

CONFRONTING RACISM TEN THINGS THAT YOU CAN DO FOR LENT

“We need to have a candid conversation on racism and its manifestations in order to adequately and seriously address racism and racial divisions in our country” (SACBC Pastoral letter on racism).

In 2016, our bishops issued a pastoral letter on racism and racial divisions. In the letter, the bishops challenged us, as followers of Christ, to play an active role in dismantling racism and fostering racial reconciliation in Southern Africa.

We have taken various messages from the pastoral letter and transformed them into the following ten activities that we can do as part of our Lenten observance.

1. Make friends with people of different races, ethnicity and nationality. During Lent this year, make new friendship with at least one person from a different race, ethnic group, and nationality. *Remember that “we should refrain from loving only people who are just like ourselves. In loving only those who share our racial and ethnic backgrounds, we fall short of fulfilling the demands of love which the Gospel calls for. The words of our Lord challenge us that if we greet only our brothers and sisters, “what more are you doing than others? Do not even the non-believers do the same?” Matthew 5: 47 (SACBC Pastoral letter on racism)*
2. On every Friday, say a prayer asking God to heal and transform the difficult racial relationships in our country. You can do this as a family, as a parish, as a solidarity, as a religious congregation, and as a choir/youth group. *Remember that “the task of reconciliation... requires watchfulness and ardent prayer on the part of each” (SACBC Pastoral letter on racism).*
3. Make apology for your complicity in individual and systemic racism. During Lent this year, apologize to at least one person who has been a victim of your racist remarks, racist jokes and racist behaviour. Follow the example of our Bishops who themselves have asked for forgiveness. *“ In humility, as St. Peter confessed, we your pastors prostrate before God and before all who are in pain, ask for forgiveness for our historic complicity with racism in the Church” (SACBC Pastoral letter on racism).*
4. Work on your prejudices and biases. Be aware of the prejudices that you hold against people of a different race, ethnic group and nationality. Resist stereotyping. Do not generalize. During Lent this year, judge individuals based on your personal experiences with them and not on how you believe people from a particular group (racial group, ethnic group or nationality) behave.
5. Take a stand. Do not remain silent. Silence is complicity. During Lent this year, speak out and challenge at least one person who makes racist remarks and racist jokes in your family, workplace, religious congregation, school, social media platform, and parish.
6. Recognize and resist systemic racism. Start a conversation in your family about *“race, power and privilege” (SACBC Pastoral letter on racism).* Interrogate privilege, including your own. Take a stand *“against economic inequalities present in our society as a result of past racial discriminatory laws and practices” (SACBC Pastoral letter on racism).*

7. In rural communities where there are commercial farms, work with those of different race to tackle the following problems: the killing of white farmers, as well as the unfair living and working conditions of black farm workers.
8. Receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation at least once during the Lenten Season. Repent and ask God's forgiveness for your complicity in the sin of racism and racial divisions; *Remember that "while reaching out to one another, in open and honest dialogue, the sacrament of Reconciliation becomes especially important and meaningful because through it we come in our sinfulness to our all merciful Father for healing and forgiveness"* (SACBC Pastoral letter on racism).
9. Take part in at least one group discussion on racism. Make sure that your small Christian Community, parish, religious congregation, solidarity, choir group/youth group organizes at least one group discussion on racism. *"We realise that this is not an easy conversation, one that many of us may prefer to avoid. Our invitation to such a dialogue may in itself evoke a range of emotions, including self-justification and self-righteous feelings; or, guilt and denial; on the other hand, feelings of anger and sadness. Dialogue, rational and respectful, is necessary so that we open ourselves to receive God's healing."* (SACBC Pastoral letter on racism).
10. Become a bridge builder in your parish, workplace, neighbourhood. Where there are divisions based on race, ethnicity and nationality, step up and play the role of a mediator. Build bridges of hope and tolerance. Destroy the walls of fear and anger. *Remember that "blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God" (Matthew 5:9).* Efforts at racial reconciliation within our parishes, workplaces and communities should be grounded on the need to restore hope and justice. They should seek *"to allay unfounded fears and promote justice"* (SACBC Pastoral letter on racism).

"Through our celebration of the Eucharist, the symbol of unity in the body of Christ, we ask the Lord to heal and transform the relationships in our dioceses and our parishes so that we become communities of faith where "there is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female." (Galatians 3: 28)" (SACBC Pastoral letter on racism).

May the Lenten season this year deepen our personal encounter with the Crucified Christ who shed His blood to redeem all humanity.

"May the Lord of Peace grant our nation the peace, the healing and the reconciliation that we seek. (cf. 2 Th. 3.16)" (SACBC Pastoral letter on racism).