

INTRODUCTION

Literature has often spoken of dreams. Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. eloquently shared his dream in his famous speech at the Lincoln Memorial in 1963; Langston Hughes in his poem, “A Dream Deferred” asks what happens to a dream deferred? Does it dry up or does it explode?

Many of us dream of a world free of racism, none more so than our sisters and brothers of color. But dreams are not enough! There comes a time when each one of us must step up, end the silence and speak the truth of the racial divide that is tearing apart the very fabric of our society. And it is not enough to merely acknowledge its existence and then to absolve ourselves of any complicity. Those of us who reap the benefits of “white privilege” cannot continue to turn a blind eye to the reality of racism in our midst.

We are therefore pleased to share with you this resource, which encourages us to explore the roots of racism and its expression within our culture, systems and institutions. This effort is a collaboration of the Institute Anti-Racism Training Team and the Institute Justice Team. We have chosen March 21st, the ***International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination***, to make this available to you for your use at any time.

Knowing that the bulk of the work of eliminating racism belongs to people of white, this prayer and reflection guide for small groups was designed for those willing to explore their white privilege and the concept of white fragility. If white fragility is a new term for you, Dr. Robin Di Angelo, who created the term, explains it:

White people in North America live in a social environment that protects and insulates them from race-based stress. This insulated environment of racial protection builds white expectations for racial comfort lowering the ability to tolerate racial stress, leading to what I refer to as ***White Fragility***. ***White Fragility is a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves.*** These moves include the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing

situation. These behaviors, in turn, function to reinstate white racial equilibrium.

Those of us who are people of white will never have to face the humiliating situations and staggering injustices borne by our sisters and brothers of color. And let us not think that this is a thing of the past. Racism today often expresses itself in more subtle ways that are just as insidious as blatant racism.

Acknowledging racism is not about feeling guilty, for guilt has never successfully changed behavior. It only makes the one who feels guilty deny racism or flee from it, fearing being labeled as a “bad person” or a “racist.” Neither approach is helpful.

As the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, we share many dreams about our future together. One such dream is our desire to address “the unrecognized and unreconciled racism” present in our systems and structures. If we are serious about this challenge, then we must work to make this dream a reality. We are called to examine our own prejudices and discriminatory actions, but our task is much deeper. We must look seriously at our own institutional racism and acknowledge our own complicity both individually and communally in oppressive systems and structures. People of white must be willing to not just listen but to hear and acknowledge the experience of people of color.

The dream cannot be deferred any longer. The injustice cannot continue. Holding each other in compassion and prayer we move forward in our journey together.

HOW TO USE THIS PRAYER AND REFLECTION GUIDE

This resource is flexible and we invite you to use it in whatever way works best for you. A small group format, no more than 15, is the best way to approach this topic. The small group allows for more interaction and an opportunity to go deeper in our shared exploration of the topic.

You may choose a day or evening of reflection. If this format is your choice, the attached readings as well as the short video on White Fragility would be shared with the group. After viewing the video, significant time for reading, reflection

and journaling is suggested. At the end of the specified time, small group discussion follows. At the conclusion of the discussion, you might ask each person in the small group to share a word or phrase that emerged as meaningful for them as a result of this shared experience. There should be no pressure to speak and no comment after the person shares. The group merely accepts and honors the spoken word of the participant. This is followed by the closing prayer.

Another format could be to share the readings prior to the gathering and ask folks to journal and be prepared to share their reflections when the meeting occurs. It would be ideal if participants were able to view the video prior to the gathering but if this is not possible, it is strongly suggested that the short clip be shown when the group gathers. At the conclusion of the video, a brief introduction and opening prayer would begin the process and the format would continue as outlined in the packet.

Since there is much here to reflect upon, you may choose to use this over an extended period of time, taking each piece, reflecting privately either before the gathering or as part of the format. When the group comes together you could prayerfully discuss what words or phrases in particular spoke to you.

There are as many options for the use of this material as your creativity allows. Feel free to utilize it in whatever ways are most helpful for your situation and your own personal and communal growth.

We continue to pray together for enlightenment, courage and the will to act to change oppressive systems and structures that use power over rather than power with one another. Harnessing our collective power through prayer, contemplation and action has the potential to eradicate this sin of racism from our hearts and institutions.

Prayer & Reflection to Eliminate Racial Discrimination

OPENING PRAYER

Leader: We gather together in this holy space to try to come face-to-face with the reality of racism in our own personal lives...

Response: *Good and gracious God, open our hearts, remove our fears and grace us with insight and integrity.*

Leader: We gather together conscious of your presence with us as we explore systemic racism...

Response: *Good and gracious God, open our hearts, remove our fears and grace us with insight and integrity.*

Leader: We gather together to understand the cultural and historical perspectives that have shaped our perceptions...

Response: *Good and gracious God, open our hearts, remove our fears and grace us with insight and integrity.*

Leader: *We gather together to acknowledge that we have not always been aware of our own complicity in systems and structures of oppression...*

Response: *Good and gracious God, open our hearts, remove our fears and grace us with insight and integrity.*

Leader: We gather together confident of your abiding presence guiding us in this journey...

Response: *Good and gracious God, open our hearts, remove our fears and grace us with insight and integrity.*

Leader: Good and gracious God we thank you for inviting us to be a part of this day of prayer. Be with us as we pray and engage one another around difficult and painful realities. Give us your strength as you

awaken within us a passion to change whatever may need to change to create the world of justice you envision for us all. Amen.

1ST READING: There are two short articles designed to stimulate your reflection and consideration of racism. You are invited to spend some time in prayer and reflection with each one. The articles are followed by some questions that you may wish to journal about. These questions are intended for your own personal reflection and you will not be asked to share your responses in your small group. Additional questions for discussion follow this piece.

*[Open Wide Our Hearts---What I Wish the Bishops Would Have Said](#)
A reflection on the Institute website by Karen Donahue, RSM*

REFLECTION: Have you ever considered the role of white privilege in shaping your perceptions and worldview? Were you aware of this term and how it is used?

Karen Donahue states simply what constitutes white privilege. How do you feel when you read this? What emotions rise in you?

The Doctrine of Discovery is something that was never really discussed **in years past**. Now that it has come to light, what thoughts or feelings arise in you as you become more acquainted with this papal bull?

Upon reflection on this article, are there any personal insights you have gained? Has this knowledge encouraged you to go deeper and to continue learning more about the roots of racism?

2nd READING: *[To Dismantle Racism We Must Heal the Human Spirit](#)
Fr. Bryan Massengale
U.S. Catholic, January, 2019
Vol. 84, 1. Page 10*

REFLECTION: Do you agree with Fr. Massengale that racism is a soul-sickness that effects the human spirit? If so, why do you agree and if not, what leads you to a different perspective?

Do you think/feel that acknowledging our own racism demands a conversion of heart and soul? If so, how might one go about addressing this challenge?

What are your thoughts about Fr. Massengale's speaking about a "revolution of values?"

VIDEO: View the video: [White Fragility](#)

REFLECTION: What emotions arose in you as you watched this video?

Did this video in any way challenge your racial worldview?

What challenge did you find addressed to you personally as you viewed this video clip?

SHARING: Each one is invited to share his/her reflections on racism.

Be conscious of not just looking at personal prejudice and discrimination. Delve deeper into the institutional racism that affects us all. Do not make judgments about the actions of others but focus on your own experience in the light of today's prayer and quiet reflection.

Look at ways in which you might be benefitting from the systems and structures at the expense of people of color.

POSSIBLE ACTIONS: Read and study to better understand the differences among prejudice, discrimination and racism.

Be more conscious of ways you see your white privilege evident in your daily life.

Be conscious of ways in which people of color are presented in the media. If the depiction is unfavorable or stereotypical, consider contacting the TV station, the advertiser or the company responsible to register your disfavor.

Do not engage in racist jokes or stories. If you are present when this occurs, try addressing it in a way that does not escalate conflict but that speaks to your personal experience which may differ from that of those sharing the story. Be careful not to make a judgment or say anything dismissive of the person relating the story.

Pray for the courage to face whatever needs conversion in you related to racism.

Be confident of God's abiding presence and challenge to live in right relationship with one another.

Be determined to address both personal and communal racism in ways that foster change.

CLOSING PRAYER:

O God of mercy, compassion and infinite love be with us on this difficult journey to uproot racism in our personal lives and that of our communities. Give us courage to stay in the struggle when what is revealed to us may be embarrassing and discouraging. We know that you bless our efforts for change. Encourage us to look deeply at our complicity knowing that with your grace we can overcome all obstacles.

Good and gracious God, source of all life,
all creation is charged with your Divine Energy
Grant us the strength and courage, we pray
for a radical transformation of our own lives
and a deeper realization of your desires for us.