



Love One Another © Laura James, 2000 Used with permission

Assembly 2022

The Passionists of Holy Cross Province Statement on Cultural and Racial Diversity



Statement on Cultural and Racial Diversity

A. *We are a Multicultural Passionist Family*

1. We, the Passionist women and men of Holy Cross Province today, are a multicultural family. We are from different countries of origin, speak different languages, and, in light of each person's cultural and racial heritage, have different spiritual traditions and practices of worship. This diversity flows from a deep unity because whether vowed religious or committed lay men and women, we are bonded together by a heartfelt affinity with the Passionist charism, the *memoria Passionis*. And, as disciples who “live and move and have our being” in Christ (Acts 17:28),¹ we are part of a multicultural church and world, members of the Body of Christ, a body splendidly composed of an amazing and seemingly endless variety of persons, each of whom is necessary and each of whom depends on and supports every other member of the body (1 Cor 12: 12-26). The Body of Christ can flourish—and glorify God—only when we affirm that every member of the body is a specially sent gift from God with a distinctive grace to share with us.

2. Thus, the Passionist Family of Holy Cross Province, counting on God's grace, joyfully affirms, celebrates, and actively promotes cultural and racial diversity for the sake of honoring God's intention from the very first moment of creation and for advancing the reign of God. We do this in fidelity to the Scriptures, Catholic teaching, St. Paul of the Cross and the Passionist charism, and our responsibility to continually discern the “signs of the times.”

3. Cultural and racial diversity, rather than something to fear and lament, is part of the Divine plan and thus should be embraced and celebrated. The opening chapter of the Bible reveals that God created a world abounding in diversity, an astonishing abundance of creatures and species that God exuberantly declared “very good” (Gen 1:31). The thirteenth-century theologian St. Thomas Aquinas taught that the breathtaking diversity of creation, both human and nonhuman, far from being accidental, was necessary in order for us even to begin to grasp the beauty, goodness, and unimaginable generosity and creativity of God (*Summa Theologiae*, I, 47,1).

4. While everything God created contains something of the Creator, human beings alone are created in the image of God (Gen 1:26-27) and called to grow in likeness to God. This means that every human being without exception brings something unique and unrepeatable of God to life in the world and is, therefore, a living, breathing sacrament of God's goodness and glory. The doctrine of the *imago Dei* is the foundation of the steadfast Christian teaching that every

¹ All scripture references are from the *New American Bible*, Jean Marie Hiesberger, General Editor. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

person possesses an inherent and inviolable dignity and sacredness, and is why all men and women, regardless of race, ethnicity, or cultural background, deserve justice, respect, and compassion. Moreover, that all men and women share the same source of life makes all of us, down through the generations, blessed children of God, inseparable sisters and brothers to one another in one human family created by God's love. Pope Francis eloquently expressed the ethical significance of this truth when he wrote: "Appearances notwithstanding, every person *is immensely holy and deserves our love*" ([*Evangelii Gaudium*](#), #274).

B. The Sin of Racism

5. That every person is created in the image of God, has dignity and sacredness, is worthy of justice, respect, and compassion, and is holy and deserving of love is precisely what the sin of racism denies ([*Brothers and Sisters to Us, U.S. Catholic Bishops Pastoral Letter on Racism, 1979*](#)). In [*Open Wide Our Hearts*](#), their 2018 pastoral letter against racism, the U.S. bishops offer this succinct definition of racism: "Racism arises when—either consciously or unconsciously—a person holds that his or her own race or ethnicity is superior, and therefore judges persons of other races or ethnicities as inferior and unworthy of equal regard" (1). They continue: "Racism occurs because a person ignores the fundamental truth that, because all humans share a common origin, they are all brothers and sisters, all equally made in the image of God. When this truth is ignored, the consequence is prejudice and fear of the other, and—all too often—hatred" (1-2). And, as they elaborate, "Every racist act—every such comment, every joke, every disparaging look as a reaction to the color of skin, ethnicity, or place of origin—is a failure to acknowledge another person as a brother or sister, created in the image of God. In these and in many other such acts, the sin of racism persists in our lives, in our country, and in our world" (2). Because racism "can often be found in our hearts" and "can also be institutional"; because the "cumulative effects of personal sins of racism have led to social structures of injustice and violence that makes us all accomplices in racism" (2-3); and because this "evil causes great harm to its victims, and it corrupts the souls of those who harbor racist or prejudicial thoughts" (4), we are called to "a genuine conversion of heart, a conversion that will compel change, and the reform of our institutions and society" (4). This conversion demands scrutinizing and transforming our attitudes, priorities, perceptions, actions, and practices, not only individually, but also communally and institutionally. True conversion must be preceded by *consciousness raising*, i.e. waking up and becoming aware of something we did not see before, and allowing that newly born awareness to change the way we see, judge, and act. The Passionist Family of Holy Cross Province, counting on the grace of God, commits to an ongoing process of *consciousness raising* and *conversion*.

C. We are Called to Work for the continued Restoration of Shalom (Hebrew, for Peace): Consciousness raising, Conversion and Repentance of Where we May have Failed

6. In light of the divinely bestowed sacredness of every person, and as a way to participate in God's work of overcoming the pernicious power of sin, God called the Israelites to be a people of justice and liberation, and to live in the joyous freedom of the children of God. They were to seek justice, liberation, and the joyous freedom of the children of God especially for the poor and oppressed, the marginalized and disenfranchised, and were to work for the continued restoration of *Shalom*, the Hebrew

word for peace that describes a world in which all men and women, thanks to justice and love, affirmation and respect, know wholeness, well-being, and fullness of life. Every member of the Passionist Family of Holy Cross Province shares this call.

7. Faithful to his Jewish heritage, Jesus inaugurated his public ministry by echoing the prophet Isaiah. His mission was “to bring glad tidings to the poor,” “to proclaim liberty to captives,” and “to let the oppressed go free” (Lk 4:18), all of which would commence with the inbreaking of the reign of God, the central image of Jesus’ ministry that symbolized a new kind of community and a new way of being human together characterized by love, justice, mercy, compassion, heartfelt generosity, and inclusion. Jesus brought the reign of God to life in his teachings and his ministry, in his abiding attention to the poor and suffering, and particularly when he welcomed to table all those who were continually told that they would never belong, that they counted for nothing, and that there would never be a place for them at table.

8. Today, many among us continue to feel that they count for nothing and have no place at the table. As the U.S. bishops note: “Native Americans experienced deep wounds in the age of colonization and expansion, wounds that largely remain unhealed and strongly impact the generations to this day” ([Open Wide Our Hearts](#), 8) in the “poverty, unemployment, inadequate health care, poor schools, the exploitation of natural resources, and disputes over land ownership” that they continue to suffer (9). Likewise, the bishops write, “Since the Mexican-American War, Hispanics from various countries have experienced discrimination in housing, employment, healthcare, and education. Hispanics have been referred to by countless derogatory names, have encountered negative assumptions made about them because of their ethnicity, have suffered discrimination in applying for college, for housing, and in registering to vote” ([Open Wide Our Hearts](#), 12). “There is also growing fear and harassment of persons from majority Muslim countries” ([Open Wide Our Hearts](#), 2), the bishops note. People of Asian descent as well “can attest to having been the target of racial and ethnic prejudice in this country” ([Open Wide Our Hearts](#), 7). We remember the internment camps of World War II and the recent violence against Asians during the Covid pandemic. And it is not surprising that so many African Americans feel they have never truly been given a place at the table when they “continue to struggle against perceptions that they do not fully bear the image of God, that they embody less intelligence, beauty, and goodness” ([Open Wide Our Hearts](#), 10). No wonder, the bishops conclude, that so many African Americans are “without hope, discouraged, disheartened, and feeling unloved” (11). This, too, calls for *consciousness raising* and *conversion* from us.

9. Jesus taught that the reign of God would take root and grow when people took to heart the command “to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength,” and “to love your neighbor as yourself” (Mk 12:30-31). As the parable of the Good Samaritan testifies (Lk 10:29-37), that love must extend to every person, especially those neighbors who are abandoned “on the roadside” and that we are most likely to shun, overlook, or pass by precisely because in their differences we fail to see them as our brother or sister or simply because in our comfort we flee the inconvenience and vulnerability of love (Pope Francis, [Fratelli Tutti](#), #63-#76). It is not surprising then that Jesus declared that entry into the reign of God hinges on habitually practicing the love that enables us to see Christ where we often least expect to find him: the hungry and thirsty, the homeless and abandoned, the imprisoned, or the strangers we refuse to welcome (Mt 25:31-46). Living by that love isn’t easy, but it is immensely powerful, abundantly hopeful, and radically transformative because, with

God's grace, it leads to the unbreakable communion of heaven in which everyone, while loving and rejoicing in God, loves and rejoices in one another. To pray "thy Kingdom come" is to commit to doing what we can to create this Beloved Community on Earth, a community blessed and enriched, strengthened and uplifted, precisely in its beautiful diversity.

10. That so many persons today remain abandoned "on the roadside" in our local communities, in our larger society, and around the world shamefully testifies that far too often we can grievously fail to love our neighbors as ourselves. To sin is to unjustly value oneself over others. It is to elevate our needs, wants, pleasures and desires, comfort and security over the fundamental needs and well-being of others, so much so that we are incapable of recognizing the harm that we do. Or it is simply not bothering to love (James Keenan, *Moral Wisdom*, 57) every time we have the opportunity to do so, particularly when such love could rescue our sisters and brothers who continually find themselves abandoned "on the roadside." The communion of life and love to which God calls us, and to which Jesus shows us the way, will remain a hopelessly impossible ideal unless we recognize, transform, and repent the many ways we do not bother to love. The Passionist Family of Holy Cross Province, counting on the grace of God, commits to an ongoing process of consciousness raising, conversion, and repentance for the times we may have failed.

The communion of life and love to which God calls us, and to which Jesus shows us the way, will remain a hopelessly impossible ideal unless we recognize the many ways we do not bother to love. The Passionist Family of Holy Cross Province, counting on the grace of God, commits to an ongoing process of *consciousness raising, conversion, and recognition of where we may have failed.*

11. Jesus came to break down all the walls we build between ourselves and others, walls constructed out of ignorance and fear, hostility and hatred, prejudice and maliciousness, arrogance and pride, coldness or indifference, "that he might create in himself one new person in place of the two, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile both with God, in one body, through the cross, putting that enmity to death" (Eph 2:15-16). It is much easier to build walls that separate us from the neighbors we are commanded to love; much easier not to live "in right relationship with God, with one another, and with the rest of God's creation" than to practice the love and justice that foster community (*Open Wide Our Hearts*, 6). But we should never succumb to that alluring temptation. We have been reconciled to God through Christ in order to be reconciled to one another, and are commissioned to continue this ministry of healing and reconciliation in order to establish unity and community among all people in God and with each other. Yes, such work absolutely depends on grace and must be led by the Spirit, but a God who depends on us and works through us has entrusted this ministry of reconciliation to us (2 Cor 5:18-19). It is, therefore, a central ministry of the church and integral to a life of discipleship; indeed, it is the baptismal vocation of all who pledge to follow, imitate, and grow in likeness to Christ.

D. We Passionists have a Special Call to "the greatest and most overwhelming work of God's love"

12. It is also integral and indispensable to Passionist life and ministry. St. Paul of the Cross called his followers "to proclaim the Gospel of Christ to all" and "to preach the Word of the

Cross in season and out of season,” because he wholeheartedly believed that the Passion of Jesus was “the greatest and most overwhelming work of God’s love” (*Const*, #1). Inspired, transformed, and guided by that love, Passionists “want our journey through life to proclaim that hope to all” (*Const*, #8) and do so when we “keep alive the memory of the Passion of Christ” in our hearts and through our words and actions (*Const*, #6). Like St. Paul of the Cross, we believe that the Passion and death of Jesus “reveals the power of God which penetrates the world, destroying the power of evil and building up the Kingdom of God” (*Const*, #5). The power of the crucified Christ must penetrate our own minds and hearts to illumine and eradicate any attitudes of cultural and racial superiority so that we can build up, rather than impede, the Kingdom of God. We believe, too, that the “Christian community is founded on the love of Christ, who by His Cross, ‘tore down the wall of separation’ and made all one people” (*Const*, #26). We ask forgiveness, for the times, in our life together or through our ministries, that we have added to what separates us rather than do our part in bringing us together.

13. Fidelity to the Passionist charism compels us to recognize that Jesus’ “Passion and death are no mere historical events. They are ever-present realities to people in the world of today, ‘crucified’ as they are by injustice, by the lack of a deep respect for human life, and by a hungry yearning for peace, truth, and the fullness of human existence” (*Const*, #65). Too, because we believe that “Christ loved everyone without exception” (*Const*, #33), fidelity to the Passionist charism also compels us to continually discern how “to make our lives and our apostolate an authentic and credible witness on behalf of justice and human dignity” (*Const*, #72).

14. Today and always that means doing what we can in our local communities and through our various ministries to bring to life “a new vision of fraternity and social friendship” (*Fratelli Tutti*, #6), a genuine communion of cultures in which everyone’s appreciation for the “inexhaustible richness of human life” (*Fratelli Tutti*, #147) is deepened and expanded through encountering, appreciating, listening to and learning from persons from diverse races and cultures. “To see things in this way,” Pope Francis explains, “brings the joyful realization that no one people, culture or individual can achieve everything on its own; to attain fulfillment in life we need others” (*Fratelli Tutti*, #150). The Passionist Family of Holy Cross Province, counting on God’s grace, commits to helping one another, as well as those to whom we minister, cultivate the moral and spiritual vision, shown to us most fully in Jesus, through which we will continue to welcome, respect, love, and befriend persons of all races and cultures for the sake of the just and Beloved Community to which God calls every human being.

15. The Catholic Church teaches that men and women “can come to an authentic and full humanity only through culture” (*Gaudium et Spes*, #53) and that the “People of God is incarnate in the peoples of the earth, each of which has its own culture” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, #115). Therefore, instead of seeing cultural and racial diversity as a regrettable fact of human existence—or a problem to overcome—the Church celebrates and gives thanks for it precisely because such diversity confirms the “indisputable fact that no single culture can exhaust the mystery of our redemption in Christ” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, #118). We need peoples of every race and culture even to begin to grasp the redemptive meaning of the Incarnation and the boundlessness of God’s love. As Pope Francis wrote: “We would not do justice to the logic of the incarnation if we thought of Christianity as monocultural and monotonous” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, #117). Instead of weakening or diminishing the Church, cultural and racial diversity enriches it. “In the diversity of peoples who experience the gift of God, each in accordance with

its own culture, the Church expresses her genuine catholicity and shows forth the ‘beauty of her varied face’” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, #116).

E. We are Called to Take Action

16. Therefore, as “Open Wide Our Hearts” invites, we as a Passionist family acknowledge “the harm done to so many” as a result of racism (7) and recognize that the harms of racism extend in different ways to every person, both those who contribute to it and those who suffer from it. The recognition of the multicultural composition of our Passionist Family is not in itself evidence of an inclusive culture. We affirm that genuine multiculturalism creates a culture of belonging and unity where everyone thrives and flourishes, one that is authentically anti-racist.

17. We desire to manifest the fullness and beauty of the reality of our multicultural incarnation as the Passionist family. We, therefore, commit to a process of consciousness raising, genuine conversion of heart and repentance of where we have failed, and the reform of our institutions, province, and society that it compels. We acknowledge that this means:

- Moving beyond our comfort zones, out into the margins where we will surely find our crucified Lord and the “Crucified of today” (2000 General Chapter documents);
- Condemning racism, asking for forgiveness for the times our Province has participated in acts of unintended racism, and taking responsibility for correcting its injustices and healing the harms it has caused;
- Working to form relationships with those we might regularly avoid, going beyond ourselves, opening our minds and hearts to value and respect the experience of those who have been harmed by the evil of racism;
- Undertaking this journey together as a multicultural Passionist family, we commit to learning from our personal and communal histories. We may be unaware of the unimaginable damage that racism caused those people of color and diverse cultures. We need to listen to them when they express their trauma they suffered on account of injustice, so that, together, we may truly become brothers and sisters, children of God.
- Pledging to be a public witness to the Church’s commitment to end racism.

18. We understand that the work of cultural and racial diversity is not a static achievement; it is life-long work that we must commit to each and every day; we are encouraged knowing that we “*don’t need to be free of racism to be an anti-racist. Anti-racism is the commitment to fight racism wherever you find it, including in [ourselves.]*” (Ijeoma Oluo).

19. Guided by these acknowledgments and in light of the Scriptures, Catholic teaching, the witness of St. Paul of the Cross and the Passionist charism, and our discernment of the “signs of the times,” we, the Passionist Family of Holy Cross Province, in our retreat centers, parishes, and ministries, commit:

1. To create, from a place grounded in the reality of our Passionist, multicultural identity, a hospitable environment in which persons of diverse cultures and races feel that they and their culture are genuinely included, welcomed, respected, and appreciated.
2. To actively participate in a “culture of encounter” by intentionally finding ways to meet, spend time with, listen to and learn from people of diverse races and cultures whose

experiences, perspectives, and insights may be very different from our own. Because creating a culture of encounter builds bridges that give birth to friendships, we want modeling and participating in a culture of encounter to be an ongoing process, both “an aspiration and a style of life” ([*Fratelli Tutti*](#), #216).

3. To promote and uphold the “social covenant” that recognizes “other people’s right to be themselves and to be different,” and recognize that without this social covenant “subtle ways can be found to make others insignificant, irrelevant, of no value to society” ([*Fratelli Tutti*](#), #218).
4. To affirm and model the value of cultural and racial diversity in liturgies, retreat talks, homilies, and all dimensions of our ministries.
5. To read, learn from and weave into our Passionist formation the Church’s teachings and educational resources relating to racism and multiculturalism.
6. To protest the racism, cultural superiority, and other injustices that undermine the Beloved Community we are actively creating.
7. To recognize systemic racism as shown in inequality of opportunities in all society, we commit to educating ourselves on the history and presence of systemic racism in our ministries and ministry locations.
8. To examine our own fears, biases and prejudices as well as other underlying and unexamined assumptions and attitudes that obstruct the love of neighbor to which Christ calls us.
9. To create safe spaces in our retreat centers, parishes, schools, local communities and other ministry sites for honest conversations about racial and cultural diversity.
10. To model inclusion of the voices of persons of diverse races and cultures in shaping our organizational structures, policies, and programs, and to recruit and retain persons of diverse cultures and races on our staffs and in our leadership so as to be truly representative of the multicultural reality of the Passionist family.
11. To work in partnership with community organizations that promote cultural and racial diversity and that seek to overcome the multitude of injustices that weaken communities and violate the dignity and sacredness of persons.
12. To set concrete goals for each of the above commitments, understanding that each goal will move us closer toward embodying our vision of a flourishing and fully functioning multicultural Passionist family and toward being the Beloved Community. Goals will be understood, measurable, and embodied by everyone, and each of us will know what role we play in achieving these goals.
13. To conduct regular review and self-assessment of our progress toward these goals.