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St. Vincent DePaul and St. Pius V Parishes
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Racial Inequities in St. Louis

Most of us are intuitively aware that the playing field isn't level for Black St. Louisans. From the day of their birth they face institutional, structural barriers that make it much more difficult for them to succeed and thrive than white St. Louisans.

In this essay we will move beyond intuition and take a look at the numbers that tell the story of racial inequity in St. Louis. (Note that not enough data on the Latino population of St. Louis was available). But let's not refer to our Black St. Louisan as a number. Let's give her a name. We'll call her Sherry.

Let's begin with her birth. On Day One Sherry is likely to live in poverty because she is Black: 44% of Black children in St. Louis live below the federal poverty line, compared to 12% of white children. Sherry is also almost three times as likely to grow up in a single-parent household than a white child.

Sherry will be exposed to far more serious early childhood health risks than if she were white. Black children in St. Louis are more than twice as likely than white children to test positive for lead in their blood. Black children make roughly ten times more emergency room visits for asthma than white children.

While public education will be available to Sherry, she will be up against huge racial disparities in educational achievement. In St. Louis, half of white adults have a college degree, as opposed to less than one in five Black adults.

What will happen when Sherry enters the job market? For one thing, she will probably make far less money than her white counterparts. The median household income for whites in St. Louis (\$55,000) is nearly twice that of black households (\$28,000). What's more, she will be nearly five times more likely to experience unemployment at some point in her career.

Because Sherry believes in the American Dream, she will want to own a home. But there she will face more challenges. For decades, Black applicants have been denied a mortgage twice as often as white applicants, no matter their level of income. If and when she does qualify for a mortgage, Sherry will be part of just 41% of Black families in St. Louis who own a home - as opposed to 72% of whites. And the value of Sherry's home will be about one-third the value of a white-owned home.

How much wealth will Sherry be able to accumulate to pass on to the next generation? A typical white St. Louis family has about \$184,000 in family wealth, while a typical Black family has only \$23,000.

Finally, Sherry will likely die at a younger age than a white St. Louisan. In Missouri, white men live 8.5 years longer than Black men, and white women live 4.4 years longer than Black women. If Sherry happens to live in the 63115 ZIP code in north St. Louis, her life expectancy is 18 years less than if she lived in the 63105 ZIP code in Clayton, not even ten miles away.

What is the point of telling the story of Sherry? Is it to shame white St. Louisans? To blame Sherry for not trying hard enough? To overwhelm us to the point where we simply throw up our hands in despair and give up?

Sherry's story - a microcosm of the inequities faced by Black St. Louisans in general - can and should be a call to action. It should motivate us to do what we can to try to level the playing field, to give every St. Louisan a fair shot at a good life. This is the work of justice. This is our calling as disciples of Jesus.