 25th Anniversary of the US Bishops' Pastoral Letter on racism, "*Brothers and Sisters to Us.*" Archbishop

John Vlazny has called on Catholics in Western Oregon to reflect, discuss and pray about racism this Lent in commemoration of this Anniversary and in recognition that we still have a long way to go to end racism.

"[W]e Catholics of western Oregon want to make a greater effort to eradicate racism from our own midst and from the world in which we live."

-Archbishop John Vlazny, Catholic Sentinel, 1/13/05

Racism is a sin. It is a sin that divides the human family, blots out the image of God among specific members of that family, and violates the fundamental human dignity of those called to be children of the same God. Christ's Incarnation revealed this sacred dignity, which makes each one of us equally special in the sight of God. Racism is a denial of the truth of the dignity of each human person revealed through the mystery of the Incarnation.

To some, it may seem that racism is no longer a major problem in American life. After all, civil rights legislation and court decisions have eliminated statutory racial discrimination and members of racial minorities have achieved varying levels of material and professional success. But when we look beneath the surface, the continuing existence of racism in our society becomes readily apparent.

The challenge and reminder issued by the US Bishops over 25 years ago is just as relevant today:

"To the extent that racial bias affects our personal attitudes and judgments, to the extent that we allow another's race to influence our relationship and limit our openness, to the extent that we see yet close our hearts to our brothers and sisters in need, - to that extent we are called to conversion and renewal in love and justice."

- US Bishops, "Brothers & Sisters to Us," 1979



A new form of racism? In the 25 years since the Bishops issued their Pastoral Letter on racism, a new form of racism has come to light - **environmental racism**. Simply put, environmental racism is the intentional siting of environmental hazards, such as hazardous waste sites, landfills, incinerators, and polluting industries, in or near minority communities and the working poor.

"Caught in a spiral of poverty and environmental degradation, the poor and the powerless most directly bear the burden and suffer disproportionately from the effects of environmental problems, as their lands and neighborhoods are more likely to be polluted or to host toxic waste dumps, their water to be undrinkable, their children to be harmed."

-US Bishops, "Children's' Health & the Environment," 2002

Minorities are particularly vulnerable because they are often perceived as weak and powerless citizens who will not fight back against the poisoning of their neighborhoods in fear that it may jeopardize their jobs and economic survival.

Toxic Air: Asthma and air pollution are linked. African Americans and Latinos are almost three times more likely than Whites to die from asthma. The hospitalization rate for African Americans and Latinos is 3 to 4 times the rate for Whites.

Toxic Communities: Poverty and pollution are also intricately linked. 3 out of 5 African Americans and Latino Americans live in communities with abandoned toxic waste sites.

Toxic Housing: Lead poisoning is the number one environmental health threat to American children, especially poor inner-city African American children.

Toxic Schools: More than 600,000 students (mostly students of color) in MA, NY, NJ, MI and CA attend nearly 1,200 public schools that are located within a half mile of federal Superfund or state-identified contaminated sites.





Questions for Discussion & Reflection

- What are some examples of environmental racism in your community or in other communities you have read/heard about? If you are unable to name any examples, do some research on this topic.
- Why do you think that issues of environmental racism are not more well-known? Why do you think that the media does not place greater attention on these ongoing problems of injustice?
- How does environmental racism relate to the main principles of Catholic Social Teaching (Care for God's Creation, Dignity of the Human Person, Option for the Poor and Vulnerable, etc.)?

A Prayer For An End To Environmental Racism

For an end to environmental racism and injustice in all its forms, we pray . . . *God, hear our prayer.*

That the Church may be a witness and a universal sign of justice among all peoples, we pray . . .

That the Church may work to establish the reign of God on earth, we pray . . .

That the victims of environmental racism be aided and polluters experience conversion, we pray . . .

For all who struggle for environmental justice and an end to racism in all its forms, we pray . . .

That we may make a personal commitment to educate ourselves and others on issues of environmental racism, we pray . . .

That we may work for environmentally safe housing, schools and communities for all people, we pray . . .

Almighty God, we acknowledge you as Creator of all people. Open our hearts and our eyes to the environmental racism that exists not only in our communities and in our country, but that exists throughout the world. Grant us the strength and courage to work for justice and peace for all of our sisters and brothers. Keep watch over our hearts so that the evils of racism and complacency will find no home within us. Amen



Prayer of Healing of Racism

O God,
Your children of all colors
Have been hurt by racism.
Help us heal together.
Help us do the inner work
To be open to your grace
And to the "balm in Gilead"
So our hearts are converted,
And we can join hands
To do the constructive work
Of love and justice.
Amen.

Prayer for Tolerance

Dear Lord, we who are
divided
unloving
prejudiced at times
inclined to misunderstanding
intolerant

Make us instead
united
loving
open to learning
understanding and forgiving
tolerant

May your Spirit be present in us as you are in all peoples.

Closing Prayer

Lord, Jesus Christ,
who reached across the ethnic boundaries
between Samaritan, Roman and Jew,
who offered fresh sight to the blind
and freedom to captives,
help us to break down the barriers in our community,
enable us to see the reality of racism and bigotry,
and free us to challenge and uproot it
from ourselves, our society, and the world.
Amen.

*Sources: Educating for Justice Website, Center of Concern
Office of Social Justice Website, Archdiocese of St Paul & Minneapolis*

