

# Racial Justice and the De Smet Jesuit Mission



*If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy. Now you are Christ's body, and individually parts of it.*

*-1 Cor. 12:26-27*

Racism and corresponding structures of white privilege stand in plain opposition to God's plan. For this reason, working for racial justice within the De Smet Jesuit High School community cannot be regarded as an "addition" to its mission, but is instead an essential part of it. To understand the basis of that mission, it is helpful to review its sources in the Bible, in Catholic teaching, and in the Jesuit tradition.

From the very beginning of the Bible, it is made clear that all human beings are created in "the divine image" (Gen. 1:27). The revelation and teaching of Jesus only intensify this message. The neighbor we are to love is the one who is unlike ourselves (Luke 10:25-37), and we are told that love of this neighbor is an absolute requirement for right relationship with God: "whoever does not love a brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen" (1 Jn. 4:20).

The Catholic Church affirms these basic truths (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1935) and seeks to apply them to the problems of our age. Thus, the Church not only acknowledges that overt acts of racial prejudice are sinful, but that social

structures can reflect that sin as well. The U.S. Catholic Bishops acknowledge, "The structures of our society are subtly racist, for these structures reflect the values which society upholds. They are geared to the success of the majority and the failure of the minority" ("Brothers and Sisters to Us"). While these structures may not be due to the choice of any one individual, all people of faith are responsible for taking the actions necessary to counter and dismantle them.

**"But any kind of social or cultural discrimination in basic personal rights on the grounds of sex, race, color, social conditions, language or religion, must be curbed and eradicated as incompatible with God's design."**

**-The Second Vatican Council,  
Gaudium et Spes, #29**

Even the name *catholic*—meaning "universal"—demonstrates the centrality of this work. For the Church to be truly "catholic," all people must find a home in her, one that is familiar and true to their heritage. While in the United States it is possible to have an experience of Catholic religion that can seem culturally and racially homogeneous, the history and global reality of Catholicism show that this is a misunderstanding of the Church at best and at worst a denial of the Church's God-given mission to reach all people (Mt. 28:19).

Fr. Fred Kammer, SJ, provides even more detail in [this one page summary](#) of Catholic social teaching on racism.

In the words of Pope Francis, “The history of the Church shows that Christianity does not have simply one cultural expression, but rather, ‘remaining completely true to itself, with unswerving fidelity to the proclamation of the Gospel and the tradition of the Church, it will also reflect the different faces of the cultures and peoples in which it is received and takes root.’ In the diversity of peoples who experience the gift of God, each in accordance with its own culture, the Church expresses her genuine catholicity and shows forth the ‘beauty of her varied face.’”

The Jesuit order has also recognized in its own reflections that the promotion of faith must entail real work for justice (*General Congregation 32*, Decree 4). Just as Jesuits seek to “find God in all things,” so also do

**“Racism is not merely one sin among many; it is a radical evil that divides the human family and denies the new creation of a redeemed world. To struggle against it demands an equally radical transformation, in our own minds and hearts as well as in the structure of our society.”**

**-U.S. Catholic Bishops  
*Brothers and Sisters to Us***

they work to ensure that “all things” reflect the justice and goodness of God. Thus, Jesuits (and Jesuit schools) are called to live in a way that shows a “willing openness to all people rather than seeking after the privileges of caste or class or race.”

## Resources

Want a classic and comprehensive Catholic Church statement on racism? The U.S. Catholic Bishops letter [\*Brothers and Sisters to Us\*](#) remains a crucial witness.

What does a Catholic bishop have to say about the slogan “Black Lives Matter”? Check out [Archbishop William Lori of Baltimore’s essay in America magazine](#).

Would you like to hear from St. Louis’ new archbishop on police reform? Archbishop Mitchell Rozanski released a letter during his time as bishop of Springfield, MA, that you can find [here](#).

Fr. Bryan Massingale, a Black priest and theologian, reflects on what white privilege means and how in the U.S.A. our assumptions about Catholic identity remain racist [in this interview](#).

There are too many relevant passages from Catholic social teaching to list them all here. For those with interest in reading more about official Catholic teachings on racism, [this](#) is a good place to start.

For even more resources, check out [the U.S. Catholic Bishops website](#).