News



Retired Chicago Auxiliary Bishop Joseph N. Perry, chair of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Ad Hoc Committee on Racism and the USCCB Subcommittee on African American Affairs, smiles during a Nov. 14, 2023, session of the USCCB's fall general assembly in Baltimore. (OSV News/Bob Roller)

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The U.S. Catholic bishops have deepened their commitment to combating racism, by making permanent a subcommittee dedicated to working for racial justice and reconciliation in society.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops announced Sept. 10 that its Ad Hoc Committee Against Racism — established in 2017 under then-USCCB president, and now retired, Cardinal Daniel DiNardo Galveston-Houston, Texas — has been made a permanent USCCB body.

The move, approved by the USCCB's administrative committee Sept. 9, will place the committee, now named the Subcommittee for the Promotion of Racial Justice and Reconciliation, under the conference's Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development.

That committee's mandate "includes Catholic social teaching on issues of domestic concern such as poverty, housing, the environment, criminal justice, and other challenges that often have a disproportionate impact on communities of color," said the USCCB in its Sept. 10 media release.

USCCB president Archbishop Timothy Broglio of the Archdiocese for the Military Services, USA, said the subcommittee "continues the important work of the temporary ad hoc committee."

The bishops had formed the racism ad hoc committee just days after the violent Aug. 11-12, 2017 "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, at which white supremacists protested the planned removal of Confederate statues there, following two city council votes. Amid clashes between rally participants and counterprotestors, James Fields drove his vehicle through a crowd of the latter, killing paralegal Heather Heyer and injuring dozens. Fields is now serving two life sentences.

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In his Sept. 10 statement, Broglio — who referenced the USCCB's 2018 pastoral letter against racism, "Open Wide Our Hearts" — said, "As we call for a genuine conversion of heart that will compel change at both individual and institutional levels, I invite all Catholics to join us as we carry forward this work to recognize and uphold the inherent dignity of every person made in the image and likeness of God."

"I speak on behalf of the bishop members, staff and consultants of the Ad Hoc Committee Against Racism in expressing gratitude for the transition of our committee to a standing subcommittee so that the important work of evangelization of the faithful and the community at large may continue in the spirit of the Gospel of Jesus Christ," said retired Auxiliary Bishop Joseph Perry of Chicago, who has been serving as chair of the committee.

With the new subcommittee set to begin work after the USCCB's November plenary assembly, members will have plenty to do.

According to a Gallup poll released Aug. 20, 64% of U.S. adults believe racism against Black people is widespread, with 83% of Black adults and 61% of white adults expressing this view.

Police interactions are seen as the "most racially inequitable" among six possible scenarios, said respondents.

At the same time, Gallup found that "68% of U.S. adults think civil rights have improved in their lifetime."

Human Rights Watch said that "racial justice remained a pressing human rights concern in the United States in 2024."

While the U.S. "ratified the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination nearly 60 years ago," the nation "has done far too little to implement its provisions," said HRW, adding that "living legacies of slavery and the slaughter and dispossession of Native peoples remain largely unaddressed."