

DIALOGUE ON FAITH AND RACE

convened by

the Office of Public Affairs of
the Bahá'ís of the United States

hosted by

the Peace and Justice Studies Program *and*
the Institute for Policy Research and Catholic Studies *at*
the Catholic University of America



BAHÁ'ÍS OF THE UNITED STATES
OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

THE
CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY
of AMERICA 

INTRODUCTION

We are grateful to be here together for the tenth gathering of this Dialogue on Faith and Race. This session is a continuation of our first seven sessions held quarterly beginning in January 2017 and is the second session of 2019.

At a time of heightened racial discord in the United States, we have convened an ongoing dialogue with leaders and representatives from national-level religious groups in Washington, D.C. in hopes of creating a space for deeper consideration of the role of the faith community in promoting racial justice and unity in this country. Because religion has historically shown an unrivaled capacity both to unite disparate peoples in a shared sense of identity and purpose and also to divide them against one another with disastrous consequences, the role of faith communities in society is critical. What is more, the faith-based voice may offer truly distinctive insights and resources for overcoming the gridlock of a national conversation on race that is increasingly defined by mistrust, entrenchment, and talking past one another.

The Dialogue on Faith and Race aims to foster open, honest, and inspired reflections on the role of the faith community in promoting a search for truth and understanding on the path of racial healing and reconciliation in the United States. It is a relatively small gathering which does not involve traditional or social media. The discussion will be on a not-for-attribution basis, which we hope will help to foster candor and understanding. It will also be an interactive and participatory, somewhat distinct from the types of events that are often held in Washington, D.C. Furthermore, we hope that this distinctive space will allow us to take a step back from the current political moment to examine the underlying dynamics of a challenge that long predates—and will no doubt outlast—the circumstances and developments of the present.

Those of us here today are a group of religiously and racially diverse participants, who bring a rich variety of differing viewpoints and experiences into the room. We hope that this will make for a robust and fruitful exchange, and will allow for the building of relationships and further discussion in the future. We also hope that this engagement will inform and enrich the work that each of us does in our own communities and in the wider society.

DISCUSSION PARAMETERS

This dialogue is a nascent endeavor. As with any new conversation, it will depend on the participants to give greater shape to the dialogue's character, dynamics, and outcomes. In that spirit, we present some points to consider as we engage in discussion.

- Our aim is to explore how we can constructively bring a distinctive faith-based voice to bear on the national discourse on race and racism. We will strive to particularly explore the unique faith-based contribution to this issue and this conversation.
- We hope to build shared understanding. Among this gathering of faiths and cultures, there is a wealth of knowledge and experience. We should strive to approach this complex and often difficult subject matter with a sincere and humble posture of learning.
- The intention is not to engage in comparing of different religious traditions and theologies, or their historical shortcomings or current challenges, but rather to search for common spiritual resources and insights on which to draw as we address the moral and practical issues before us.
- With this in mind, we can use this environment to share with heart and mind, speaking from our experience in a spirit of fellowship, love, and compassion.
- This discussion is not for attribution, meaning that participants may share what they heard in this space, but should not attribute statements to the person who made them. This format is intended to foster candor and understanding.
- This is an interactive and participatory discussion involving a number of voices; we should strive to ensure that everyone has chance to contribute and be heard.
- Finally, a note on current events: we know that people have strong feelings about the most recent presidential election cycle and developments since then, and that this is a turbulent time marked by anxieties and uncertainties about the future. Still, we hope that we can use this opportunity to take a step back from the immediacy of the political moment, particularly with respect to specific news items regarding current events and particular individuals. The issues and challenges we will be discussing long predate the current political moment and will persist for many years, so we hope to take the long view, reflect more broadly and deeply, and envision new possibilities together.