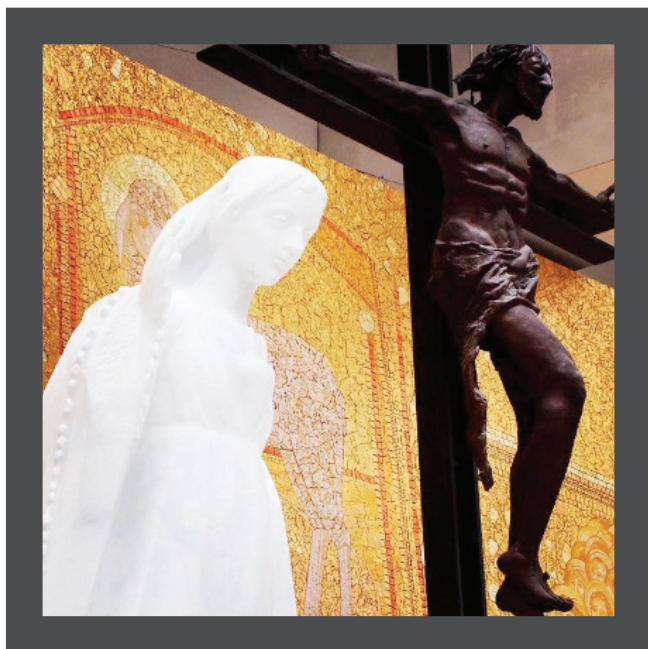


# ROOTING OUT **RACISM** FROM OUR PARISH



**OUR LADY  
OF FÁTIMA  
WHITE CITY**



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## **Rooting out Racism from Our Parish**

Parishioners' testimonies, reflections  
and experiences of racism  
Our Lady of Fátima, White City

Following the killing of George Floyd on 25 May 2020 and the resulting wave of Black Lives Matter protests, we, like so many communities around the world, were finally awoken to the urgent need for us to talk together about the reality of racism both in the wider world but also crucially in our own community.

'We' here means the Catholic parish of Our Lady of Fátima in White City, West London which, despite its name, is a vibrantly multicultural community in one of London's largest social housing estates. This booklet aims to capture something of the journey travelled here in the parish since the summer of 2020.

**This is what the Lord asks of you: only this, to act justly,  
to love tenderly, and to walk humbly with your God.**

– Micah 6:8

**We cannot tolerate or turn a blind eye to racism and  
exclusion in any form and yet claim to defend the  
sacredness of human life.**

– Pope Francis, General Audience, 3 June 2020

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# INTRODUCTION

**Fr Richard Nesbitt, Parish Priest**

To be honest, it wasn't the George Floyd killing which was the decisive spark for me on this journey. I remember being shocked by the George Floyd footage, but at the same time thinking 'That's something that happens in the US – it's an "over there" kind of story...' I think for me personally it was the pulling down of the statue of Edward Colston in Bristol on 7 June 2020 which really woke me up. As a teenager I lived in Bath and I used to go across to Bristol for rock and pop concerts with bands like Siouxsie and the Banshees and the Thompson Twins which all took place at the Colston Hall. I had never even once asked myself why the 'Colston Hall' – who is this 'Colston' guy? So to discover back in June that he was a 17th century slave trader, based in Bristol, who made his vast fortune through human suffering came as a huge shock and wake-up call to me personally. I realised that there was a whole narrative of our British history that I had never really engaged with or even tried to learn about. I had lived my life in a bubble of white privilege.

As a parish priest I feel very passionately that we should always have the courage and integrity to bring into our shared community conversations the 'difficult issues' which surround us in our world today – this makes our faith real and not something comfortable and cosy. But I must admit that I struggled initially to know how to talk about racism and bring it into my preaching after the George Floyd killing. In July we were finally able to re-open the church after 13 weeks of coronavirus lockdown and so it seemed that there were a lot of other important issues to be dealt with as parishioners finally began to return to Mass.

But then I watched a series of videos called 'Being Black and Catholic' which were posted on the Westminster Diocese website in July, in which four young black Catholics based in London talked very honestly about their experiences of racism in their lives in general but also, crucially, within the Church. Listening to them really helped me to understand that this was not an 'out there' problem, but that racism is absolutely inside the Church as well. The Gospel for the following weekend was Jesus' parable about the field with the wheat and darnel (Matthew 13: 24-30). So I preached about the darnel of racism, and included

several experiences of racism which parishioners had shared with me over recent years from within our own parish community. I also pointed towards the videos and invited people to get back to me with their own reflections and experiences. I didn't have to wait long! Outside the church after each Mass that weekend there were groups of parishioners, especially black women, talking together. I joined their conversations and time after time the women told me how they could hardly believe what they had just heard – several said that they thought the time would never come when they would hear the problem of racism being talked about openly in the church. There was a powerful sense of relief that the time had finally come and that it seemed that the issue of racism was finally to be addressed – not just in the parish but also by the diocese and wider Church.

Some of the women said that it was an important opportunity for parishioners to be able to share their own thoughts and experiences (they had waited so long!) So, at their suggestion, we arranged a Zoom meeting for the following Sunday evening. Over 20 parishioners, again mainly black women, came together on that evening and the journey began in earnest. For me personally, as a middle-aged, middle-class white man, that evening and all the conversations which have followed have been an incredibly powerful eye-opener. I have just been so blind to this whole issue and the daily impact it has on so many people's lives, including so many of our very multicultural parish. Our Sunday evening Zoom calls became a regular event and the depth of trust and sharing, often of very painful and raw experiences, was very profound and moving.

A real picture emerged from these conversations of the significant and indeed fundamental changes needed in various areas of our parish life so that different forms of racism can be uprooted. These include:

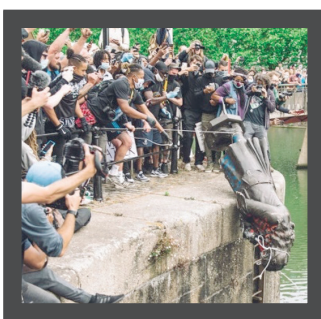
- **Leadership roles within the parish** – do they reflect the racial profile of the parish and how are these leadership roles chosen. Greater transparency in the process of choosing/appointing leaders.
- **Making sure that different racial groups are equally represented in parish ministries** (Readers, Eucharistic Ministers etc...) and that at major celebrations in the year (Christmas, Easter...) there is a mix of different racial groups taking part in these ministries (e.g. Reading at the Easter Vigil).

- **The artwork in the church** – how can we bring in a greater diversity of religious imagery so that it is not a sea of white-skinned depictions of Jesus, Mary and the saints?
- **Charity work** – we had a powerful conversation about the danger of a ‘White Saviour’ syndrome by which it is predominantly white parishioners making appeals on behalf of poor black children.
- **The Repository** – how to make sure that there is a wide variety of skin colours and racial imagery in the cards, books etc... stocked in the repository.
- **Music** – how do we make sure that we have a diversity of musical styles in our Masses which reflect our multicultural community?
- **The Sign of Peace** – how do we challenge clearly racist behaviour and attitudes manifested in our daily parish life – e.g. at the sign of peace where some black parishioners still today regularly experience rejection by white parishioners who turn away or refuse to shake hands? This was something which I found particularly shocking.

Finally, we agreed that perhaps the most powerful way to help the wider parish community learn from our conversations was through personal stories. Our initial idea was to make a series of ‘talking heads’ videos with parishioners, I guess in the style of the ‘Being Black and Catholic’ videos. One of the group has film making skills and equipment, so we set up a mini studio in the parish centre one Sunday afternoon and waited, and waited. No-one showed up! At the Zoom call that evening one person after another explained that they had had second thoughts and real concerns about the potential social media backlash of ‘putting something out there.’ So instead we agreed that people would be comfortable writing down their personal reflections/experiences for others to read, and keeping their accounts anonymous. On the pages that follow we present these reflections. Some are quite long but we feel it is important to honour every word written, especially as for many of the writers it will have been very painful to write these words. We hope that their experiences will give all who read them real food for thought.

If you would like to contact us with your own responses to what you read in this booklet, please email: [whitecity@rcdow.org.uk](mailto:whitecity@rcdow.org.uk)





## PART ONE

# EXPERIENCES OF RACISM IN THE WIDER SOCIETY

***Parishioners A and C cannot be named as both work in the criminal justice services – A in law enforcement in London and C as part of a Government Crime Agency. Here they reflect together on their experiences of racism both in their personal and professional lives and also as parents to a young primary school aged son.***

**C:** I think every black person living in the UK sooner or later in their lives will have ‘the conversation’ in which their parents/family will explain to them that simply because of the colour of their skin, some things will be more difficult for them in life, and that they will experience racism in different forms. My family originally come from Jamaica and I remember as a young girl having a conversation with my grandmother in the kitchen while we were preparing supper together. She was cooking rice and she explained to me that you always have to wash the rice before you cook it, but I replied that I was sure you didn’t need to do that. I remember how she looked me very seriously in the eye and then explained that her grandmother had been a slave, working on a rice plantation. All of the good quality rice was exported abroad to countries like England while the dirty, poor quality rice was left for the slaves who had to wash it to make sure that it was safe to eat. I also remember when she explained why our family lived in a very simple house up in the hills – because that was safer than living closer to the seashore when the slave traders would come ashore to abduct people and take them away as slaves. I have never forgotten what my grandmother taught me.

**A:** My father came to London from Ghana back in the 1980's and I remember how he later told me how in the early days he cried himself to sleep against a lamppost because he just couldn't get a job. He had come to this country as a land of opportunity but he quickly discovered how many doors were closed to him because of the colour of his skin. He learnt very quickly that he would have to work ten times harder than many others to make a life here.

**C:** That takes me forward to when we had our own child, just a few years ago. We had not been sure that we would be able to have children and even when I became pregnant I was really unsure all the way if this was going to end well. So we pushed the baby shower party with my friends as late as we could – only 7 days before our son was born and even then I told my friends to keep the receipts for their presents just in case! Then I remember how out of the blue at the party I was suddenly overcome with a deep sadness because I realised that there would be people who would make judgements about our son, even despise him just because of his race. I thought to myself – when will people stop thinking of him as cute and start seeing him as a threat – when will that line come in his life? They would never know how much we had prayed for him to be born, that he is our blessing. He is still only six but he has already had at least one experience of another child saying something very hurtful towards him because of his colour. We do everything we can to protect him from all of this, but we know that the time will come, sooner or later, when it will be our turn to have “the conversation” with him. We will need to prepare him for experiences of racism.

**A:** I think people often think of racism in terms of extreme racist acts, abusive language and assaults such as from the National Front or football hooligans but I would say that we have experienced racism much more in the little things of everyday life, such as people assuming that someone is a certain way because of a racist stereotype. For example, driving a car in London is a very different experience for black people than it is for white people. I have been stopped and searched 7 times so far.

**C:** And I have been stopped and searched 20 times so far even though I don't actually drive! Simply as a passenger in a car with other black people I have already experienced stop and search 20 times. And

another everyday experience that comes to mind is the simple act of planning a holiday abroad. I decided a few years ago to go on holiday to Italy with A's sister as a special treat. So I got the Lonely Planet guide out and started deciding where we might go. But then I discovered advice on Trip Advisor about which were the more dangerous places in Italy for black people to visit because of the high number of racist incidents which had been reported there. So, for example, it warned about Lake Garda and other more rural areas. And then when we finally went we had some really bad experiences in Rome itself. We got dressed up and went out for supper and several times we were offered money by men who obviously thought we were 'women of the night'. It happened so many times that we eventually decided not to go out at night but to stay in our hotel to eat. It was really horrible.

**A:** For me my strongest experiences of racism are in my work in law enforcement. When I am wearing my ordinary civilian clothes things can be fine, but as soon as I put the uniform on people start trying to wind me up. I remember when I was on duty recently policing the Black Lives Matter march in Whitehall and Parliament Square. As well as the BLM protesters there were also groups of nationalist supporters supposedly there to protect some of the statues like the one of Winston Churchill but many of them really just out to cause trouble. So there I am as a black police officer caught in the middle between the two groups. From one side I am getting abuse, people calling me a traitor to my face and then on the other side I am being called the 'diversity hire'. And then lots of abuse about 'you immigrants' which takes me right back to my father's experiences of arriving here from Ghana and having to work so hard just to survive. At the end of a shift like that I am so shattered, both physically and emotionally.

**C:** For me too, my work can be very challenging. I work at a Government Crime Agency which is made up of a lot of ex-Met, ex-military, ex-Special Services. The whole Black Lives Matter debate has really divided people at work. I am quite new to the team I am on and I remember taking part in a conference call earlier this year just after the pulling down of the Edward Colston statue in Bristol. The first 15 minutes or so of the call was made up of many negative comments about the protesters – there was just an assumption that this was our collective opinion. At the end of the call I spoke to the facilitator in private telling

her that as a black woman I had been very uncomfortable with the conversation of those first 15 minutes. And she replied that it had never even occurred to her that there was any black person on the call. I think the whole debate we are now having about racism has given me more confidence to challenge, to voice my disquiet in a way which once I would not have been able to do.

**A:** I have also experienced racist attitudes from colleagues, but I haven't followed it up or gone down the road of official complaints because I have known that it wouldn't go anywhere. You can become a bit defeatist after a while because you know that the system is stacked against you. We still live in a society where racism very much exists and unfortunately it is not always called out, challenged or dealt with. It is still used as a tool to oppress people both in the workplace and throughout society. Taking a stand takes courage and patience as we have seen, for example, in the civil rights movements in the US and South Africa. But with time, tolerance, understanding and love I really hope to see a change in my life-time for my family, friends, colleagues and the future.

**C:** On a more positive note, our experience since living here in the parish has been mostly positive 9 times out of 10. We are able to have good interactions with those who live here as well e.g. greeting parents and children from other cultures, races and faiths. We do find this parish to be truly welcoming and that's why we choose to come here. That's not to say that racism in different forms doesn't also exist in the Church, but our experience here has been nearly all good. This is a place where our son can hear that core Christian message that he is precious in God's eyes as he is precious on ours, and that means everything for us.

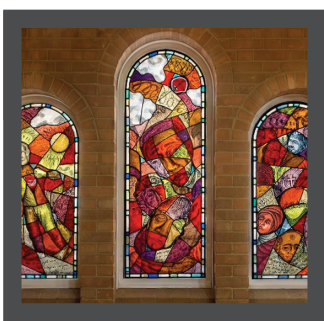
***Parishioner S shares her own experiences of racism from different stages and places in her life***

I was born and raised in the North – Leeds was my home town back in the 60's which was predominantly white. We are the generation of the swinging sixties and baby boom. 'Coloured folks' arrived in the UK to re-build the country after the war and hopefully have a better quality of life. My father came to the UK aged 19 from the beautiful Caribbean island of St Kitts. The UK was not a friendly place at the time – 'No blacks, No pakis, No dogs!' Dad protected us the best he could as he was discriminated against in many different ways. He raised and taught us not to be upset or retaliate if someone called us unpleasant names.

I didn't experience name calling until later on in life but was singled out and made to feel different on many occasions, e.g., the last to be chosen to be partnered with at the Gymnastic club even though I was one of the best gymnasts (I wanted to be the next Olga Korbut, Nellie Kim!). Those days were tough but I had a real love and passion for the sport and I was good at it. Growing up I used to be continuously asked where am I from and I would say Leeds and say it proud. Then the awkward question would come, where are your parents from. Then I have to explain. I am dual heritage with a white English mother and black father from the Caribbean. I soon learned that there was more behind the questioning as I climbed the career ladder and more was to come as I got older, the feeling that you are treated differently because of the colour of our skin was apparent. Also, my older brothers were continuously stopped and searched by the police.

As an adult I have sadly myself been the victim of racist abuse on several occasions and witnessed others also being the target of such abuse. Here is just one of the less traumatic experiences! I was offered a job teaching first aid on a ski resort in France. A fantastic opportunity so I jumped at it. In Switzerland the scenery was amazing with a blanket of pure white snow covering everything – stunning. When we arrived, we were asked to partner up to share a cabin with someone. Again, that awkward feeling of not being included and chosen to be partnered. After that difficult start all went OK until the teaching of a first aid session (CPR). One woman made derogatory, inappropriate remarks

about 'the problem of Negro Nostrils' (Negroes having wider nostrils) as she implied her hands were too small to pinch the nostrils of a black person's nose. That terminology used in front of 6 other candidates was very humiliating. Staff who were not directly involved in the training, working in the background all stopped. All eyes on me. I just stood there with grace and remembered the words of my father about not reacting. The camp director overheard what was said and asked everyone to take a break from the teaching and grab a coffee. He asked me if I was OK. He was the warmest person to me whilst I was there and he made sure I received VIP treatment moving forwards and I was invited back to teach first aid for another season. But that was an awful experience, as everyone and everything, including the surroundings, was white except me! I felt totally isolated. Up until now I have only shared this with close family and friends. There is a feeling of helplessness and humiliation that racist terminology used back then is unfortunately still used in today's society. We still have a long way to go.



## PART TWO

# EXPERIENCES OF RACISM IN THE CHURCH

*Parishioner N reflects on her experiences of racism and her responses to it, particularly in her various stages of Catholic education, as well as the wider issue of racism.*

I have been attending this parish for 30 years and although I moved homes I still come to Mass at Our Lady of Fátima for the love of the community. While I haven't experienced or witnessed racism in our parish, I have experienced it within the Catholic community. I attended Catholic schools from nursery to college, which played a pivotal role in shaping both my spiritual and academic being.

While I encountered many moments of micro aggression in primary school and college, it was during my secondary school that I was made to feel inferior. I was told by teachers that the Catholicism I practised as an Eritrean was invalid, thus it would serve me best to follow only 'Western' practices. This made me question my Eritrean Catholic identity and whether I should even attend the Eritrean Gheez Rite Mass on Sundays. I also constantly witnessed the targeted disciplinary actions by teachers towards black students, so I learnt to assimilate with my white classmates by constantly regulating my words, actions and physical appearance. It was only in my adult life I was exposed to the reality that this was the lived experience of far too many.

As I grew older, it saddened me to learn that the Catholic Church had been silent during countless other experiences worldwide of racial

abuse and injustice under its watch. Sadly, the assimilation approach I had evolved led to me distance myself from the Church because I realised I was not welcomed as myself. When I entered the church I felt like it was God's house and I would feel His warm loving embrace, but then I started looking at the images around the church and realised that I (along with anyone non-white) wasn't in them. A home which doesn't include you in the 'family photos' doesn't seem inviting and so you begin to question your part in the Catholic family. The only saints Catholics appeared to celebrate were white with blue eyes, thus implying that only white people were worthy to be canonised. I studied History at university when I learnt about that atrocities committed by the Church towards Africans, Asians, South Americans... This greatly hurt my spirituality, my faith as a Catholic and my relationship with God. I couldn't comprehend how the Catholic Church, called to be the moral compass of the world, had failed to exercise the love of Jesus towards all, held an international reach but chose not to speak and condemn injustices, and had 1.2 billion Catholics around the world of diverse ethnic backgrounds but didn't reflect this in its imagery.

**Actions:** I believe that while God is in our prayers, He is also in our actions. So while it is at our core to pray, it should also be at our core to act in the name of God. Since God is anti-racist, we should all be anti-racist too, from the Vatican to every parish. Being anti-racist means it's not enough to just not be racist but that we have to actively work towards eliminating the sin of racism from our world. That means calling out racism when we see it. And that means, as Fr Richard has said, that we have to whistle-blow in the name of love and compassion when we witness wrong-doing in our parish.

**Education:** The Church needs to conduct more research into racism in the Catholic Church, because we can't eradicate something we haven't identified. There has already been excellent work undertaken by Fr Bryan Massingale, a black American Catholic priest, academic and writer, who has spent decades working tirelessly to highlight these issues. Racism has become so embedded in the fabric of our society that some people are not aware of their participation and their privilege. We all have to take an active role in learning more and asking more, because this isn't a matter just for the few, but for the soul of all.



**Forgiveness:** Pope Francis has become a beacon for Catholics and non-Catholics regarding the importance of repentance and believing in God's mercy. As a Church we need to ask for forgiveness and do our penance, before we receive our absolution from God. As Catholics we know that admitting our wrongdoings is not a sign of weakness but strength, and I believe this will not only strengthen our community but also our relationship with God. We are on a healing journey, and sometimes healing is painful – that's why the support of the community is crucial.

***Parishioner C reflects on her often painful experiences of racism in our parish and school community.***

### **Have you experienced racism in our parish?**

Yes, I have been a member of Our Lady of Fátima church for 25 years and, sadly, I have had many hurtful experiences of racism during this time. I would like to share a few of these.

There was an incident that I witnessed and could not believe what I was hearing, which was when the stained-glass windows were installed a few years ago. For me it was something really exciting to see for the first time black faces featured in the public art work inside our church but then I heard several white parishioners openly commenting about how disgusted they were with the images in the windows, which, according to them, looked like a “bunch of refugees”. It made me wonder, how do refugees look? And isn’t the best place to find comfort if you are a refugee in the house of God?

One really horrible memory is a telephone call I received from one of the parishioners to ask why the church toilet was dirty and when did we next plan to do the cleaning. I politely advised the individual that anyone can clean the toilet.

Up until last year, I used to clean the presbytery with my children and 2 other parishioners. Several individuals on different occasions addressed me in a condescending way, saying that I should go and clean their homes too. This could have been a joke but it came from people I had never had a conversation with before and I did not take it as a joke. As a black person you hear these comments differently than if you are a white person.

Three years ago we came to church at Easter. The church was packed, we stood at the back until I realised there was a free space a few rows from where we were standing. One of the Eucharistic ministers was sitting there and had put her bag down next to her. I went to sit down and the right thing would have been for this individual to remove her bag to allow me to sit down. But she made no attempt to remove her bag, so I had to perch on the end of the bench, and then she did not shake my hand during the sign of peace. One of the parishioners

witnessed this and on her way to receive communion, she told her that as a Eucharistic minister she had to set a good example to other members of the church and how could she put her bag on the seat when others had to stand throughout the Mass? After this interaction, she removed her bag and I was able to sit down comfortably for the last few minutes of the Mass. This incident made me question whether as children of God we truly know the meaning of fellowship and if we are truly one family of God.

When I first joined the church in 1995, individuals would often just move from a seat if you went to sit next to them. This is no longer happening, I am happy to say. However, it has been replaced by equally unacceptable and demeaning discriminatory behaviour that is so subtle that it can easily be overlooked. For instance, some individuals feel it is their duty to give us orders, akin to a master/servant mentality. We are made to feel like we cannot do anything right. Some individuals think it is their God-given right to tell us what to do and how to do it. I have over-heard people in the church choir being taught how to pronounce English words and there was an occasion when we were referred to as uncivilised because we were taking pictures at the altar after a First Holy Communion celebration.

On last year's parish pilgrimage to the Holy Land, we felt that several parishioners were very uncomfortable being around us. There was an incident when one of our group went to sit down. The person she went to sit next to asked her to move yet there was a big space next to her. Before she could react, the individual got up angrily and moved away in a very upset mood. This made me wonder, a pilgrimage is supposed to be a time of self-reflection, prayer and being close to God in a holy place. I found it disturbing that someone could come to a holy place and still have this level of resentment towards someone they did not even know. I thought this would have been a time to come together as a church community, yet it was undeniable that there were individuals who cannot help themselves.

Ten years ago when my son was in our parish primary school, I went to pick him up from school. I rarely picked my children from school due to work commitments. On this occasion I was on annual leave and I overheard one of the parents tell the teacher that the school

had promised her that my son would be kept away from her daughter during play time, and while passing the school, she had seen my son playing near her daughter. On hearing this I introduced myself to the parent and asked her what the problem was. The teacher proceeded to advise me that since my child was very big and clumsy, if he played with the little children, he might end up hurting them. I was shocked and hurt. It seemed clear to me that the problem wasn't his size but the colour of his skin!

### **Why is it important to end racism in our parish and the wider community?**

It is important to end racism (overt and covert) in the parish as we are all children of God. Even Christ had to take refuge in Egypt. Those people who refer to immigrants as refugees forget that we are all one in Christ and are all children of God. Racism has to end as it is based on hate and ignorance. Remember John 4:20: 'Anyone who says, "I love God" but hates his brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen'.

### **What can we do to overcome racism in our parish and the wider community?**

1. In order to overcome racism in our parish, there should be equal representation of all ethnic groups in the decision-making concerning how the church is run.
2. There has to be respect for everyone, we are all made in the image of God. Those concerned need to reflect on their behaviour, be honest with themselves and have the self-awareness to keep their prejudices in check.
3. There have to be workshops to educate people/celebrate diversity. When something happens or is reported, a meeting has to be arranged to resolve the matter rather than trying to justify unacceptable behaviour. Most of the time, we feel that we are not taken seriously.

4. It would be good to see a greater variety of more racially diverse statues and artwork in the church.
5. There should be a fair representation of black and ethnic minority groups in positions of leadership within the church.
6. There should be rules of what is expected from all parishioners.
7. Celebrating 'Black History Month' as a parish community and through this highlight the role that black saints have played in the Church.
8. I would like the International Mass celebration to be an annual event so that we can celebrate our diversity.

***Parishioner F shares her experiences and thoughts***

**How long have you been in the parish? How have you experienced racism in our parish community?**

My family and I have been in the parish for many years. I was baptised in this church, received my First Holy Communion and celebrated the sacrament of Confirmation here.

Our parish, while part of a very rich and diverse community, occasionally fails to reflect that in the people who are called to serve in a ministry role and the leadership roles that are held within the parish.

During special occasions such as Easter and Christmas I've found the reading ministry dominated by white readers and have questioned why we often don't get to see the diversity of our wider reading group at these times. It gives the message that there are people who decide that one group of people are better than another and therefore restrict others from having the opportunity to read at Mass. If there are people who perhaps need more support or training to be better readers that's understandable – however the white readers selected were often of mixed reading ability so it was confusing to see why these decisions were being made. As a reader, I do think that it's an honour to be part of the ministry and that we should humbly and dutifully wait to be assigned to fulfil that duty. At the same time, I do think it's important to speak up or to question so as to help understand why decisions are being made and always ensure they are made for the right reasons. People may think the point of who reads at Mass is a small one but it's not – it's about representation, it's about role modelling, it's about inspiring others, it's about relatability, diversity, inclusion and equal opportunity – for all these reasons it's important to have a racial mix and cross representation.

Which leads me on to my next point. The subject of leadership. I think there's a good mix of parishioners helping out in the church. However, I do question whether we have enough visibility of black leaders within the parish. Sad to say the roles I've often seen black parishioners fill have been in positions of servitude. By that I specifically mean cleaning and tea giving – roles that are generally looked down upon or seen as of service and have in society, historically, been held by those in less

affluent circumstances. I know we're all here to serve in imitation of Christ himself – but it feels as if we as a parish are holding outdated stereotypical and racist perspectives that don't serve us and do more harm than good. It's heart-breaking to know of all the talent that exists within the parish and not see this tapped into.

I'd also make this point when it comes to the parishioners who speak out about the charitable causes within the parish such as Mary's Meals or CAFOD Fast Day. We have a number of white parishioners who speak up on behalf of the 'poor black people' who are so often depicted in such a light in the films shared. As an observer it feels like a 'White Saviour complex' played out on the sanctuary, painting a misleading or perhaps unbalanced picture of reality. The underlying message has felt like without white support leading the way, making a difference would not be possible. As a person of African heritage I also feel frustrated that a more balanced view of our continent is not given.

### **How do these experiences make you feel?**

Worthless. Unseen. Unheard. Not wanted. Not loved. Confused. Sad. Disappointed. Frustrated.

### **How do you want to feel?**

Part of a community that understands what racism is and actively takes steps to abolish it. I want us to feel empowered, like equals, loved, welcomed and respected for the diversity, uniqueness and worth we all offer as children of God.

### **Why is it important to end racism in our parish and the wider community?**

I don't think the racism we see within the parish is necessarily all intentional – I do think unconscious biases are at play but also let's not forget what racism is – prejudice combined with institutional or social power which creates a system of injustice based on skin colour. This is something I am hopeful none of us want to be part of and indeed would want to destroy it. It's so important for us to end racism so we're all treated equally, feel like we belong and are part of something that reflects and represents us all. So that we can bring our whole selves to

the parish, so we may serve each other and God with the talents he has given us for his greater glory.

### **What can we do to overcome racism in our parish and the wider community?**

Firstly, I think the main problem is that the majority of people just don't get it. I believe that to really understand someone's suffering you have to experience something of their pain. And I am not sure that many white people every truly get racism and understand what it feels to be discriminated against simply because it is not part of the daily reality of their lives. They don't experience, as we do, the horrendous racial abuse, bullying, violence, harassment, discrimination, racial profiling and much, much more – all because of the colour of our skin. The feeling also that you have no-one to turn to within your work-place or place of education to express these concerns. The need to face battle after battle from the moment you leave your home to the moment you return (sometimes you don't even have to leave the house!). Being worried about the safety of your loved ones as they go about their everyday lives. Wondering if systems we have in place, supposedly to serve and protect us all, will actually be prejudiced against us at best and kill us at worst – anything to try and tear us down for simply being black. This is a reality which we face and cannot escape in our daily lives. When we try and discuss these subjects, our perspectives are repeatedly ignored or worse even gas-lighted and we're told it's not a major issue and we should get over it. We are told not 'to play the race card'.

So when I say that people don't get it – we need to think about how we can help them to get it. I hope and pray that sharing these very honest and raw personal reflections will be one way to wake up people in the parish who have had little experience of racism and so perhaps don't think it's a problem in which they are also implicated. I hope these reflections will begin conversations in our parish which we have not been able to have before and that in these conversations there will be real listening and real learning.

I must also recognise that there have been times in recent years when we have heard in the parish from a number of different speakers from a variety of backgrounds which is always amazing and inspiring. Last



Advent at the 'Hope in White City' evening in the church, we heard from Kevin who shared his life experiences and how he has made positive changes in his life. It was inspiring to see a local black man giving that witness.

As a parish we also celebrate culture through the international days we have every year. This really helps bring us together and create a strong sense of community. So there are positive things, but there is also a lot of real deep conversion and change needed in our parish as well.

**Can you share anything else that is happening/has happened in the parish or wider community that is a good example of racial justice and equality? What would you like to see more of?**

Yes. The fact that we're having this conversation is amazing! We have a parish priest who really wants to abolish racism and I truly believe we will by the grace of God. The commitment, the voices that are speaking up, the ideas being shared are so important. I would like all parishioners of all skin colours to really understand what racism means and how it is experienced by many people and the impact it's had on so many for so many years. And in particular how that feels in a place of worship which you turn to for unconditional love and support and yet can face injustice and abuse instead.

**Can we have greater diversity and visibility in all ministries within the parish? Can we see more diversity in the materials shared in the repository?**

More cultural celebration or awareness days. In essence weaving diversity into the very fabric of the parish, in the structure, with those who hold power and the way decisions are made.

I believe we will get there and pray for the strength, wisdom and fortitude needed to abolish racism in all its forms from our parish, the Church and wider society.

***Parishioner S shares her experiences of racism here in England and in our parish***

I was brought up by my aunties, my mother's big sisters – lovely, caring and prayerful ladies who transmitted to me the gift of Faith. And I promised them to keep my Faith when I left them to come to Europe. As a young Catholic girl it was my duty to go to church every Sunday and be part of the church. But the first time I went to church here in England, during the time for the sign of peace people were pretending not to see me or spending more time with people they knew so as not to greet me. That was the first time, and the next Sunday was the same thing. When I saw this I was really wondering if I would continue to go to church, but since I had promised my aunties to keep my Faith alive, thanks be to God I didn't fail them and I have grown in my journey of Faith. I felt really sad at the beginning and it was a big challenge to my Faith.

My message is that, we should build a culture of welcoming and caring in our Catholic Church. There are so many things we know about Jesus, but how do we live them in our daily lives? A person of a different colour or different culture, when they are not welcomed can sense a feeling of racism or rejection. I am sad to say that this was my experience in this parish as well, when I first came. I was trying to help or integrate into the group, but the answer was we don't need help or any extra people, we have enough, we do things here in a certain way. We shouldn't have clans and cliques in the church. Our doors should be wide open! Thanks be to God I was accepted and welcomed in the Charismatic prayer group which has become my family. Alléluia, praise the Lord!

***Parishioner I shares her personal experiences of racism in her own and her children's lives***

I have experienced a series of racial attacks and abuse ranging from name calling to other stuff, at work, on the road and out and about. Most of them I have overlooked over the years because of my faith. An incident that pierced my heart was when a little girl in the local Catholic school told my daughter that she is too black and she can't play with her and her friends. My daughter was in tears. I was upset and mad at the girl. I concluded that it might be an action picked up from parents because I believe that 90% of such behaviour in 8 year-old children must be the result of mimicked actions. It was the same issue when she told my son that her hair is too beautiful for a black boy to touch. The issue was dealt with at school, but it did bring a sense of insecurity to us especially when we had other stuff to deal with. In some other local Catholic churches as well there are very few black Catholics and sometimes the look from even the priest makes it difficult. I have to travel a long way to a church where we feel accepted as we are. Even my children do not like to attend some other local churches, but we prefer to come to White City where we are accepted.

***Parishioner C reflects on her own experiences of racism both in Catholic education and in our parish***

I have been in this Parish for about 12 years, When I first moved into the area, I continued attending my previous parish but Our Lady of Fátima's warm and inviting community made it easy to make the switch.

Growing up I received a Catholic education from Primary school to Sixth Form and unfortunately racism was something I learned to live with from a young age. One of my earliest memories was from Primary School, when in Year 4, I remember being punished simply because I was one of 6 black girls in the class. A couple of the girls spoke after the whistle was blown at the end of break. I watched the teacher look around until she had counted all 6 of us – despite being nowhere near each other – and then punished us all for talking whether we were involved or not. During school life whilst we all mixed, socially and academically, it was natural for the black children to gravitate towards each other or maybe 'stick together'.

As I got older despite being educated in Catholic schools the prejudice against black children felt great at times. During Sixth Form the common rooms were segregated, and everyone had their place within them. As a young person this was the norm, we knew what was happening but we never questioned it or even really thought there was anything wrong. It was just the way it was; we were aware of what was happening but no one in any position of authority ever challenged it so why would we? Looking back, for me personally I did not connect Catholicism with racism. The treatment of people like me was just something that happened, in fact having our own space was almost celebrated because as young black people we felt like we had somewhere we belonged and could identify with each other.

These experiences honestly made me feel scared. Being a child whose parents and much older siblings immigrated here in the 60s I had obviously heard their stories of racism and my siblings' experiences of school life. Having been born here in the UK and being considerably younger I expected life for me to be different, and initially would dismiss things as not possibly being racist incidents especially as I was in a Catholic environment. I had a real fear of stating anything as being racist for many reasons, because I did not want to be labelled as 'using the race card'.

Within the Parish I can recall experiencing newer members of the congregation who were maybe visiting or had just moved to the area, seemingly not wanting to sit near me or my family or shake hands when making the sign of peace. This resulted in me constantly wondering how visitors or newer congregation members will feel about my presence and about me being too physically near to them. As racism has become a huge discussion point everywhere and of course in the Church, I have realised that I avoid people I don't recognise because I don't want to go through the whole awkwardness of seeing their faces when they realise I am sitting on their bench or am directly in front or behind them during the sign of peace. The sad thing for me is also that when they do shake my hand I often convince myself they only did it because they had no choice and not because they wanted to.

Our Parish and school community is widely multicultural, and the perception would be that this would be reflected in people's beliefs. The Parish has done many things to appreciate and highlight the many different cultures we have and it is important to continue that. I think we have the community to champion being pioneers to end racism within the Catholic Church. I think we have the potential to inspire other parishes to start doing something to address the topic and also offer support and guidance to them. It's important that we don't stop trying to bring these issues forward and that we never stop trying, after all, the only thing that can be achieved from doing nothing... is nothing.

***Parishioner F shares her suggestions for how to combat racism in the parish***

These are my suggestions:

- The distribution of leadership roles in the church should reflect all nationalities – those in leadership roles have been given too much power that they are using to oppress others.
- The music we play and hymns we sing need to reflect the great cultural diversity of our community. This is not the case at the moment.
- The parish should hold regular workshops on racial equality/unconscious bias.
- There should be a celebration of Black History Month in the church.
- More International Mass celebrations in which all cultures and identities are celebrated.

It is important that we make these changes. All we want to do is to worship God and any racist or unjust behaviours are a distraction and for those who are not strong in their faith, it might drive them away from the Church. Our Catholic Church has to be truly Catholic in word and action!

***Parishioner A reflects on her experience of cultural/racial prejudice at a Catholic primary school***

I am glad to hear the issue of racism is finally being addressed both in the church and the school as it has caused untold hurt and distress to many.

My son and daughter attended the local Catholic primary school back in the 1990's and it was a constant battle with no explanations as to why every time my son had his hair cut he was sent to the Headmistress's office. When he went for the initial interview as a very young boy, it was the first time he had his hair cut at the barber's, a simple short back and sides. He was accepted into the school with this hair cut as at the interview and yet every time there after when he had his hair cut by the same barber he was sent to the Headmistress's office. When I enquired why, they said his hair was too short. I again shared the above and they gave the same statement. They took no responsibility for their actions or the impact to his mental health nor the humiliation they caused him in front of his class mates.

My son could not understand what he had done wrong and would cry when he came home and every time he had his hair cut. My son had cornrows in his hair before he started school and we thought the short hair cut would be easier to manage. I questioned what his hair had to do with his academics and got no response. His sister would console her brother through this trauma and when she had her own children she swore she would not send her children to that school to be tortured and humiliated.

I am happy to hear that now, 30 years later, the school is rethinking its policy on this issue. The school and church need to address such issues as there is no excuse for such ignorance and racism.

***Parishioner J reflects on her experiences and attitude of/to racism on both the parish/school and wider society***

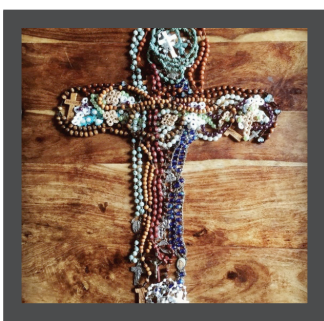
I have been in the parish since 2014. I personally have never experienced or witnessed racism directly in our parish. However, I have witnessed racism from people from my country towards people of colour and this breaks my heart every time. It was not in our parish but I have witnessed racism towards my son. I am a white woman and my son is of mixed heritage and sometimes I have seen how people's attitudes and behaviour have been different towards him because of his skin colour. This is something that will never go unnoticed by me.

I want to talk and educate myself and ensure I am loud and heard in my views about racial injustice. I want everyone to feel welcome regardless of their race. I want to take a stance and be a voice against racial injustice. I want to be united in the movement against racism. So far I have not done enough, I have been silent and it is not enough and I am aware of that.

Here in the parish we need to start somewhere and we have the great opportunity to work towards the end of racism by speaking against it openly and ensuring that all who walk through the doors of our church know that we stand strong against racism and prejudice. Educate, educate, educate! This is the starting point. As a governor of our local Catholic primary school I think we need to review policies, e.g. uniform and hair, and make those really out-dated policies more in touch with where we are now. The hair issue is really important for children and their parents. People of different cultures have different hair styles which are smart for them and we need to respect these differences and diversity.

I am pleased to report that as well as this conversation in the parish, we have also set up a working group in the primary school to look at experiences of racism within the school context and how we can actively work to oppose and expose racism of all forms within the school. This all gives me hope – I think the time has finally come to really kick racism out of our society, our Church and our schools.





## PART THREE

# VOICES OF ENCOURAGEMENT

As we continued our regular Sunday evening Zoom calls and discussions (many of the calls lasted more than 2 hours!), we also contacted Cardinal Vincent to let him know about the group and the journey we were travelling together. He wrote back with words of encouragement and something of his own reflections, as did Bishop Paul McAleenan, an Auxiliary Bishop of Westminster Diocese with a special responsibility for Justice and Peace issues. Here below are parts of their messages to the group:

### **From Cardinal Vincent Nichols, Archbishop of Westminster**

I would like to express my admiration and gratitude for what you have been doing as a group in White City parish, coming together to discuss in a very personal and perhaps painful way this question of the awful discrimination which people of colour experience. I find this very encouraging. I have myself been involved in various discussion and listening groups especially during July. Here are some of the points that have come out for me:

1. There is a real problem of language. Many people, myself included, are not confident in the terminology we should use and are unsure about what might or might not be heard as 'offensive' (is it 'black people' or 'people of colour' etc...)
2. There is as much a problem in what is called 'micro prejudice' as 'macro'. John Barnes (footballer) explained that the language and gestures that he experienced during a match were one thing. But it

was the 'micro' acts and attitudes he experienced Monday to Friday which were just as hurtful. From what Fr Richard has shared with me, I think you as parishioners are saying something similar.

3. Sharing stories is hugely important and I thank the contributors to the 'Being Black and Catholic' video for doing that. And I thank you too for the stories you are sharing. Yes, it is not easy but it is cathartic. But some would say that is not enough and if that is all that happens then it is an avoidance of the substantive issues. So you are so right to move on to action – manageable and agreed.

I look forward to hearing how your journey continues. And I wonder if you would keep in mind the possibility of your presenting what you have done to a wider diocesan audience, perhaps in a written form. Because I believe that other parishes may well want to hear about what you have done and learn from it.

### **From Bishop Paul McAleenan, Auxiliary Bishop of Westminster**

I wish firstly to endorse and thank you for your initiative and your approach to tackling the issue of racism, including in your own parish community. I am delighted that you found the 'Black and Catholic' videos useful and an aid to your conversation. I have had other positive responses to the material posted on the website.

The experience of the Black community within the Church seems to be universal. Black people have told me personal stories which are identical to what you have shared with each other, such as the refusal to greet or shake hands. It is tragic that such attitudes are not merely something from history but contemporary. It is a great eye opener to listen to anecdotal experiences. The 'Being Black and Catholic' videos were presented as a listening exercise, and it is so important that we listen to each other now, especially as so many people feel they have not been able to talk about this openly in the Church for so long. The importance of listening cannot be underestimated.

Also the involvement or lack of involvement of black congregants in certain roles is keenly noticed in other parishes as well. Perhaps we need to discern if someone's negative experience is a perception

rather than the reality, although that in itself indicates that the Black community almost expect to be confronted with a certain attitude because they have had to endure injustice for so long.

In a very unexpected way the death of George Floyd RIP and the disproportionate effect of COVID on the BAME community has given impetus and validity to those striving for racial justice and recognise inequality as an issue. As always this is often the way God works bringing something positive out of painful experiences.

Your conversation and others like it taking place across our diocese and country highlight the need the Church has to promote the racial justice agenda, to confront systemic racism and to increase representation of the Black community in our institutions and committees. This needs to happen at all levels, in places where important decisions are made and also at parish level attempting to ensure that all communities are participating in parish groups. I think it is enlightening to look at our Finance Committees, School Governors, Teachers, Head Teachers, Parish Council and ask not only are all communities represented there but are they leaders?

I wish to thank you again for what you are doing and to say I would like to continue this conversation with you.



## PART FOUR

# A VOICE OF CHALLENGE

We are very grateful to one of the Sunday evening group, Nebiat, who not only shared her own experiences but also her own studies. She introduced us to a wealth of articles, YouTube clips and books which explore different aspects of racism/racial justice within the Catholic Church. In particular, she introduced us to the writings of Fr Bryan Massingale (pictured above) – a black American Catholic priest, who for several decades has been speaking, writing and lecturing about racial justice (or the lack of it!) in the Church. We really recommend his 2018 book 'Racial Justice in the Catholic Church' (Orbis Books)

Here are a few quotes from the book to give you a flavour of Fr Massingale's voice and arguments. Firstly, about the underlying assumptions of the 'white culture' which dominates in the West:

'White' denotes a frame of reference which is unquestioned, invisible and unnamed because it is the norm by which all other cultures are measured. Much as a fish is unaware of water, so whiteness – for white folk – exists on the fringe of consciousness because it is so 'normal', obvious and 'just the way things are.'

Hence, white culture sees itself as the measure of what is real, standard, normative. White culture is a perspective that measures, but is seldom measured; studies, but is rarely studied; analyses, but is not often analysed; evaluates, but is typically not evaluated. Let me make this point clear with an example. When I was a student for the priesthood, the annual evaluation by the seminary's faculty often raised the concern about how I, as a black person, would fit

into a white parish. But never were questions asked about how a white parish would accept me, nor of how the overwhelmingly white seminary community handled living with a black man. This is because 'whiteness' studies, but is rarely studied; and evaluates, but is seldom evaluated – at least by whites themselves... (p.22)

White culture is built on a presumption of dominance and entitlement whereas a key component of black culture is the expectation of struggle. (p.24)

And here is a passage about the poverty of teaching and campaigning on racial justice within the Catholic Church's tradition. Fr Massingale writes about the situation in the US, but it clearly applies to the UK as well.

American Catholic social teaching on race suffers from a lack of passion. As a corporate body and as individuals, Catholics espouse a number of beliefs, but not all of these are held passionately. For example, no one can doubt the passion with which the Catholic Church opposes abortion. If others know anything about Catholicism, they certainly know that the Catholic Church is against abortion. This position is articulated repeatedly, forcefully and uncompromisingly. It is a position held fervently and passionately, even in the face of significant opposition and disagreement. Opposition to abortion is a major public marker of Catholic identity.

However, racial justice is not now – and never has been – a passionate matter for most American Catholics. Teaching on racism has had little impact upon the consciousness and behaviour of the vast majority of American Catholics, as it is a matter of low institutional commitment, involvement and importance. If "passion" connotes commitment, involvement and fervour, the Catholic stance on racism, in contrast, can be characterized as tepid, lukewarm and half-hearted. Standing against racism is not a core component of Catholic corporate identity. (p.77)

After the killing of George Floyd, Fr Massingale also appeared widely in the media to discuss issues of racial justice. Here are a few links for some of these really powerful interviews and articles:

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=FvMmtD04-i0>

An interview with Fr Massingale in June 2020 in which he reflects on faith and race in the days following the killing of George Floyd. Here is a short extract from that interview. Fr Massingale says:

White Americans experience life in a fundamentally different way to black Americans. Many black Americans think about race and racism every day. Many white people very rarely think about race. White people can see examples of racism as “isolated incidents” rather than a constant experience. Black people know that these are not “isolated incidents” but part of a lived everyday reality which is all around them.

A lot of white people are living in their own white bubbles. Some would say that black people can be just as racist as white people – yes, people of any colour can react negatively to others, but what people are protesting about at the moment on the streets of our country is that it’s not just about person A acting badly towards person B. No, it’s a whole system, a whole social reality that is geared in favour of white Americans and against African Americans and that’s the stumbling block.

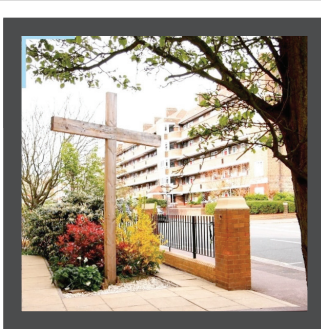
If we face the truth of what is going on, then we have to change what is going on. We have to be able to face up to miserable, uncomfortable truths if we are going to be free. We have to be ready to say uncomfortable truths if we are to move beyond the status quo. White people can often feel threatened and defensive in conversations about racism. We need to note the emotions but accept that there are times when we need to be uncomfortable. To say we are one human race is an aspiration rather than a reality and it is very difficult for us to become one as long as we insist on living in an illusion. Denying this truth can only lead to further division.

**<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=jcKbNo5Yjlw&t=2946s>**

A lecture given by Fr Massingale in October 2014 to a university audience on racial justice.

Also see/Google the really powerful article by Fr Massingale written in June 2020, immediately after the George Floyd killing – ‘The assumptions of white privilege and what we can do about it.’

Published in the National Catholic Reporter – **[www.ncronline.org](http://www.ncronline.org)**



# CONCLUSION

**Elizabeth Uwalaka**

I firmly believe that now is the time when we must act against racism. As Bishop Paul McAleenan writes in his reflection for Racial Justice Sunday 2021, racism is 'a sin and a violation of human dignity in which we are all complicit. As Catholics we need to acknowledge and confront our own failings, as individuals and as a Church'. And he adds: 'Every single one of our parishes, schools and organisations has a responsibility to actively practise anti-racism in all aspects of our mission'.

I am a 'cradle Catholic', born into the thick of racist and discriminatory practices in West London. Our family used to live in a dilapidated house in Notting Hill, where we were subjected to racist attacks from 'teddy boys' and National Front arsonists. In spite of this, we still had to live there, until council development plans for the area meant we, and the families who were renting rooms in our house, were moved. In the early 1970's we were relocated to a flat on the White City Estate – a much smaller home than was befitting for us as a large Nigerian family. These are the experiences we were told of by our late father.

My own personal experience of racism as a teacher meant that I was reminded by colleagues that my 'face doesn't fit', when it came to promotion to positions of school leadership. I found myself fighting to progress professionally, in spite of years of success and experience, only to be overlooked by younger, white, inexperienced males, to the point that the fight broke me and I was left unsupported and abandoned, forced to sign a non-disclaimer agreement by the white male leads in the school and quietly leave my post. I found an echo of

my personal experience in some of the parish testimonies gathered in this publication, which shows how unconscious biases serve to reinforce the gulf of inferred disadvantage, so people of colour – black people – do not progress. Over time, the silence cements an acceptance of things just being okay that way, just because they are.

Since childhood, I have written poetry and, more recently, songs which tell a story and stir people's thoughts on another level. The killing of George Floyd and the global pandemic have been themes which have inspired pieces of poetry and songs I have written. Whilst the actions may be cathartic, easing the pain to an extent, the agonies endured from unresolved situations do not disappear completely.

I am happy to say that the roles I play in parish leadership in church across a range of ministries, in the Diocese of Westminster through school Governance as a Chair of Governors, and in local community groups, place me in a position to be part of a driving force to effect real change and the revision of policies. This is something I am very proud to be doing.

For the best part of 40 years, our parish here in White City has celebrated its many racial majorities and minorities with international Mass celebrations under its various parish priests. The good thing is that we know what we need to do and that we want to do it together.

The anti-racism group here in our parish of Our Lady of Fátima has chosen to share this set of redacted testimonials, reflections and experiences, courageously written by many members of the group. These voices will be heard across our parish community and beyond – perhaps across the United Kingdom. While the statements are very personal, and are anonymised as a form of protection for the writers, they will not be what everyone has experienced in the parish. For many readers, these reflections will open up for them a whole landscape of painful and traumatic experience of which they had simply not been aware. We hope that these reflections lead all who read them to their own personal reflection about the reality of racism in their own lives. As we have read, it is not enough to say 'I am not a racist' – no, we can't just be passive in this, we need to actively work together to stop and uproot all forms of racism from our communities and society. It is clear



that now is an ideal time for change. As Christians, we also need to remember that prayer is an important part of this change, especially as prayer constantly gives the power to heal.

We are united through Baptism to love and serve God, and to live this mission in our own lives, in our Church and in our society. The racial issues and inequalities, identified locally, nationally and internationally in 2020 – and shared so frankly by Our Lady of Fátima parishioners – had the potential to derail this mission, as differences can breed division and discord. But the journey of sharing and healing which our parish anti-racism group has travelled together since last summer shows that God can bring light out of any darkness.

During our Sunday evening Zoom discussion, questions were given in order to help guide our church community towards a real and constructive set of actions for us to genuinely proclaim that everyone of whatever racial origin should be Welcomed, Protected, Promoted and Integrated. This is a pledge which we now need to do everything we can to put into practice. There is still a journey to travel ahead of us. Racism is a disease, a virus we might say, which takes a long time to cure.

It is historically known that religion has been used as a tool to control indigenous peoples through conquests and colonialism so, understandably, the stigmas are deep-set, but it is never too late to change.

I am certain that these reflections are not just for Racial Justice Sunday 2021, but will remain a continued reference point for the future, for us to do our best to commit to the creation of new actions against racism in the name of fairness, respect and justice in our parish community and the local communities we serve.

I finish with words of encouragement and challenge from Pope Francis:

‘This is a moment to dream big, to rethink our priorities — what we value, what we want, what we seek — and to commit to act in our daily life on what we have dreamed of. God asks us to dare to create something new.’ (New York Times 26/11/2020)

# A PRAYER FOR RACIAL JUSTICE

God of justice,  
in your wisdom you create all people in your image,  
without exception.

Through your goodness, open our eyes to see the dignity,  
beauty, and worth of every human being.

Open our minds to understand that all your children are  
brothers and sisters in the same human family.

Open our hearts to repent of racist attitudes, behaviours  
and speech which demean others.

Open our ears to hear the cries of those wounded by racial  
discrimination, and their passionate appeals for change.

Strengthen our resolve to make amends for past injustices  
and to right the wrongs of history.

And fill us with courage that we might seek to heal wounds,  
build bridges, forgive and be forgiven, and establish peace  
and equality for all in our communities.

In Jesus' name we pray.

**Amen.**



## FURTHER RESOURCES

Many of the contributors have mentioned the excellent 'Being Black and Catholic' videos (the four contributors are pictured above). These videos can be accessed via the link below:

**<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mCax8kPRJoE>**

An interview with Nebiat and Frances, two of our Sunday evening parish anti-racism group, was recorded specially for the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales (CBCEW) website for Racial Justice 2021:

**<https://www.cbcew.org.uk/home/events/racial-justice-sunday-2021/catholic-parish-discussion-on-racial-justice/>**

The CBCEW Racial Justice Sunday 2021 webpage also includes a reflection from Bishop Paul McAleenan and also a powerful reflection from the Zimbabwean Catholic Youth Ministry:

**<https://www.cbcew.org.uk/home/events/racial-justice-sunday-2021/>**

We invite you to listen to one of Elizabeth Uwalaka's songs – 'Raise Our Voices' – which she wrote and recorded following the killing of George Floyd and subsequent protests:

**<https://soundcloud.com/user-496205367/raise-our-voices-1>**

If you can recommend any other resources which you have found particularly helpful, we would love to hear from you.

Please email us at: **[whitecity@rcdow.org.uk](mailto:whitecity@rcdow.org.uk)**

# ROOTING OUT RACISM FROM OUR PARISH

Rooting out Racism from Our Parish  
Parishioners' testimonies, reflections and experiences of racism  
Our Lady of Fátima, White City

Following the killing of George Floyd on 25 May 2020 and the resulting wave of Black Lives Matter protests, we, like so many communities around the world, were finally awoken to the urgent need for us to talk together about the reality of racism both in the wider world but also crucially in our own community.

'We' here means the Catholic parish of Our Lady of Fátima in White City, West London which, despite its name, is a vibrantly multicultural community in one of London's largest social housing estates. This booklet aims to capture something of the journey travelled here in the parish since the summer of 2020.



OUR LADY  
OF FÁTIMA  
WHITE CITY