



RACIAL INEQUITIES - WHAT CAN WE DO?

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I feel some ambivalence authoring this month's Justice Jubilee insert on racial injustice. Not because I don't see it, care about it and want to speak out against it. But, because too often the voices we hear from are not the ones most intimately impacted.

It's important to acknowledge that I am writing this as a 61 year old white woman, college educated, a social worker, married to a man, mom to adult children, and living in South St. Louis city. These are my demographics, and also the lens from which I am writing today.

If you are not aware of data in the United States that illustrates racial discrimination and inequality—I encourage you to spend some time researching it. There is ample evidence that Blacks and other Persons of Color are disproportionately impacted by poverty, unemployment, limited access to health care, fewer educational opportunities, and the criminal system. This racial inequity transcends all social determinants in the United States. It is undeniable.

We know it, yet we have had limited success in fixing it or eliminating it. Our efforts to educate often get lost in the semantics and defensiveness.

It becomes a conversation about who has suffered more, and who is to blame and philosophy around self-determination. White folks can become so invested in proving they are not racist, that they (we) fail to listen.

So, I want to focus on my observations of racial injustice and describe the ways in which I have seen it in my life. Such as:

- My 3 year old asking me why all the people on the bus are brown?
- Noticing all the children in my kid's grade school "detention room" were always little Black boys
- Consistently seeing my Black clients dismissed more quickly from ER care, being seen as "malingering" and unhoused; and not warranting a full psychiatric evaluation
- Hearing a female colleague talk about how another Black female "moves through the office" as if she should not be allowed to move with confidence, and power—implying ever so subtly that she doesn't know her place.
- Recognizing that I have to drive my North city clients out of their neighborhoods to find grocers with fresh produce.

All these examples represent the insidious ways that racism is present. These examples represent biases, lack of representation in positions of power, decades of images and stereotypes perpetuated in our entertainment and now social media, and very real systemic ways in which populations of people continue to be oppressed and marginalized under the guise of economic progress. Generational trauma and generational poverty are having a profound effect on our communities.

What can we do? What can you specifically do? It is overwhelming to think about addressing this at a macro level. So, let's think about what is possible for each of us individually. Even small acts can be powerful in changing the narrative and cultural landscape of our communities.

I encourage all of us to intentionally place ourselves in spaces where we are the minority. If you don't normally ride the bus, take a bus route to work. If you have never attended a Black church, attend one next Sunday. Sit with someone who doesn't look like you at lunchtime. Dine at a minority owned restaurant outside of your neighborhood. Pay attention. How do these experiences make you feel? Are you uncomfortable? If so, that is telling you something about your own biases and assumptions. *Change requires a certain amount of discomfort.* Be intentional and expand your experiences, which enhances your understanding. Our best hope of moving toward justice is in our individual connections. A friend reminded me

that hope is not a feeling, but a practice. Practice curiosity, love and openness.

We will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.

RESOURCES:



THE JESUIT POST

Catholic 101: Church Teaching and the Anti-Racism Movement

by Chris Kellerman, SJ | Jul 30, 2020 | Catholic 101, Justice, Race

<https://thejesuitpost.org/2020/07/catholic-101-should-a-catholic-be-an-antiracist/>

Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love - A Pastoral Letter Against Racism, US Bishops 2018 <https://www.usccb.org/resources/>

