

Statement on racism for Brothers and Sisters of Saint Francis region Adopted by the REC April 5, 2024

As Secular Franciscans living in the United States, we are confronted by the continuing presence of racism in our nation. And, motivated by the love of God and neighbor which is the heart of our Franciscan charism, we are called to help address it. As our bishops have said, "*racism still profoundly affects our culture, and it has no place in the Christian heart. This evil causes great harm to its victims, and it corrupts the souls of those who harbor racist or prejudicial thoughts.*"¹ Moreover, we acknowledge that, because we are frail human beings in need of conversion, racism exists within our Order, and, regrettably, racist acts by a few of our members have hurt our brothers and sisters who are people of color.

With our bishops, the Brothers and Sisters of Saint Francis region affirms that the evil of racism should have no place in our nation, in our Church, in our Order, or in our hearts. As Secular Franciscans we are called by our Rule to "*strive to create conditions of life worthy of people redeemed by Christ.*"² We believe this passage applies to the reality of racism and that we are called to support all people affected by racism, whether through personal encounters or through "*social structures of injustice and violence.*"³ Our Holy Father reminds us: "*We cannot tolerate or turn a blind eye to racism and exclusion in any form and yet claim to defend the sacredness of every human life.*"⁴

Our bishops have committed themselves to taking concrete action and call upon all Catholics in the US to do likewise.⁵ Our national fraternity has asked us, as Secular Franciscans, to "*Listen, discern, and go forth.*"⁶ Applying this to the call of our bishops, we urge one another to make every effort to listen to our brothers and sisters--Black, Hispanic, Native American, Asian⁷--who continue to experience racism. Let us discern the ways in which racism has wounded our Church and our fraternities, and go forth to take concrete steps to heal the wounds that it has caused.

As a regional fraternity, we pledge to take these steps and to work with local fraternities to advance the cause of justice. Through our director of formation and our JPIC and multicultural animators, we will provide opportunities to reflect on racism and its impacts. We will ask our fraternal and pastoral visitors to accompany local fraternities as they engage in the often difficult conversations on this subject. And we invite local fraternities and individual Secular Franciscans to find ways to act in their parishes and communities to address racism and its legacy.

Knowing our own frailty and our need for daily conversion in all things, we ask the intercession of the Venerable Augustus Tolton, the first African-American priest in the United States, Servant of God Julia Greeley, OFS, and Servant of God Thea Bowman, FSPA. By their prayers may we receive the grace to "*accept all people as a gift of the Lord and an image of Christ*"⁸ and to "*resolve to work for justice.*"⁹

¹ Open Wide our Hearts, p. 6. <https://www.usccb.org/committees/ad-hoc-committee-against-racism>

² OFS Rule, Article 13. <https://secularfranciscansusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/RULE.pdf>

³ Open Wide our Hearts, p. 5. <https://www.usccb.org/committees/ad-hoc-committee-against-racism>

⁴ <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2020-06/pope-francis-usa-george-floyd-protests-no-racism-violence.html>

⁵ Open Wide our Hearts, p. 21. <https://www.usccb.org/committees/ad-hoc-committee-against-racism>

⁶ <https://www.secularfranciscansusa.org/2022/11/26/ofs-usa-national-theme-2022-2025-listen-discern-go-forth/>

⁷ Cf. Open Wide our Hearts, pp. 11-16, which specifically discusses the experience of Native Americans, African Americans, and Hispanics; also see Brothers and Sisters to Us, par. 16, which refers specifically to racism and its impact on Blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans, and Asians.

⁸ OFS Rule, Article 13. <https://secularfranciscansusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/RULE.pdf>

⁹ Open Wide our Hearts, p. 24. <https://www.usccb.org/committees/ad-hoc-committee-against-racism>

Notes on documents: The document **Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love** is a pastoral letter against racism approved by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) in 2018. The document **Brothers and Sisters to Us** is an earlier pastoral letter against racism approved by the USCCB in 1979. Both documents are official teaching statements by the US Bishops.

