

# 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

## U.S. Bishops' Pastoral Letter on Racism

A Research Report Commemorating the  
25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of

*looking back seeing today's reality pressing forward*



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# A Research Report Commemorating the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of



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# *Executive Summary*

## INTRODUCTION

In 1979, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) issued the pastoral letter *Brothers and Sisters to Us*, which called upon the Church at every level to confront the evil of racism and work toward full inclusion of racial and ethnic minorities in the life and leadership of the Church. Specifically, they exhorted the faithful to examine their own attitudes and behaviors, overt and covert, "that favor one race or social group at the expense of the poor and the nonwhite" (1979:5), and to resist the "social structures that inhibit the economic, educational, and social advancement of the poor" (1979:10). To those in leadership in the Church, they issued a series of recommendations for eradicating racism and ensuring equal representation of racial and ethnic minorities in various areas of the Church's life.

Twenty-five years have now passed since the bishops wrote these words in *Brothers and Sisters to Us*. In order to commemorate the anniversary of this pastoral letter, the Secretariat for African American Catholics of the USCCB commissioned the research, presented in this report, which has entailed a full inventory of the Church's progress in meeting the goals outlined in the pastoral letter. This executive summary will use each of the recommendations from *Brothers and Sisters to Us* as a way of presenting the chief findings.



# *Principal Findings*

*as Related to the Recommendations of 'Brothers and Sisters to Us'*

## **#1: SPEAKING OUT AGAINST RACISM.**

*“36% of American Catholics who responded to a recent poll on contemporary Catholic trends said that they had heard a sermon on racism in the past three years.”*

*(LeMoyné-Zogby 2003)*

Among the primary challenges the U.S. Catholic bishops presented to themselves and all members of the Church were the need for personal conversion from the "sin of racism," increased awareness of the structural dimension of racism, and the need to "speak out" against racism in all of its forms. In their pastoral letter, they called on the Church community to "speak out (against racism),... in every diocese and parish in the land, in every chapel and religious house, in every school, in every social service agency, and in every institution that bears the name Catholic" (1979:8-9).

### **FINDING FROM RESEARCH**

Since the publication of *Brothers and Sisters to Us*, at least 35 bishops (or approximately 18% of all diocesan archbishops or bishops), have issued statements, either individually or jointly, condemning the sin of racism (NCCB 2001). Moreover, 36% of American Catholics who responded to a recent poll on contemporary Catholic trends said that they had heard a sermon on racism in the past three years (LeMoyné-Zogby 2003). These data demonstrate that at least some Catholic leaders have fulfilled their responsibility to preach the Gospel instead of "closing their eyes to the racism it condemns" (USCC 1979:10). Still, a majority of bishops have not issued such statements, and a majority of American Catholics have not heard the topic of racism addressed in homilies at Mass in the past three years.

### **FINDING FROM RESEARCH**

Data drawn from the American National Election Studies (NES) combined data file (1964-2000) were used to analyze trends in U.S. Catholics' attitudes on various issues of race and race policy. These analyses revealed that, much like the trends among Whites of other faiths and denominations (Kinder and Sanders 1996), White Catholics over the last twenty-five years exhibit diminished - rather than increased - support for government policies aimed at reducing racial inequality. Specifically, White Catholics have become less likely to agree that the government





should ensure equal opportunity, less supportive of government aid to Blacks, and less supportive of government's role in ensuring that Blacks get fair treatment in jobs. Consistent with other Whites, White Catholics' support for government's assistance to Blacks appears to diminish most dramatically beginning in the late 1980s.

### **FINDING FROM RESEARCH**

Analysis of data drawn from the National Election Studies (NES) also revealed that not only do prejudice and perceived group interests still play a role in shaping Catholics' attitudes toward public policy, but there has been an increasing, not a decreasing, divergence of opinion between Blacks and Whites over the last two decades. These findings suggest that the Church's statements condemning racism have not had their intended effect of reducing the pervasiveness of racist attitudes over the last twenty-five years.

### **RECOMMENDATION IN LIGHT OF FINDINGS**

Because White Catholics have become less supportive of government policies aimed at reducing racial inequality, especially since the late 1980s, bishops, pastors, and other Church leaders should renew their commitment to combat racism through their words and actions.

## **#2: SHARING IN RESPONSIBILITY AND DECISION MAKING.**

In their pastoral letter, the bishops urged "scrupulous attention at every level (of the Church) to insure that minority representation... involves authentic sharing in responsibility and decision making" (1979:11). Given that Blacks comprise about 3% of the U.S. Catholic population and 12.9% of the total U.S. population, any attempt to evaluate how well Blacks are represented in various ranks and institutions within the Catholic Church must consider these figures.

### **FINDING FROM RESEARCH**

Data gathered from the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA), the National Black Catholic Congress, and the Secretariat for the Diaconate reveal that Blacks are represented in most ministerial positions in the Church in the proportion that we would expect given their representation in the U.S. Catholic population overall. They comprise 3% of bishops and 3% of deacons, deacon candidates, and lay ministry



*“The percentage of Catholic Charities' paid staff who are minorities has increased over the past twenty years, from approximately 25% throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s, to a peak of 38.6% in 1988, and a current figure of 32.8%.”*

candidates. At the same time, however, Blacks are not well represented among priests, sisters, lay pastoral ministers (Murnion and DeLambo 1999), and diocesan directors of religious education. Furthermore, in those areas of ministry in which Blacks are most represented (e.g., among seminarians), this phenomenon appears to be due to increasing recruitment of Black seminarians from Africa, a trend which introduces other concerns, such as how to prepare these seminarians to minister effectively to Whites or African Americans who have distinct cultures and histories.

#### **RECOMMENDATION IN LIGHT OF FINDING**

Because of the lower representation of Blacks among priests, sisters, lay pastoral ministers, and diocesan directors of religious education, the Church must make concerted efforts to foster vocations to these ministries and provide financial assistance to those who wish to pursue them.

#### **FINDING FROM RESEARCH**

The percentage of Catholic Charities' paid staff who are minorities has increased over the past twenty years, from approximately 25% throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s, to a peak of 38.6% in 1988, and a current figure of 32.8%. These figures show that Catholic Charities' paid staff are clearly over-representative of minorities in the general population, but they are still under-representative of minorities in the populations they serve. This is especially true of the representation of minorities on the organization's corporate boards.

#### **RECOMMENDATION IN LIGHT OF FINDING**

Because some sectors of the Church are not as inclusive of Blacks as we would expect based on their proportion of the U.S. Catholic population, the Church should devote more attention and resources to fostering vocations, eliminating employment discrimination, and developing leadership training programs that will provide Blacks and other minorities with the kinds of skills and expertise necessary to hold ministerial and administrative positions throughout the Church. Because minority representation on the staff and boards of Catholic Charities is still considerably less than the minority representation among clients, the agency may want to consider ways to increase minority representation, especially in areas where staff members have direct contact with clients.

### **#3: FOSTERING VOCATIONS THROUGH APPRECIATION OF DISTINCT HISTORY AND CULTURAL TRADITIONS OF MINORITIES.**

In their pastoral letter, the bishops emphasized the need to "foster vocations among minority groups" and to provide training for ministry in which "minority cultures and traditions might contribute to that training" (1979:11).

#### **FINDING FROM RESEARCH**

According to the respondents of two national surveys, one of Black priests, seminarians, and deacons (USCC 1996), and the other of Offices of Black and Multi-Cultural Ministry (conducted for this research), many diocesan seminaries and ministry formation programs are inadequate in terms of their incorporation of the history, culture, and traditions of Black Americans.

#### **FINDING FROM RESEARCH**

The absence of effective, inculturated ministry formation programs may result in a loss of Black vocations as Black men and women, both young and old, seek in their formation programs evidence of the same culture, traditions, and liturgical styles found in their home parishes. Furthermore, the absence of inculturated ministry formation can result in poorly trained ministers for the Black Catholic community. This is especially problematic when candidates who have little or no exposure to African American culture (e.g., White or African candidates) are assigned to serve predominantly African American parishes.

#### **RECOMMENDATION IN LIGHT OF FINDINGS**

The Church at every level must continue to foster vocations among Blacks and other minorities by showing respect and appreciation for the various minority cultures and traditions that enrich the life of the Church. Seminaries and ministry formation programs must renew their efforts, as instructed by the bishops in 1979, to infuse their curricula and liturgies with "an awareness of the history and the contributions of minorities," showing that they "respect and foster the spiritual gifts of the various races and peoples and encourage the incorporation of these gifts into the liturgy" (1979:11-12).



*"The Church at every level must continue to foster vocations among Blacks and other minorities by showing respect and appreciation of the various minority cultures and traditions that enrich the life of the Church."*



#### **#4: ECUMENICAL COOPERATION IN THE PURSUIT OF JUSTICE AND PEACE.**

In their pastoral letter, the bishops called for the "joining hands with members of other religious groups in the spirit of ecumenism to achieve the common objectives of justice and peace" (1979:11).

#### **FINDING FROM RESEARCH**

To evaluate the Church's attempts to support ecumenical endeavors designed to curb the tide of racism and poverty, data were gathered from the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD), an agency which provides funding to a variety of inter-denominational and non-denominational grassroots anti-poverty groups. Analyses revealed that over the last twenty years there has been an increase in funding, both in terms of the projects funded and the total dollar amount of funding, to grassroots anti-poverty groups whose board and membership are either multiracial or about half Black and half White. Moreover, funding to groups whose board and membership are predominantly or completely Black, or about half Black and half Hispanic, has remained fairly stable over this time period.

#### **FINDING FROM RESEARCH**

Data gathered and analyzed from Catholic Charities, USA, revealed that of the 6,845,653 people who received "emergency services" in 1997, 42% were White, 35% were Black, and 16% were Hispanic. Of the 3,782,476 people who received "social services" in 1997, 43% were White, 24% were Black, and 23% were Hispanic. As anticipated, Blacks and Hispanics are disproportionately represented among the recipients of the emergency and social services, much as they are disproportionately represented among those in poverty in this country. Because Catholic Charities, USA, employs and serves Catholics and non-Catholics alike, this commitment of services and resources is testimony to the Church's strong commitment to foster justice for the dispossessed regardless of their religious background or affiliation.

## **#5: INCULTURATION OF THE LITURGY, PASTORAL PROGRAMS, AND EDUCATIONAL INITIATIVES.**

In their pastoral letter, the bishops called for the incorporation of the "spiritual gifts of various races and peoples" in the Church's liturgy, pastoral programs, and educational initiatives (1979:11-12).

### **FINDING FROM RESEARCH**

Although it is impossible to measure the extent to which parishes throughout the U.S. have inculturated their liturgies, pastoral programs, and educational initiatives without conducting a nationwide survey, our in-depth observations of eight predominantly Black Catholic parishes in four different dioceses revealed that these parishes use a variety of methods to incorporate the spiritual traditions of their African American, African, and/or Afro-Caribbean members. Parish leaders in these parishes spoke of the need to incorporate different models of liturgical inculturation in order to meet the needs of their various constituencies, thereby reinforcing the notion that the level and style of inculturation that works well in one place or at one Mass time may not necessarily work well in another.

### **FINDING FROM RESEARCH**

Our interviews with parish leaders at eight predominantly Black Catholic parishes revealed that some parishes are becoming increasingly ethnically diverse, primarily as a result of the arrival of new immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean. As a result, these parishes are searching for new models of inculturation, not only for their liturgies, but also for their pastoral and educational programs.

### **RECOMMENDATION IN LIGHT OF FINDINGS**

Bishops, diocesan administrators, and pastoral leaders should adopt strategies to ensure that African and Afro-Caribbean immigrants to the United States do not feel marginalized in their parishes. This will require sharing information with parishes, perhaps in the form of diocesan-sponsored workshops or mailings, about how they can respond to the diverse needs of these immigrant communities, including inculturating their liturgies, pastoral programs, and educational initiatives. In order to identify these needs, bishops and diocesan administrators should encourage parishes to conduct parish needs-assessments in the form of either a parish-wide survey or focus groups among distinct populations



*"...parishes are searching for new models of inculturation, not only for their liturgies, but also for their pastoral and education programs."*



within the parish. Whenever parishes do not have the resources to carry out these parish needs assessments, the diocese should assist them with financial and/or personnel resources.

## **#6: SPIRITUAL AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT OF ASSOCIATIONS OF MINORITIES WITHIN THE CHURCH.**

In their pastoral letter, the bishops recommended "the active spiritual and financial support of associations and institutions organized by Blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans, and Asians within the Church for the promotion of ministry to and by their respective communities" (1979:12).

### **FINDING FROM RESEARCH**

Only 44 (or 33%) of the 134 dioceses that responded to our national survey of dioceses claim to have a separate diocesan department that oversees Black ministry. The majority of these Offices of Black or Multi-Cultural Ministry were established in the 1980s, in the years following the publication of *Brothers and Sisters to Us*.

### **FINDING FROM RESEARCH**

Although the presence of these offices is a sign of progress in meeting the spiritual and pastoral needs of the Black Catholic community, the qualitative data gathered from our research reveal that many Offices of Black and Multi-Cultural Ministry suffer from inadequate financial support. In fact, as many as 25 of the 44 offices that oversee Black ministry specifically mention the need for more financial resources if they are to expand Black ministry in their dioceses.

### **FINDING FROM RESEARCH**

Although several dioceses have developed exemplary models of lay involvement in pastoral planning for the Black community, more than a third of respondents to our survey of Offices of Black and Multi-Cultural Ministry reported that the Black laity is either "never" or "hardly ever" involved in diocesan pastoral planning for Blacks.

### **RECOMMENDATION IN LIGHT OF FINDINGS**

Bishops should demonstrate their support for Black ministry by devoting more financial resources to Offices of Black or Multi-Cultural Ministry,

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especially since these resources have been so well used in the past. In addition, dioceses without any mechanism for involving the laity in pastoral planning for the Black community should learn from the exemplary models of consultation adopted elsewhere, such as in Chicago or Washington, D.C.



## **#7: THE CONTINUATION AND EXPANSION OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS IN THE INNER CITIES AND OTHER DISADVANTAGED AREAS.**

In speaking about education, the bishops state that "no other form of Christian ministry has been more widely acclaimed or desperately sought by leaders of various racial communities" (1979:12).

### **FINDING FROM RESEARCH**

One area in which the Church has maintained its commitment to minority education is in terms of the percentage of Catholic school buildings (as a proportion of all Catholic school buildings) located in inner-city neighborhoods. This percentage has remained fairly stable over the last twenty-five years.

### **FINDING FROM RESEARCH**

Although the percentage of Catholic school buildings located in the inner city has remained stable, Black student enrollment in these and other Catholic elementary and secondary schools has declined by over 50,000 students over the past twenty years. This decline in Black student enrollment has occurred at the same time that enrollment of Hispanic and Asian American students has increased.

### **RECOMMENDATION IN LIGHT OF FINDINGS**

Superintendents of Catholic schools and diocesan education departments should do more to promote Black enrollment in their schools. Many dioceses could easily qualify for more federal funds to subsidize Blacks' and other minorities' involvement in Catholic schools, but this will require mobilizing local resources and personnel (e.g., school principals) to lobby public school authorities for inclusion in the annual funding process.



### **FINDING FROM RESEARCH**

A recent study by The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University (Reardon and Yun 2002) finds fault with the levels of racial segregation within Catholic schools. Using data gathered by the National Center for Education Statistics' "Private School Survey," Reardon and Yun (2002) found that levels of racial segregation among Catholic schools and other religious private schools were often greater than levels among public schools.

### **RECOMMENDATION IN LIGHT OF FINDING**

Although many young Blacks derive clear benefits from their education at Catholic high schools that serve predominantly Black student populations (Polite 2000), further study is needed of the potential negative consequences of racially segregated Catholic schools, including the costs borne by all races for their lack of exposure to diverse populations during their developmental years.

### **FINDING FROM RESEARCH**

Blacks' enrollment in Catholic colleges and universities accounted for only 6% of students enrolled in accredited Catholic colleges and universities in 1995, a figure that is substantially lower than Black enrollment in public institutions (11.5%), private, for-profit institutions (15.6%), and other religiously affiliated colleges and universities (e.g., 13.4% at Protestant institutions). Our analyses revealed that tuition cost is the major reason why Black enrollment is lower at Catholic colleges and universities than public colleges and universities.

### **RECOMMENDATION IN LIGHT OF FINDING**

A key strategy in increasing Black and minority recruitment to Catholic institutions of higher education is to increase opportunities for scholarships and other forms of financial assistance.

### **FINDING FROM RESEARCH**

Data gathered from the National Catholic Education Association (NCEA) and the U.S. Department of Education reveal that although there has been an increase in minority faculty employed at Catholic schools and universities, this increase is not substantial enough to offset the significant under-representation of minorities among Catholic school faculty. While Blacks currently make up approximately 8% of students enrolled in Catholic schools and 6% of students enrolled in Catholic



colleges and universities, they comprise only 3% of Catholic school faculty and less than 2% of full-time faculty at Catholic colleges and universities. This situation has left many Black and minority students without role models of their race and ethnicity during their developmental years.





## *Conclusion*

As Catholics in the United States commemorate the 25th anniversary of *Brothers and Sisters to Us*, it is appropriate to assess the Church's degree of compliance with the recommendations outlined in that document a quarter of a century ago. One way to measure the pastoral letter's impact - indeed, perhaps the best way - is to observe the changes in attitudes, practices, and structures in the years following its promulgation.

*“One way to measure the pastoral letter's impact - indeed, perhaps the best way - is to observe the changes in attitudes, practices, and structures in the years following its promulgation.”*

This report has highlighted the areas of achievement as well as the areas that demand more steadfast attention and unified action. Although many agencies and leaders within the Church have begun to meet the challenges presented by *Brothers and Sisters to Us*, much work remains to be done. Church leaders must renew their commitment to speak out against racism so as to raise people's awareness of the systemic nature of this form of evil. In addition, some sectors of the Church are not as inclusive of Blacks as we would expect based on their proportion of the U.S. Catholic population. This reality should lead Catholic leaders to devote more attention and resources to eliminating employment discrimination, fostering vocations, and developing programs that will provide Blacks and other minorities with the kinds of confidence, skills, and expertise necessary to hold ministerial, teaching, and administrative positions throughout the Church.

But addressing racism and under-representation of minorities is not enough. Evangelization of minorities requires developing homilies, liturgical rituals, symbols, music, pastoral programs, and educational curricula that reflect, and reflect upon, that community's life, history, and culture. Pastoral leaders, therefore, must make every effort to ensure not only that these practices and institutions are sufficiently inculturated, but also that they are fully accessible to those who wish to participate in them. Only then will Blacks and other racial minorities be able to enjoy their rightful place at the table.

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