

# Reflection Guide on Dismantling Racism

## **Introduction:**

Since 2019, the Dismantling Racial Discrimination Committee has been working to educate our sisters, companions, and coworkers about the issue of systemic racism and how it impacts us as individuals, a community, and a society. As Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia, we are committed to the Gospel values of human dignity, justice, and love. Racism is an affront to human dignity, and we acknowledge the profound moral imperative to dismantle racism in all its forms. We recognize that racial discrimination damages human dignity, divides communities, and contradicts our fundamental values of justice and respect for all persons.

In May 2025, after a period of prayer and reflection, the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia took a Corporate Stand on Dismantling Racism in ourselves, our congregation, our nation, and our world.

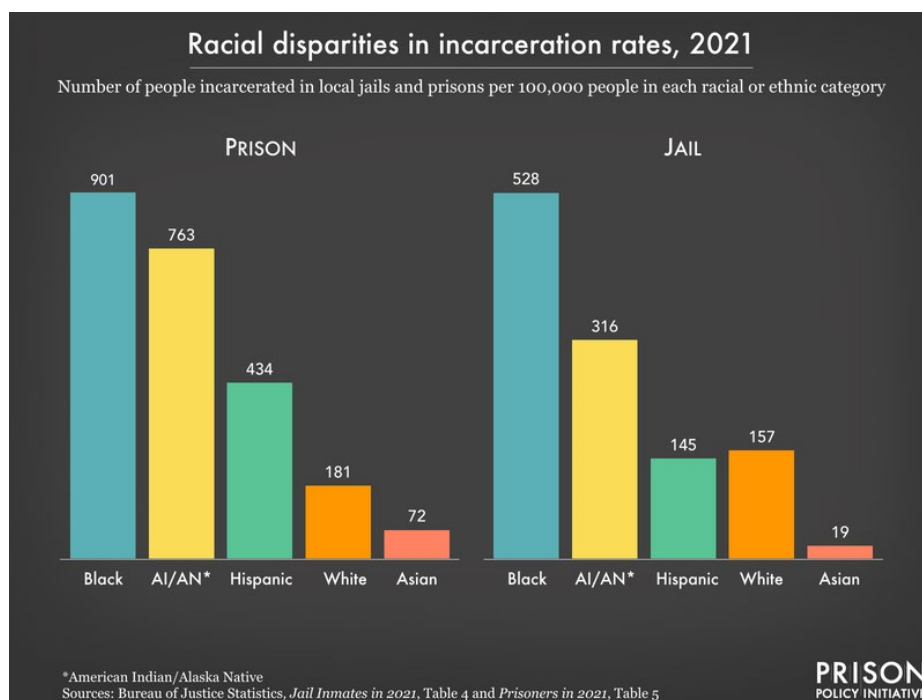
## **Prayer:**

Divine Creator of All Peoples,

We gather before you with humble hearts, acknowledging the sin of racism that has wounded your beloved community. We recognize the ways racism has taken root in our individual hearts, our congregation, and our broader society. Grant us the courage to examine our own biases and prejudices with unflinching honesty and to listen deeply to the experiences of those who have been marginalized. Move us to take meaningful action to dismantle systemic racism within ourselves and our institutions, so that we can create spaces of true belonging and radical welcome for all your children. Amen.

## **Some Facts About Racism**

### **Our criminal justice system:**



**Voting Rights:** The John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act of 2023 (H.R. 14) is proposed voting rights legislation named after civil rights activist John Lewis. The bill would restore and strengthen parts of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, most notably its requirement for states and jurisdictions with a history of voting rights violations to seek federal approval before enacting certain changes to their voting laws. The bill was written in response to the Supreme Court decision in *Shelby County v. Holder* in 2013, which struck down the system that was used to determine which jurisdictions were subject to that requirement.



**Gun violence:** Gun violence affects every person in America, but the weight of this crisis is not felt equally across demographic groups. Inequities in systems such as those in our justice, health, housing, and education institutions, along with generations of discrimination and disinvestment in certain communities, have exacerbated the gun violence crisis in a way that disproportionately impacts historically marginalized communities, including racial and ethnic groups, women, and LGBTQ+ people. Since 2020, gun violence has been the leading cause of death among all children and teens in the United States.

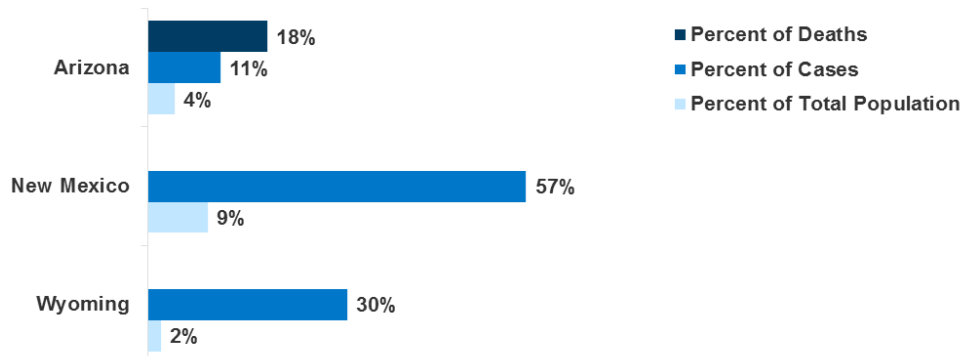


**Health:** The devastating impact of COVID-19 on American Indian and Alaska Native communities can be directly linked to the historical discriminatory beliefs and values of the U.S. government, which created policies that sanctioned inequitable systems of housing, education, employment, health care, environment, and infrastructure.

Figure 1

## Data Point to Stark Impacts of COVID-19 for American Indian and Alaska Native People in Some States

American Indians and Alaska Natives as a Share of Confirmed Coronavirus Cases, Deaths, and Total Population in Select States, as of May 11, 2020



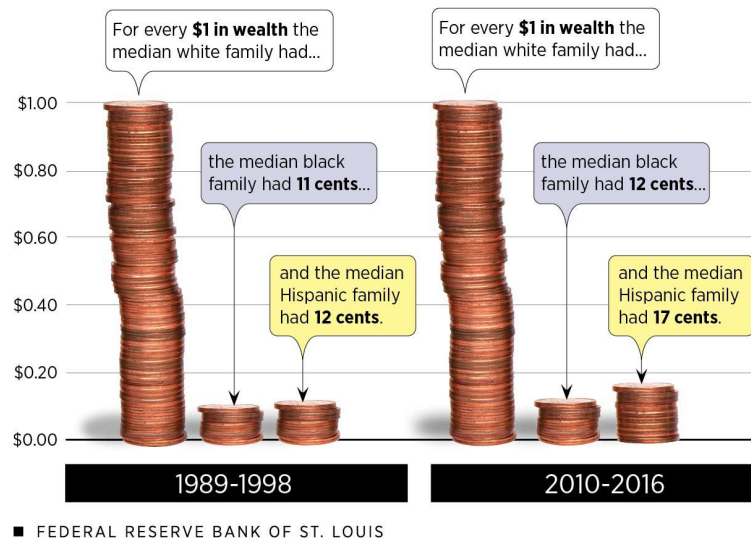
SOURCE: KFF, "COVID-19: Confirmed Cases & Deaths by Race/Ethnicity as of May 11, 2020", <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/state-data-and-policy-actions-to-address-coronavirus/>

**KFF**  
HENRY J. KAISER  
FAMILY FOUNDATION

## Wealth inequality:

### Comparative Wealth: Non-College Grad Families

A look at median (50th percentile) wealth per dollar of white median wealth



## Our Faith Response

### From Scripture

- **Matthew 22:39:** “Love your neighbor as yourself.”
- **Luke 6:31:** “Do to others as you would have them do to you.”
- **Galatians 3:28:** “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”
- **1 John 4:20-21:** “Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen.”

### From LCWR

On July 10, 2020, the national board of LCWR unanimously affirmed a call to place the conference on a five-year journey to address systemic racism and white privilege. The call emerged from an open and honest conversation held among the leaders of LCWR and the National Black Sisters’ Conference.

In 2022 LCWR made an assembly resolution for 2022-2025 which begins: “Reading the signs of the times and in our desire to create communion, we the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, reaffirm our commitment to address the interrelatedness of the concerns expressed in our *2019-2022 Assembly Resolution, Creating Communion at the Intersection of Racism, Migration, and Climate Crisis*. We are heartbroken by the myriad ways our one human family and Earth, our common home, continue to suffer from disconnection, indifference, violence, and fear in the face of racism, forced migration, and climate crisis.

## **From our Popes**

“One of humanity’s great achievements is in fact its triumph over racism. However, unfortunately disturbing new forms of racism are being manifested in various countries. They are often related to social and economic problems which can, however, never justify contempt and racial discrimination. Let us pray that respect for every person everywhere will increase, together with a responsible awareness that only in the reciprocal acceptance of one and all is it possible to build a world distinguished by authentic justice and true peace.” ~*Pope Benedict XVI*

“...A readiness to discard others finds expression in vicious attitudes that we thought long past, such as racism, which retreats underground only to keep reemerging. Instances of racism continue to shame us, for they show that our supposed social progress is not as real or definitive as we think.” ~*Pope Francis*

## **From our Bishops**

In 2018 the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops published *Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love – A Pastoral Letter Against Racism*. In this important document the bishops state: “Every racist act—every such comment, every joke, every disparaging look as a reaction to the color of skin, ethnicity, or place of origin—is a failure to acknowledge another person as a brother or sister, created in the image of God. In these and in many other such acts, the sin of racism persists in our lives, in our country, and in our world.”

## **Our Corporate Stand**

In light of the harmful effects of racism in our world and our faith response, the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia take the following corporate stand:

*The Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia take a Corporate Stand on Dismantling Racism in ourselves, our congregation, our nation, and our world. We acknowledge our responsibility to confront systemic racism through prayer, education, and advocacy. We commit to examining our own biases while working to create equitable policies, to amplifying diverse voices, and to building authentic partnerships that advance racial justice. In a spirit of continuous conversion, we also commit to speaking up with compassion when we observe words or actions that may perpetuate racial bias, recognizing that authentic transformation requires both accountability and courage.*

## **Implications of Our Corporate Stand**

### **What does it mean to dismantle racism?**

Racism has been part of our country since Europeans came to the Americas. It is imbedded deep in the fabric of our country and deep in our own hearts. Even with all of the work that we have done as sisters and companions to educate ourselves about racism, we acknowledge that racism is so ingrained in our society and our world that we need to dismantle it piece by piece, day by day, one action at a time.

## **What is systemic racism?**

In *Uncomfortable Conversations with a Black Man*, Emmanuel Acho explains systemic racism saying it, “is the legitimizing of every dynamic—historic, cultural, political, economic, institutional, and person-to-person—that gives advantages to White people, while at the same time producing a whole host of terrible effects for Black people and other People of Color. Those effects show up as inequalities in power, opportunities, laws, and every other metric of how individuals and groups are treated. Which is to say: systemic racism is making the unequal treatment of People of Color the national norm.”

## **How do we examine our own biases?**

Examining racial biases requires careful self-reflection of our immediate thoughts, reactions, and assumptions in different situations. This involves questioning what we consider “normal” and understanding how our own racial identity shapes our worldview. When biases are identified, it’s important to explore their origins in media, family, education, and society. Rather than becoming defensive, stay curious about what uncomfortable realizations reveal about internalized racism. For those with racial privilege, consider how it affects your perspective and what challenges you haven’t experienced.

## **How do we work to create equitable policies?**

To promote anti-racist practices, we could conduct internal audits of our policies and structures while providing education on systemic racism and Catholic Social Teaching. This includes learning from Black, Indigenous, and People of Color’s (BIPOC) experiences, studying other congregations’ approaches, examining community practices, reviewing ministry locations, and fostering difficult conversations about race. Key areas for policy revision include admission, employment, resource allocation, ministry partnerships, and communications, all viewed through an anti-racist lens with a focus on developing intercultural competency.

## **How do we amplify ?**

To effectively amplify marginalized voices, we should create safe platforms in conversations and leadership while stepping back when needed. We should support impacted communities by centering their experiences, sharing access to resources and networks, and properly crediting their work. We could provide direct financial support to organizations and businesses of color while consistently engaging with diverse perspectives through active listening and learning.

## **How do we build authentic partnerships that advance racial justice?**

Building effective partnerships for racial justice requires developing trust through consistent engagement, deep listening to BIPOC-led organizations, and ensuring shared decision-making power. Key partners include local racial justice organizations, BIPOC-led faith communities, community service organizations, educational institutions, and policy advocacy groups focused on systemic racism.

### **Questions for Reflection:**

- How do I/we respond with a Franciscan heart to the racism in ourselves, our congregation, our nation, and our world?
- What aspects of examining my own biases do I find most challenging?
- How can I continue to educate myself about systemic racism?
- What is “ours to do” in the fight against racism?

### **Additional Resources**

#### **Books**

- *A White Catholic's Guide to Racism and Privilege* by Daniel P. Horan
- *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* by Robin Wall Kimmerer
- *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* by Isabel Wilkerson
- *No One Is Illegal: Fighting Racism and State Violence on the U.S. – Mexico Border* by Justin Akers Chacón and Mike Davis
- *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church* by Fr. Bryan Massingale
- *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* by Richard Rothstein
- *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* by Michelle Alexander
- *The Night is Long but Light Comes in the Morning: Meditations for Racial Healing* by Catherine Meeks
- *Unsettling Truths: The Ongoing Dehumanizing Legacy of the Doctrine of Discovery* by Mark Charles and Soong-Chan Rah

#### **Podcasts**

- Center for Action and Contemplation's podcast “*Learning How to See*” with host Brian McLaren: <https://cac.org/podcast/learning-how-to-see/>
- Scene on Radio's “*Seeing White*” podcast, with hosts John Biewen and Chenjerai Kumanyika: <https://sceneonradio.org/seeing-white/>
- National Immigration Forum's podcast “Only in America with Ali Noorani”: [https://immigrationforum.org/landing\\_page/podcast/](https://immigrationforum.org/landing_page/podcast/)
- NDN Collective's Podcast “Land Back for the People” with host Nick Tilsen: <https://ndncollective.org/land-back-for-the-people/>
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#### **YouTube Videos**

- [“Uncomfortable Conversations with a Black Man” with Emmanuel Acho](#)
- [“How to Fight Racism: Courageous Christianity and the Journey Toward Racial Justice” with Jemar Tisby](#)

- [“The Lie that Invented Racism” with John Biewen](#)
- [“Racial Metanoia: The Next Frontier in Racial Justice” with Fr. Bryan Massingale](#)
- [“Conservatives \(and liberals\) are Wrong About Immigration” with Fr. Casey Cole, OFM](#)