

Chapter 6: Justice and Racism

Getting Started

Introduce teens to the concept of racism by summarizing, in your own words, the material on page 119 of the Teacher's Manual, "Introducing the Chapter." Optionally, you may also have them read the chapter summary on page 155 of the Student Text; or ask them to read about racism and institutionalized racism on pages 135–137, and inclusiveness on pages 151–152 of the Student Text. Then have them read the following story.

The Story

A parish comes together to work through racial healing through an involved and effective process.

WE HAVE A DREAM

By Richard K. Taylor

Colette Oldham, a 16-year-old member of St. Vincent de Paul Church in Philadelphia, attends a private high school that is predominantly white. As a white teen from the suburbs, Oldham never had an opportunity to meet African Americans her own age, let alone become friends with them. . . .

Access the rest of the story at www.uscatholic.org/2001/02/dream0102.htm originally from *Salt of the Earth*, 1997.

Discussion

Lead the teens in a discussion of the following questions:

1. What problem did Saint Vincent de Paul parish try to overcome?
Racial tensions rooted in a history of racism against black parishioners.
What did the parish do to overcome the problem of prejudice and racism?
They started a program to systematically address the issue of racism in the parish.
2. What virtues, personal characteristics, and spiritual resources did the African American Leadership Ministry need in order to carry out their plan?
Teens offer a wide variety of valid answers; under "Lesson 1," the author explicitly names prayer, wisdom, strength, patience, dialogue, humility, commitment, responsibility, and God's help or grace.
3. In your opinion, what was the most important or interesting step the parish took toward forming a real community across racial lines?
4. Think about the chaos stage of developing community across racial lines. Why do you think this stage is necessary?
Without it, the truth is never openly addressed and real community never forms.
What did the participants need to do to survive this stage?
Commitment to the process, self-examination, sharing fears and vulnerabilities, admitting prejudices, expressing a willingness to change, and speaking the truth in love. They also held potlucks and additional meetings to get to know one another more deeply and enlisted the aid of professionals in conflict resolution and diversity training.
5. Suppose we undertook a similar effort to form real community across racial lines in our school or community. What elements would you borrow from the process described in the article? How would our effort need to be different? Do you think such an effort could be successful?

Take Action

Getting to know you

- Find a way for your teens to experience, if only briefly, a racial, religious, or ethnic subset of their community that is mostly foreign to the teens. For example, if your time is limited, arrange for someone from that minority group to speak to your teens about that people's history, culture, and experience in the wider community. Alternatively, find a video that profiles a racial, ethnic, or religious group that is unfamiliar to the teens (PBS has a wide variety of useful videos). If time permits, a field trip into an unfamiliar community—for example, a synagogue, mosque, cultural center, soup kitchen, ethnic museum, or group home—would be even better.

- In advance of the experience, point out that the article about Saint Vincent de Paul parish illustrates that overcoming racial division is not easy—in fact, it is hard work. While it may not be possible for each of us to undertake such an involved process individually, we can take the step of getting to know people who are different from us so that we have fewer misperceptions and fears about them.
- Have teens spend some time sharing their perceptions and knowledge about the ethnic, racial, or religious group they will be experiencing. Record their comments on newsprint for later reference.
- After the teens' experience, have them summarize their perceptions and knowledge about the group again. Record their answers on newsprint.
- Bring out the newsprint from before the experience and compare their "before" and "after" perceptions. Explore with the teens how their perceptions changed, and why.
- To enhance the activity, conclude by asking the teens to develop a short prayer service devoted to greater understanding between different peoples.

Additional Activities

- Have teens answer the racial stereotype questions on page 139 of the Student Text.
- Have the teens complete the "Scripture Link" activity on page 147 of the Student Text.
- Consider undertaking some of the suggestions outlined in "Do Something to Combat Racism" on page 154 of the Student Text.
- Have teens complete the worksheet "Identifying Racism" on page 210 of the Teacher's Manual.
- Conduct a debate on affirmative action or immigration as described in the "Creative Learning" section on page 126 of the Teacher's Manual.

Additional Resources

For additional books, videos, and websites related to this topic, see pages 119–121 of the Teacher's Manual.