

November 2020 ZOOM Plenary Comments
Most Reverend Shelton J. Fabre
Ad Hoc Committee Against Racism
Tuesday, November 17, 2020 at 1:00 PM

In 2015 - 2016 when the USCCB formally began the process of issuing another pastoral letter on racism, it was clear that the country's racial unrest and struggle with racism was again in an acute way a growing problem. The bishops were aware that our Church and country were again struggling with a rise in racism and racial unrest that was being witnessed on many fronts. The process of issuing another pastoral letter on racism from the full body of bishops came to fruition in November 2018, when we overwhelmingly approved *Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love – A Pastoral Letter on Racism*, a document which among many other things unequivocally declared that racism is a life issue. When this body overwhelmingly approved *Open Wide Our Hearts*, we could not have foreseen all that has occurred in 2020. We could not have known that we would watch, on screen, numerous killings of African Americans, and that these killings would spark worldwide peaceful demonstrations and protests, and, sadly and reprehensibly, also spark violence in some places. The events that have affected our daily lives and ignited passions regarding racism in our Church, country and our world clearly confirm to be true that statements and concerns in *Open Wide Our Hearts*.

The struggles against racism would have been enough of a challenge, but we have had to also confront the pandemic that has been caused by the Corona virus. We could not have completely foretold the devastation that the disparate impact the corona virus would have in communities of color, nor could we have completely foretold how starkly obvious racial healthcare disparities would become during this pandemic.

My brother bishops, in the context of all these concerns and challenges, I want to assure you that the USCCB Ad Hoc Committee Against Racism has been exceedingly active, as is evident from its November 2020 information report. I strongly encourage and urge you to read the committee's report. The work that the report reflects is still only a slice of what is being done by the Ad Hoc Committee Against Racism. I express great gratitude to the Ad Hoc Committee Staff and to the USCCB Staff for all that we have been able to address in these challenging months of the year 2020.

I also want to express gratitude to you, my brother bishops, for the time and attention you have given to racial justice and healing in your dioceses. You have spoken out in both word and deed, and you prayerfully asked the Lord's guidance, help, and wisdom. Many of you have formed committees of lay people, staff, priests, and religious to examine how the message of *Open Wide Our Hearts* may be addressed and acted upon in your dioceses. You have held virtual and in-person events to open dialogue between the laity and leaders in your dioceses, creating opportunities that have led to conversion of hearts. You have said special masses, have participated in marches, Stations of the Cross, and have reached out to ecumenical and interreligious faith leaders in your area. You have written pastoral letters, and editorials, and have made yourself available for numerous interviews, making sure that you were in regular communication with your flock. One incredible example of the work dioceses have been doing can be found in the Diocese of Green Bay, where the experiences of many of the faithful have been converted into a compelling photo presentation inspired by our 20118 pastoral letter. It has now been adapted into a powerful online experience. You have also had non-stop pandemic related challenges in the midst of this, and some of you an untold number of natural disasters. As is written in *The Soul of the*

Apostolate, “God wants good works, and therefore, he wants zealous action,” yet let us not believe that our smallest efforts go for naught.

As we continue to foster dialogue and encounters to seek healing and forgiveness with regard to our nation’s sinful past and present regarding racism, Archbishop Gomez and the administrative committee have asked me to host this conversation, a time of sharing so that bishops may learn about the ways that other bishops have engaged *Open Wide Our Hearts* and the issue of racism and have seen positive fruit in our efforts to overcome racism in spite of the many challenges. In parishes, dioceses, apostolates, educational institutions, as well as at the USCCB headquarters, there is unequivocally more thought, conversation, and faith-filled deliberation and action against racism and how it divides and harms us as the Body of Christ. The work is hard, the work is slow, but the work is being done. Our reflection time today will focus on three questions: **1. In continuing or embarking upon this work, were there people that experienced conversion or healing through local efforts?; 2. How have you encountered the Holy Spirit at work through concrete efforts in your diocese?; 3. What one effort or change made created the most fruit? What challenges did you encounter?**

At this time, and in this order, I will ask Bishop Jamie Soto, Bishop of Sacramento; Bishop Gerard Battersby, Auxiliary Bishop of Detroit and a member of the Ad Hoc Committee Against Racism; Archbishop Mitchell Rozanski, Archbishop of St. Louis; and Archbishop William Lori, Archbishop of Baltimore, to use the “raise your hand” feature when it is your turn to speak to share experiences in your dioceses. Once we have heard from these four bishops, we will invite the rest of the bishops to consider the questions and share reflections regarding what they have learned. While some may want to ask questions about the Committee, I will remind you that this

discussion will be directed towards the work you have done, what you have learned, and what could be helpful to the rest of the bishops. With that, I will yield to the four bishops who will share their experiences with us, again in this order, Bishop Soto, Bishop Battersby, Archbishop Rozanski and Archbishop Lori.