

are often asked to bear the heaviest burden of these economic pressures . . . Crude and blatant expressions of racist sentiment . . . are manifest in the tendency to stereotype and marginalize whole segments of the population whose presence is perceived as a threat. It is manifest also in the indifference that replaces open hatred. The minority poor are seen as the dross of a post-industrial society – without skills, without motivation, without incentive. They are expendable.”¹⁰

The Church’s response to this unjust situation has been uneven and often half-hearted. First, the official teaching is not widely known. Secondly, many Church leaders and many of the faithful have not given it a high priority.¹¹ Moreover, as communities moved from historical segregation in territorial church parishes, white flight has created segregation in many other places. Persistent challenges regarding community life, public education, economics, drugs and violence have been labeled “their problem, not ours.” Both members of the Church and the wider community have failed too frequently to help the man going down from Jerusalem to Jericho who fell prey to robbers. (Lk 10:30)

As we continue to work toward racial justice today, it is important to understand what is recognized as “white privilege.” Those with lighter skin color have certain advantages, privileges and benefits that persons of darker color do not enjoy. (In Louisiana, 36 percent of African-American families live in poverty, compared to 11 percent of whites.) People of color have certain systemic disadvantages, burdens and stigmas that they have to overcome. From a white perspective, everything is normal because white people often do not see the advantages that are inherent simply in being born into society with physical characteristics valued by that society. Such privilege shows up, however, in current everyday occurrences. In stores and restaurants, preferred treatment is at times

given to some, while others are delayed or denied the same equal service.

As members of a privileged race, we may not have espoused a conviction that our race was better than other races, but we probably have accepted uncritically the privileges attached to our race no matter how this has impacted others. Anyone who has accepted social privilege at the expense of people of another race is complicit in the fostering of attitudes and behavior that unfortunately can feed racial disharmony.

Our Archdiocesan Heritage

“Praised be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has bestowed on us in Christ every spiritual blessing in the heavens.” (Eph 1:3)

As we consider how we might foster racial harmony in the Archdiocese in the future, might we draw some positive lessons from our past? New Orleans has been a multi-racial and multi-cultural community for almost three centuries. Peoples from diverse lands have enriched the life and history of the city and surrounding area. In 1727, the Ursuline Sisters welcomed in their school children of different races and religious backgrounds. Our Cathedral records show that in 1803 there were parishioners from France, Spain, England, Scotland, Ireland, the Canary Islands, Cuba, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Belgium, Greece, Sardinia, Denmark, Bohemia, Santo Domingo, Mexico, Canada, Martinique, Majorca, Spain, Morocco, Puerto Rico and Cartagena in the Indies. In 1800, 69 percent of the children baptized were of African descent. Their parents came from Barbara, Chamba, Congo, Gambia, Fon, Guinea, Ibo, Mandingo, Mina and the Senegal nations.¹² The church parish was never free from cultural tensions. But a deeper reality still bound people together in their Catholic faith.