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# TEACHING HUMAN DIGNITY & ARCHDIOCESE OF LOS ANGELES

PRESENTS

RESPECT LIFE WEEK CURRICULUM:  
RACISM AS A LIFE ISSUE

## *Human Dignity and the Sin of Racism*

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## Lesson Overview

**Lesson Description:** This lesson approaches historical and contemporary racism by asking the fundamental question, “What does it mean to see human dignity?” In our own lives we must reckon with virtue and vice, moments when we live up to the ideals of our faith and moments when we sink below them. Individuals, however, do not live in a vacuum, but in communities and societies that form us in particular ways, both positively and negatively. Just as we recognize virtue and vice in our lives, we must also be willing to reckon with the realities of virtue and vice in our collective biography. In this lesson, students are invited to reflect on personal and structural realities of racism using the lens of human dignity.

### Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- ◆ build grammar for articulating human dignity.
- ◆ practice using the grammar of human dignity to describe the reality of racism.
- ◆ distinguish between personal sin and structures of sin, and describe the relationship between the two.



## Framing the Lesson and Introducing Day 1 Seeing Human Dignity

In this lesson, students have the opportunity to reflect on personal and structural racism in light of the Church's teaching on the dignity of the human person. Students are encouraged to recognize that we all have filters, ways of seeing and not seeing, that allow us to ignore or remain indifferent to the suffering and injustice that otherwise might disturb us or interrupt us from our own concerns. Our societies often form us to *not* see the dignity of others, especially those who are different from us, and often in ways we don't even realize. It's important for the teacher to emphasize that identifying and naming these ways of seeing and not seeing is not an exercise in self-condemnation. It is simply a fact of our imperfect human nature that our personal and collective (Church, nation, etc.) lives are marked by *both* virtue and sin and that we must reckon with this if we are to grow in holiness.

This lesson sequence begins with multiple readings of the parable of the Good Samaritan. The parable may be quite familiar to some students and not others. The teacher may want to begin by gathering input on what students already know about this Scripture passage. This will allow the teacher to reference students' pre-knowledge throughout the discussion of the text.

## Day 1 Activity

Students read the parable of the Good Samaritan twice. Each reading focuses on a different layer of meaning. The first reading focuses on comprehension. The second reading asks students to “read between the lines” to identify the possible motives of various characters — what prevents the robbers, the priest, and the Levite from seeing the dignity of the wounded man? What do they see instead? And what enables the Samaritan to see the man’s dignity?

Possible modification: If students are more advanced, it may be helpful for them to read the parable alongside or even interspersed with reflections from Pope Francis’ reflection on the Good Samaritan found in *Fratelli Tutti* (§§56-77).

### Text: Lk 10:30-35 (from NRSV)

Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. **31** A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. **32** So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. **33** But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. **34** He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. **35** The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’

### Read 1: Comprehension Questions

After reading the parable aloud slowly, ask students the following questions (students may reflect individually, discuss in pairs or as a class, or some combination of these):

1. Where does the action take place?
2. Who are the main characters?
3. What happens in the parable? Describe the action.
4. How do each of the passersby respond to the man? (It is important to emphasize, as the text does, that the priest, the Levite, and the Samaritan all see the man, but they do different things.)

Transition to Read 2: All of the characters have reasons for how they treat the man. Some reasons may be personal, others may be related to the expectations and norms of their society, and some are probably a combination. Each of the passers by see the same person, but the priest and the Levite clearly do not have the same response as the Samaritan. The next reading will consider each character’s motives.

### Read 2: Reflection Questions

After reading the parable aloud a second time, students reflect on and discuss the possible motives of each of the characters who encounter the man. What do they actually see when they encounter the unnamed man on the road? These are not immediately obvious, as each character’s reasoning for stopping or not stopping are not shared in the text.

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Students will need (with the teacher's guidance) to draw conclusions based on a careful reading of the text.

Allow students to grapple with these questions on their own. If they are struggling, the teacher may need to give some additional information to contextualize the parable (ex. the relationship between Samaritans and Jews; the role of priests and Levites in Jewish society, etc.)

1. What do the robbers see?
2. What does the priest see?
3. And the Levite?
4. What does the Samaritan see?

As students reflect on and discuss these questions, they may need guidance making inferences and drawing conclusions. The robbers offer a fairly straightforward example. They see an opportunity, a victim, and a payday. The motives of the priest and Levite, however, are more difficult to discern. There are all kinds of reasons not to stop. If students are struggling, it may be helpful to provide them with a contemporary analogy and ask why someone might not stop. Or it may be helpful to ask students to imagine themselves in the position of priest or Levite, returning from a long day (or many days) at the Temple along a dangerous road, and ask why they might not have stopped.

Martin Luther King, Jr. offers an example of such a reflection. In the last speech he gave before his death, "I've Been to the Mountaintop," he reflects:

"In the days of Jesus it [the road from Jericho to Jerusalem] came to be known as the 'Bloody Pass.' And you know, it's possible that the priest and the Levite looked over at that man on the ground and wondered if the robbers were still around. Or it's possible that they felt that the man on the ground was merely faking. And he was acting like he had been robbed and hurt, in order to seize them over there, lure them there for quick and easy seizure. And so the first question that the Levite asked was, 'If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?'"

The Samaritan's motives are given in the text, which says he took pity on the man. He is moved to act. But why? What does he see that the others don't? These are the questions students must grapple with.

Martin Luther King, Jr., concludes his reflection with the following observation: "But then the Good Samaritan came by. And he reversed the question: 'If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?'"

The goal is to help students appreciate that the Samaritan is one who sees dignity and to reflect on what this recognition of dignity means. Pope Francis puts it this way in *Fratelli Tutti*: "Without even knowing the injured man, he saw him as deserving of his time and attention" (§63).

It's important for students to recognize that seeing dignity is more than not being called names. It is more than an abstract sense of "respect", or the principle of "you do you." To see dignity is to make it possible for others to flourish again. The teacher might conclude this lesson by leading students to reflect on the extravagant care the Samaritan provides the man.



## Introducing Day 2

# Structural Challenges of Seeing Human Dignity

The previous day, students read the Good Samaritan parable and considered the personal responses of the robbers, the priest, the Levite, and the Samaritan to the man beaten and left for dead on the side of the road. They were challenged to understand that to see dignity is to make it possible for others to flourish again. The focus of Day 1 was a reflection on what each of the characters saw in the man on the

roadside, their motives for stopping or not stopping, and how personal choices promoted or did not promote the flourishing of man. During Day 2, students will broaden their understanding by considering the ways our culture impacts how we see one another and how society organizes itself to recognize the dignity of some while remaining blind to the dignity of others.

## Activity: Recognizing Structures and Systems: Past and Present

### **PowerPoint Lecture: Personal and Structural Sin, Historically Considered**

In order to help students begin to think about structures and systems in our contemporary society, the teacher begins by recounting the history of the treatment of Irish Catholics in the early 1900s. Teacher notes are provided in the PowerPoint for this section. The brief class discussion will conclude with a more formal definition of both personal and structural sin.

### **Group Work: Contemporary Issues of Human Dignity**

Once students have been introduced to the concepts of structural sin and have worked together as a class to unpack some of these ideas in the historical context of the treatment of Irish Catholics, they are ready to work in groups considering the role structures and systems play in different contemporary contexts. Students will read or listen to short excerpts and then work together in their groups to answer the provided questions. The questions should help students recognize how structures and systems can make it difficult to see the human dignity of individuals and promote their flourishing.



## Contemporary Issue #1: Assisted Suicide

The following is excerpted from “Disability groups claim California's assisted suicide law discriminates against them” NPR, April 27, 2023. Read the story and answer the questions.).

A group of people with disabilities is suing to upend California's assisted suicide law, saying the bias they faced trying to get health care during the pandemic shows the system is too quick to offer death as an appropriate outcome.

The lawsuit, filed against state officials and agencies, argues that California's 7-year-old law that allows terminally ill people to choose to get lethal drugs to end their life — the End of Life Option Act — puts disabled people at greater risk of being coerced into seeking assisted suicide.

The lawsuit says people with disabilities often face a denial of the medical care they need and, as a result, may be quick to seek assisted suicide as an option.

Ingrid Tischer, who is one of the plaintiffs in the lawsuit, says she experienced that.

Tischer, who lives with a form of muscular dystrophy, has been around doctors her entire life. In 2021, in the middle of the pandemic, Tischer was hospitalized for pneumonia. When she asked for therapy to regain her strength, the doctor said she didn't qualify.

"He kind of looked at me and said, 'Well, I mean, look at you, there's nothing we can do for you. And you've known this is coming for a long time. So why are you surprised?'" Tischer says.

Tischer, who was 55 then, says she was devastated. She thought she was facing the end of her life. "For me, it was a very solid gut punch," she says.

If a doctor had told her she should apply for California's assisted suicide law, she says she might well have said yes.

No doctor ever suggested that to Tischer. The lawsuit doesn't mention any cases of that kind of coercion.

Tischer, instead, got another doctor, who gave her a different diagnosis. She left the hospital and recovered.

Tischer and the other plaintiffs raise fears of a subtle kind of discrimination — what Michael Bien, the lawyer who filed the challenge, calls "steering." Bien says people who have difficulty getting the care they need may feel compelled, instead, to see assisted suicide as their best option.

The End of Life Option Act requires people to make a clear choice to end their lives. But, Bien argues, the choice of people with disabilities gets clouded by whether they get the medical care and support that helps them live.

"Is it really a choice," Bien asks, "when society makes it very difficult to access home health care support?"

For many people in California with disabilities, there are long waits — often months long — to get a direct support professional to provide the in-home support that allows them to live independently. California is known to have a generous program. But a report by the state auditor in 2021 found that even when people get into the In-Home Supportive Services Program, some 40,000 a month don't get all the care they require. For someone with quadriplegia, getting an attendant to help them get in and out of bed may determine whether they can go to school or work, and stay out of a nursing home.

Lonnie VanHook, another individual plaintiff in the lawsuit, has quadriplegia and needs round-the-clock assistance, including people who can move him in his bed or wheelchair to prevent him from getting painful bedsores. But when he couldn't get enough hours of care, he became depressed and considered assisted suicide.

Jules Steimnitz, a rehabilitation doctor, calls this "attendant deficiency diagnosis, that you can't get attendants." Steimnitz, who first treated VanHook more than three decades ago, kept in touch and helped talk him through that desperation. "This is his main problem. This is what's causing his depression. He doesn't need suicide. He needs attendants."

"Over the years, it has been a continuous uphill battle" to get that assistance, VanHook told NPR. "It's a mental drain. It's debilitating."

The lawsuit says VanHook, as a Black man with little income, is at an increased risk because of racial disparities in health care.

The limits of health care systems became more clear early in the pandemic. When health care providers feared possible shortages of ventilators and other treatments, states issued guidelines — called "crisis standards of care" — that sometimes gave doctors and hospitals permission to put disabled and elderly people at the back of the line if care got scarce.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services stepped in and stopped it.

Among several states that agreed to rewrite their triage guidelines: Tennessee revised rules that let care be denied to people who already use a ventilator, those with advanced neuromuscular conditions like ALS, and some people with dementia and traumatic brain injuries. Officials in Pennsylvania changed standards that told hospitals it was OK to cut off care to some people with chronic lung disease or cancer. Alabama rewrote rules that allowed the denial of ventilators to people with "moderate to severe dementia."

People who work with California's assisted suicide law acknowledge that disabled people often struggle to get adequate medical care, but they say the state's end-of-life law is set up to avoid precisely that kind of discrimination.

"Having a disability would not qualify someone for aid-in-dying," says Nathan Fairman, a psychiatrist and palliative care doctor who oversees cases at UC Davis Health in Sacramento. "Someone who's disabled and has end-stage cancer would potentially qualify. And they would have to step through all of the safeguards that are set out in the law."

Two doctors, he notes, need to confirm that someone is terminally ill and mentally competent to choose to die. Health care systems like his, Fairman says, add psychological and other evaluations that go beyond the state law to further protect against abuse.

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Today, Ingrid Tischer is working again, helping nonprofits do fundraising. She looks back at the time two years ago when she was hospitalized, having difficulty breathing and ready to give up. She says she was driven then by fear — of dying or moving to a nursing home and of a "mass of misplaced guilt" that she'd become a burden to her husband. "I just wanted out," she says. "I don't think I was thinking very clearly."

But Tischer had resources that turned her around — that supportive spouse, a solid family income, a house, reliable health insurance and her long personal experience navigating the medical system.

"There are many people in this world who are a lot more vulnerable than I," she says, and — as a result — more likely, she believes, to seek assisted suicide.

[Link to full story](#)

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1. What genetic disorder does Tischer have?
2. What is the End of Life Option Act?
3. Describe the interaction between Tischer and her doctor when she was hospitalized in 2021 with pneumonia.
4. Did Tischer's doctor recognize and uphold her human dignity in this situation? How or how not?
5. Why is a lawsuit being filed against state officials and agencies by Tischer and others?
6. What kind of support is missing for those with disabilities?
7. What types of structures or systems might be put in place to better help uphold the dignity of those suffering from various disabilities to be recognized?
8. How might Tischer's interaction with the first doctor been different if these structures and systems were in place?

## Contemporary Issue #2: Climate Change and Migration

The following is excerpted from “Central American Farmers Head to the U.S., Fleeing Climate Change,” *New York Times*, April 13, 2019. Read the story and answer the questions.

CORQUÍN, Honduras — The farmer stood in his patch of forlorn coffee plants, their leaves sick and wilted, the next harvest in doubt.

Last year, two of his brothers and a sister, desperate to find a better way to survive, abandoned their small coffee farms in this mountainous part of Honduras and migrated north, eventually sneaking into the United States.

Then in February, the farmer’s 16-year-old son also headed north, ignoring the family’s pleas to stay.

The challenges of agricultural life in Honduras have always been mighty, from poverty and a neglectful government to the swings of international commodity prices.

But farmers, agricultural scientists and industry officials say a new threat has been ruining harvests, upending lives and adding to the surge of families migrating to the United States: climate change.

And their worries are increasingly shared by climate scientists as well.

Gradually rising temperatures, more extreme weather events and increasingly unpredictable patterns — like rain not falling when it should, or pouring when it shouldn’t — have disrupted growing cycles and promoted the relentless spread of pests.

The obstacles have cut crop production or wiped out entire harvests, leaving already poor families destitute.

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Climate change is rarely the sole factor in the decision to migrate. Violence and poverty are prime drivers, but climate change can be a tipping point, farmers and experts say.

“Small farmers are already living in poverty; they’re already at the threshold of not being able to survive,” Mr. Castellanos said. “So any changes in the situation may push them to have enough incentives to leave.”

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José Edgardo Vicen, 37, one of Mr. Vicen’s brothers, had weighed migrating for years. He had worked in the coffee fields since he was a boy, continuing the family tradition. In this part of Honduras, coffee is a major crop, with an increasing amount bound for North America, Europe and Asia.

But after a rust outbreak and other pressures in recent years, including plunging commodity prices, the younger Mr. Vicen said he could no longer earn enough from his harvest to cover production costs.

He headed north with his 14-year-old son last August, crossed the border illegally and settled in Texas. A brother and a sister, driven by similar circumstances, left Honduras soon afterward and also sneaked into the United States.

“For the small producer, I promise you, there’s no way to get ahead,” said Mr. Vicen, who now works in construction and sends remittances home to support his wife and daughter.

When he was younger, harvest time “was like a party,” he recalled. Now, “there are only losses, no profits.”

Fifteen producers from the Vicens’ coffee cooperative — more than 10 percent of its members — have migrated to the United States in the past year, said Ms. Esperanza López, the general manager of the cooperative. They have joined thousands of others from villages in Honduras’s western highlands.

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After large caravans of migrants arrived last fall in Tijuana, Mexico, a United Nations survey found that 72 percent of those surveyed were from Honduras — and 28 percent of the respondents had worked in the agricultural sector.

[Link to full story](#)

1. Where does José Edgardo Vicen live now and what does he do for a living?
2. Where is José Edgardo Vicen from and what did he used to do for a living?
3. Why did José Edgardo Vicen illegally enter Texas?
4. Where does José Edgardo Vicen's wife and daughter live?
5. What are three factors described in the text that might cause people to illegally migrate to the United States?
6. Explain how climate change can motivate people to migrate to the United States?
7. What are two things that contribute to climate change?
8. Do you think José Edgardo Vicen wanted to migrate to the United States? Why or why not?
9. When you make choices that impact climate change, how often do you think about those farmers in South America?

## Contemporary Issue #3: Migration and the Border

Read the following excerpts from different news sources and answer the corresponding questions. Excerpted from “Title 42 Is Gone, but Not the Conditions Driving Migrants to the U.S.,” *The New York Times*, May 14, 2023.

Beyond U.S. borders, political instability, gang violence and climate change will continue to spur emigration.

Much of the developing world, from Africa and Asia to South America and the Caribbean, is still reeling from economic ruin wrought by Covid-19 and exacerbated by the war in Ukraine.

“Everyone is looking at the arrivals at the border, but the root of the problem lies in push factors inside countries of origin that are going to persist,” said Justin Gest, a political scientist at George Mason University who studies immigration. “When crises occur, they generate northbound flows,” he said.

In recent years, there has been a growing exodus from troubled countries in the Western Hemisphere, such as Venezuela, Cuba and Haiti. Unlike Europe, where multiple countries are potential destinations for migrants, in the Western Hemisphere, almost all roads lead to one country, the United States.

And, beyond the factors pushing migrants out of their home countries, the magnet drawing people to the United States is the labor market. Unemployment stands at its lowest level in decades, yet there are millions of unfilled jobs.

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[Link to full story](#)

Excerpt from “Catholic groups condemn Texas’ ‘inhumane’ treatment of migrants alleged in report” *Angelus*, July 21, 2023.

Migrant advocates condemned the alleged inhumane treatment of migrants seeking to cross the border into Texas, which according to a report, included an allegation that the state directed its personnel to withhold water from them despite extreme heat.

The Houston Chronicle reported July 17 it obtained a July 3 email this month showing a trooper-medic sharing concerns with a supervisor in the Texas Department of Public Safety over the treatment of migrants at the border in Eagle Pass, Texas. The email suggested that troopers involved in Texas Republican Gov. Greg Abbott's border security initiative, Operation Lone Star, have been given a directive not to give migrants water.

"Due to the extreme heat, the order to not give people water needs to be immediately reversed as well," the trooper wrote, adding, "I believe we have stepped over a line into the inhumane."

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"Just recently, the bishop had to administer last rites to a teenager who collapsed in the desert and died," he said. "This is what happens with brutal policies of deterrence at the border."

The July 3 email suggested state officials have set "traps" of razor wire-wrapped barrels in parts of the river with high water and low visibility, according to the Chronicle's report. The trooper argued in the email that the wire has

increased the risk of drownings by forcing migrants into deeper, more dangerous, parts of the river.

The email said a pregnant woman having a miscarriage was found late last month caught in the wire, describing her as doubled over in pain. A father was found carrying his teenage son after he broke his leg navigating around the wire, while a 4-year-old girl passed out from heat exhaustion after she tried to go through it but was pushed back by members of the Texas National Guard.

CLINIC (the Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc.) condemned the allegations in the report, saying they "represent the very worst of the U.S. immigration system, which dehumanizes the vulnerable and desperate people caught within it."

"People of faith and conscience cannot look away from the fact that these actions are done by government employees in our name," Anna Gallagher, CLINIC executive director, said in a July 20 statement to OSV News. "Either we believe that all people bear untouchable dignity, or we don't. Permitting this despicable behavior denies that truth and rejects the deepest principles of our Catholic faith and our nation's values."

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[Link to full story](#)

1. Give at least three reasons why you think someone might want to migrate to the United States.
2. Why might the United States want to limit the number of people migrating into the country?
3. According to the text, what did the state of Texas tell personnel to withhold from migrants seeking to cross the border?
4. What are the "traps" the text mentions? What effects did these "traps" have on migrants?
5. Do these policies recognize the human dignity of the migrants? Explain.

### Excerpted from "When migrant buses arrive, LA groups rush to help," *Angelus*, July 18, 2023.

Nearly two weeks after seeing charter flights with migrants flown from Florida and dropped off in California's capital city, Sacramento, in early June, the members of Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA) in Los Angeles received word that a bus full of asylum-seekers had left Texas and was heading their way.

Two weeks later, another bus full of migrants arrived. Two weeks after that, on July 13, it happened again.

In each case, despite the anxiety, the media attention, and

the politics, the group was prepared.

That's because CHIRLA — along with the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, Central American Resource Center (CARECEN), Immigrant Defenders Law Center, Esperanza Immigrant Rights Project, Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice (CLUE), city and county officials — had been meeting since 2022 to prepare for these exact scenarios.

"We were all in it together," said Jorge-Mario Cabrera, CHIRLA's director of Communications, about the group

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formed as the L.A. Welcomes Collective. “The city of Los Angeles, Angelenos, were in essence doing what a good Samaritan would do. And that is assisting the downtrodden and providing safe haven for those who needed it the most. And that’s just gold because you don’t get that type of collaboration on many things.”

In each instance, about 30-40 migrants — including women and young children — were sent to Los Angeles’ Union Station and then taken to nearby St. Anthony Croatian

Catholic Church, where they could eat, change clothes, and rest. They received legal resources and assistance about their impending court appointments before being picked up by local sponsors, family, or friends.

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[Link to full story](#)

6. How long had groups been meeting to prepare for and create structures for the potential arrival of migrants to their community?
7. How was the human dignity of the migrants that arrived in Los Angeles upheld



## Contemporary Issue #4: Vulnerable Pregnant Women

The following is excerpted from “Why People Are Bigger than Politics,” TEDx Talks, March 15, 2023.

Watch the video linked below from the beginning to 3:22 and 5:14 - 6:04. Then answer the questions. Listen to the linked video below from the beginning to 3:22 and 5:14 - 6:04.

[Link to full story](#)

1. Who is Destiny Herndon-De La Rosa?
2. How old was Destiny when she became pregnant?
3. What privileges does Destiny say she had as a young single mother?
4. Destiny talks about a young mom with a two-year old. Without family support what struggles did this young mother face when she found out she was pregnant?
5. If this young mother was working full-time why was she still homeless?
6. What do you think the young mother might have done if her daughter could not come to work with her?
7. What kinds of structures and systems might better uphold the human dignity of the young mother?
8. How might upholding the human dignity of any mother help the mother uphold the dignity of her unborn child?

## Class Discussion

After students have been able to unpack some current issues within their groups (i.e., immigration, assisted suicide, and abortion), they should be given a chance to present and learn about the other issues. This will broaden their perspective of the various ways in which structures and systems can blind us to the human dignity of others. Ask the groups to share the following with the class:

1. Briefly describe the situation of the person in your article/video.
2. What structures or systems make it harder to uphold that person's human dignity?
3. Then ask the whole class, what structures or systems might make it easier to uphold the human dignity of a person in a similar situation?

### Takeaways

It is important for students to begin seeing that individual choices are made within a web of structures and systems. These structures can help individuals see and uphold the human dignity of others, OR they can cause us to be blind to another person completely. Finally, the teacher can return to the PowerPoint and remind students that structures and systems are created and continued because of individual choices. It is not easy to dismantle current structures and systems that dehumanize others but it is possible to do so and in the process to build a society that promotes the human dignity of each and every person.



## Framing Day 3

### Reflections of a Southern Student on Racism

On day 1, students had the opportunity to reflect on what it means to see human dignity. On day 2, they examined how structures and systems shape our ability to see the dignity of other persons. In light of their reflections on human dignity, students now directly engage with the reality of racism, reading the testimony of Civil Rights leader, Diane Nash, about the freedom rides and sit-ins in the 1950s and 1960s. Students are asked to identify examples of personal and structural blindness to the dignity of Black men and women and encouraged to reflect on the relationship between the two.

Warning: In the context of describing her experience in the South, Nash recounts the use of a racial slur. The use of such derogatory slurs is a matter of the historical record. The teacher will have to make the judgment whether students will be able to engage this reality. If the teacher decides to include the portion of the text with the slur, he/she will want to prepare students for the encounter.

The following is an excerpt from “Inside the Sit-ins and Freedom Rides: Testimony from a Southern Student” by Diane Nash in *The New Negro*, edited by Mathew H. Ahmann. Fides Publishers: Notre Dame, IN, 1961.

**DIANE NASH was raised in Chicago and went to the South for the first time two years ago [1959], when she enrolled in Fisk University. Early in 1961 she became involved in the Freedom Rides and interrupted her education to work full-time for a year with the student sit-in and freedom-ride movement. At present she is Coordinating Secretary for the Nashville Non-Violent Movement.**

I see no alternative but that this text must be a personal interpretation of my own experience within the region known as "Dixie."

My participation in the movement began in February, 1960, with the lunch counter "sit-ins." I was then a student at Fisk University, but several months ago I interrupted my schoolwork for a year in order to work full time with the movement. My occupation at present is coordinating secretary for the Nashville Nonviolent Movement.

I should not wish to infer that I speak for the southern movement, for I think that there is no single person who can do that. Although many of the following statements can be generalized for the entire movement in the South, I shall refer largely to Nashville, Tennessee, for that is where I have worked.

I submit, then, that the nonviolent movement in that city:

is based upon and motivated by love;

attempts to serve God and mankind;

strives toward what we call the beloved community.

This is religion. This is applied religion. I think it has worked for me and I think it has worked for you and I think it is the work of our Church.

One fact occurs to me. This is that the problems of the world lie within men and women; yes, within you, me, and the people with whom we come in contact daily. Further, the problems lie not so much in our action as in our inaction.

...

I believe that when men come to believe in their own dignity and in the worth of their own freedom, and when they can acknowledge the God and the dignity that is within every man, then Berlin and Jackson will not be problems. After I had been arrested from a picket line about three weeks ago, I jotted down the following note, with this meeting in mind:

If the policeman had acknowledged the God within each of the students with whom I was arrested last night, would he have put us in jail? Or would he have gone into the store we were picketing and tried to persuade the manager to hire Negroes and to treat all people fairly? If one acknowledges the God within men, would anyone ask for a "cooling off period," or plead for gradualism, or would they realize that white and Negro Americans are committing sin every day that they hate each other and every day that they allow an evil system to exist without doing all they can to rectify it as soon as they can?

Segregation reaches into every aspect of life to oppress the Negro and to rob him of his dignity in the South. The very fact that he is forced to be separated obviously implies his inferiority. Therefore the phrase "separate but equal" denies itself. The things non-black Americans take for granted, such as a movie and dinner date for college students, or a coffee break downtown, are usually denied the black American in the South. Sometimes he may obtain these services if he wishes to compromise his dignity. He might, for example, attend a downtown movie if he would enter through the alley entrance and climb to the balcony to be seated.

But these are not the most important things. The purpose of the movement and of the sit-ins and the Freedom

Rides and any other such actions, as I see it, is to bring about a climate in which all men are respected as men, in which there is appreciation of the dignity of man and in which each individual is free to grow and produce to his fullest capacity. We of the movement often refer to this goal as the concept of the redeemed or the "beloved" community.

In September, 1959, I came to Nashville as a student at Fisk University. This was the first time that I had been as far south as Tennessee; therefore, it was the first time that I had encountered the blatant segregation that exists in the South. I came then to see the community in sin. Seeing signs designating "white" or "colored" being told, "We don't serve niggers in here," and, as happened in one restaurant, being looked in the eye and told, "Go around to the back door where you belong," had a tremendous psychological impact on me. To begin with, I didn't agree with the premise that I was inferior, and I had a difficult time complying with it. Also I felt stifled and boxed in since so many areas of livin were restricted. The Negro in the South is told constantly, "You can't sit here." "You can't work there." "You can't live here, or send your children to school there." "You can't use this park, or that swimming pool," and on and on and on. Restrictions extend into housing, schools, jobs (Negroes, who provide a built-in lower economic class, are employed in the most menial capacities and are paid the lowest wages). Segregation encompasses city parks, swimming pools and recreational facilities, lunch counters, restaurants, movies, drive-in movies, drive-in restaurants, restrooms, water fountains, bus terminals, train stations, hotels, motels, auditoriums (Negro college students usually attend the most important formal dances of the year in the school gymnasium), amusement parks, legitimate theatres, bowling alleys, skating rinks - all of these areas are segregated. Oppression extends to every area of life.

In the deeper South, Negroes are denied use of public libraries, they are denied entrance even to certain department stores, are discriminated against on city buses, in taxicabs, and in voting. Failure to comply with these oppressions results in beatings, in house-burnings and

bombings, and economic reprisals, as we saw in Fayette County, Tennessee, and in Montgomery in the case of the Freedom Riders. Significant, however, are the many countless incidents that the public never even hears about.

...

Segregation has its destructive effect upon the segregator also. The most outstanding of these effects perhaps is fear. I can't forget how openly this fear was displayed in Nashville on the very first day that students there sat-in. Here were Negro students, quiet, in good discipline, who were consciously attempting to show no ill will, even to the point of making sure that they had pleasant and calm facial expressions. The demonstrators did nothing more than sit on the stools at the lunch counter. Yet, from the reaction of the white employees of the variety stores and from the onlookers, some dreadful monster might just as well have been about to devour them all. Waitresses dropped things. Store managers and personnel perspired. Several cashiers were led off in tears. ... So segregation engenders fear in the segregator, especially needless fear of what will happen if integration comes; in short, fear of the unknown. Then Jim Crow fosters ignorance. The white person is denied the educational opportunities of exchange with people of a race other than his own. Bias makes for the hatred which we've all seen stamped upon the faces of whites in newspaper pictures of the mob.

...

Police departments can also sink to a sorry state. Bias lets the police turn their heads and not see the attacks made against demonstrators. In Nashville, police permissiveness has served to make the hoodlum element more and more bold, with incidents of real seriousness resulting, even a real tragedy, as was the case in the bombing of a Negro attorney's home last year during the sit-ins.

...

Segregation, moreover, fosters dishonesty between the races. It makes people lie to each other. It allows white

merchants to accept the customers' money, but to give them unequal service, as at the Greyhound and Trailway Bus Lines, where all customers pay the same fares but some are not free to use all the facilities in the terminals and at restaurants where rest stops are made. Fares are equal, but service is not. The system forces the Negro maid to tell her employer that every thing is all right and that she's satisfied, but when she is among her friends she talks about the injustice of the system.

...

I can remember Nashville in this stage of sin when I first came there in September, 1959, a few months before the sit-in movement was to begin. As a new student at Fisk University that September, I was completely unaware that over the next few months I would really experience segregation; that I would see raw hatred; that I would see my friends beaten; that I would be a convict several times and, as is the case at the moment, that there would be a warrant out for my arrest in Jackson, Mississippi. Expecting my life to pursue a rather quiet course, I was also unaware that I would begin to feel part of a group of people suddenly proud to be called "black." ...

The revolution in the Negro student's concept of the name of his own race is really important only as it is indicative of change in the Negro's concept of himself and of his race.

Through the unity and purposefulness of the experience of the Nashville Negro, there was born a new awareness of himself as an individual.

There was also born, on the part of whites, a new understanding and awareness of the Negro as a person to be considered and respected.

I think an outstanding example of this latter change was revealed by the negotiations which took place between Negro students and leaders and the white merchants who were the managers of downtown lunch counters. It became apparent to me during the negotiations that the white southerner was not in the habit of taking the

Negro seriously. During the initial stages, the attitude of the merchants was one of sort of patting us on the head and saying, "Yes, we've listened to your story and maybe segregation is bad, but you can't have integration now, because it'll ruin our business." And they closed the matter there. However, after the sit-ins continued and after the moral weight of the community was felt, through our 98 percent effective boycott; after a number of talks in which the merchants got to know us as people and saw our problem (and we saw theirs), there was indeed a beautiful type of awareness born, to the extent that one of the merchants, who incidentally was a white southerner, made what I think was a real concession: "Well, it was simply that we didn't see they were right and we were wrong."

...

I would like to say also that the students and the adults who have taken part in this movement and who are doing so now are dead serious. We're ready to give our lives. It is a slight miracle, I think, that in the almost two years since February of 1960 there has not been a fatality. But we have come amazingly close to it several times. Let me mention the case of William Barbee who was on the Freedom Ride when it arrived at Montgomery and met with mob violence. Barbee had gone on a few hours ahead to arrange for cars and other necessities before the riders arrived. When they did get there and were attacked, he was busy trying to get them into taxi cabs or ambulances and take them where they could receive medical attention. Just as about all of them had gotten into cabs, the mob attacked him.

At that moment a Negro man was passing by. He was on his way to pay a bill. It was just a regular day in his life until he saw one of the mobsters with his foot upon William Barbee's neck. Mr. Nichols, who had lived in the South all his life, said that he started to go ahead about his business. But, he said, he knew that he would never be able to live with his conscience again if that man killed Barbee. So he turned around and pulled the man off. Well, Mr. Nichols landed in the hospital next to Barbee.

...

There are roles for all of us to play. First, of course, is the role of the participant, who really pickets or sits in. Then there is the role of the observer. I don't know if you have heard, but a number of whites are being utilized effectively as observers. In the integration of lunch counters and movie theaters, many of the older church women who have been sympathetic with the cause for a long time, but who haven't had an opportunity to speak out, have helped by doing such things as sitting next to Negroes at the lunch counters or at movies and thus creating an appearance of normalcy. These people have become quite enthusiastic about their new role. There have been several cases of - well, real "bigness." One lady is known to have drunk countless cups of coffee and gained ten pounds in sitting at lunch counters all day for several days in a row and looking normal. Several have been known to see the same picture over and over again. Also looking normal. For those in the North, as I mentioned, there are local problems, and we also need groups that we can call upon to support the southern movement.

Finally, this movement has been called one of passive resistance. But it is not that at all. Rather it might be

called one of active insistence. In regard to our own roles and the role of our Church, I think we need to understand that this is a question of real love of man and love of God. Is there such a thing as moderate love of God or moderate disdain for sin? I think we need radical good to combat radical evil. ... In a word, it is a question of dignity.



## Content Comprehension

There is significant leeway in how the teacher wishes to ensure a basic level of content comprehension before moving to analysis and application. The teacher may choose to assign some of the reading and accompanying reading guide questions for homework, have students take a reading quiz, or read the text in class (either in small groups or aloud) and have students answer the reading guide questions during class time.

Some possible reading comprehension guide questions include:

- Who is Diane Nash and what do you think her goal in writing the text is?
- What does Nash list as the three pillars of the nonviolent movement?
- What does Nash identify as the root of the evil of racism? What does she think is needed to overcome it?
- Describe the extent of segregation in the South.
- How does Nash describe the reaction of white police officers and other segregationists to Black people? What does Nash believe motivates them?
- What are the destructive effects of segregation? On the segregated? On the segregator?
- According to Nash, what surprised her when she moved from Chicago to Nashville?
- What are at least three ways Black people in the South are discriminated against?
- Why were the Freedom Rides and sit-ins successful?
- What are two or three statements or ideas from Nash's piece that struck you and why?

### Analysis Questions for Class Discussion

After students have read through the text at least once and the teacher has ensured adequate comprehension, they should move on to analysis questions. Students may be broken up into pairs or small groups for discussion or the entire class may discuss together. The goal is to think with Nash about some of the more subtle points in the text, ones that may not be explicitly stated but are certainly implied. Some suggestions include:

- Dignity is a word used many times throughout the text. How do you think Diane Nash would define dignity (she doesn't offer a definition in the text but does provide many clues)?
- Give one example of internalized racism, two examples of interpersonal racism from the text, and three examples of structural sin and explain your choices.
- Think about how Nash describes the reaction of white police officers and other segregationists to Black people and what motivates them. Now, recall our reflection on the parable of the Good Samaritan. How would you say the police officers/segregationists see or do not see the dignity of Black people?



## TEACHING HUMAN DIGNITY

- How does a culture of racism (laws, customs, and traditions), as described by Nash, affect Black and white people?
- Can you identify additional parallels to the Parable of the Good Samaritan in the text?





## Framing Day 4

### Case Study Discussion Maternal Mortality

Students have spent several days reflecting on what it means to see the dignity of another and exploring the various ways social realities or structures can shape the ways we see or don't see the dignity of others and the harm this causes specific peoples and communities. They then applied these insights in light of the reality of historical racism. Students are now asked to apply their learning to a contemporary issue: maternal mortality.

Through careful reading and discussion, students are asked to identify key challenges, ask questions about how racism contributes to these challenges, and evaluate possible courses of action.

# Activity: Discussion of Maternal Mortality

## Discussion Preparation

Depending on student readiness, the teacher may give the entire class a single article or video (recommended for younger students) or may give individual students/or groups different articles/videos, which they'll report on to classmates. Suggested articles are included below. Along with assigning the article(s), each student should be given an article organizer to complete based on their assigned article (see page 29-30).

## Maternal Mortality Articles

*Teacher Note: The discussion of maternal mortality is often speciously linked with abortion access. In reality, these are two distinct issues. We recommend that teachers consult [Maternal Mortality in the United States: A Primer](#) from the Commonwealth Fund and "[Making Pregnancy Safer: The solution is not more abortion](#)" from *Commonweal Magazine* in order to prepare to engage possible questions from students regarding a perceived connection.*

*The following articles/video have been reviewed for inaccurate links between abortion access and maternal health. The articles themselves do not contain material that should prevent them from being used in a classroom setting.*

*Some of the organizations mentioned do support abortion access; such views and activities, however, are not mentioned or even alluded to in these articles or videos. The focus is entirely on personal experiences of mothers and/or the causes of maternal mortality. The Office of Life, Justice, and Peace in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles and the Office of Life and Human Dignity in the McGrath Institute of Church Life are fully and unreservedly committed to Church teaching regarding the life and dignity of the human person.*

*The teacher will want to review the articles and select only those that best serve students' needs, interests, and abilities. Some of the articles include a narrative component along with analysis of causes and possible solutions, while others focus more exclusively on causes and solutions.*

["Making Pregnancy Safer: Inside the Effort to Reduce Maternal Mortality,"](#) Duke University Medical School, August 23, 2023. (~4 pages including photographs)

["U.S. maternal deaths more than doubled over two decades in unequal proportions for race, geography,"](#) *Washington Times*, July 3, 2023 (~6 pages including ads)

["Maternity's Most Dangerous Time: After New Mothers Come Home,"](#) *New York Times*, May 28, 2023. (~4 pages including photographs)

["Maternal deaths surged during the pandemic. How California is fighting that trend,"](#) *Los Angeles Times*, March 19, 2023. (~5 pages including photographs)

["Implicit bias, lack of access and health disparities fueling maternal mortality: Dr. Fisher,"](#) *Fox News*, March 18, 2023. (4:24 video)

["I Don't Want to Die': Fighting Maternal Mortality Among Black Women,"](#) *New York Times*, January 18, 2023. (~6 pages including photographs)

## TEACHING HUMAN DIGNITY

[“She Was Pregnant With Twins During Covid. Why Did Only One Survive?”](#) *New York Times*, August 6, 2020. (~5 pages including photographs)

[“Why America’s Black Mothers and Babies Are in a Life-or-Death Crisis.”](#) *New York Times Magazine*, April 11, 2018. (~16 pages including photographs)



# Maternal Mortality Discussion Article/Video Organizer

Read through your assigned article (or watch your assigned video) carefully and complete the organizer.

**Step #1: My Initial Reactions**

Note your initial reactions to the what you read/heard and complete to the prompts below:

“I notice”

“This makes me think of”

“It makes me feel”

**Step #2: Consider the Issue**

Describe the main problem(s) or issue(s)? What are relevant supporting facts and details? What are its causes (keep in mind, there may be more than one)?

## TEACHING HUMAN DIGNITY

**Step #3:**

Who are the stakeholders involved? What issues of dignity are involved? Is there an individual/group whose basic needs for human flourishing are not being met?

**Step #4:**

How does the article/video touch on interpersonal and/or structural racism? Explain. If the article/video touches on both interpersonal and structural racism, explain how they related to each other?

**Step #5:**

Does the article/video propose any kind of action? If so, what are its recommendations and how could these address the maternal mortality crisis? If not, what suggestions would you make? What are barriers to change or positive action?

### Discussion Structure

There are several possible ways to structure this discussion. How a teacher chooses to do so will depend on students' maturity and understanding, the practice they've already had in having complex and potentially sensitive conversations, and the teacher's comfort in facilitating discussions. Specific models are discussed more below.

Regardless of how you plan to structure the discussion, remind students that there may be moments when they all feel uncomfortable or challenged by something they hear. This can be a good/productive type of discomfort!

### Introduce Community Agreements

There are a few community agreements that will guide the discussion:

- Monitor your air time: If you are a talker, make sure you leave space for others. If you are on the quieter side, be sure to share too.
- We are all experts in our own experiences! Where possible, use “I” statements instead of “you” statements.
- It is okay to disagree respectfully. We will not “solve” everything today.
- Mindful of our words and how they can harm and help.

*Teacher Note: The community agreements will be most effective if students have practiced them prior to this discussion.*

The teacher can structure the discussion in any way he/she thinks will work best for students. Below are some possible discussion structures:

1. **Jigsaw model:** This model will be particularly effective if students are reading different articles (recommended for older students).
  - During this first phase of conversation, students should discuss their article organizers with their expert group, making appropriate notes and corrections.
  - The second phase of discussion occurs in home groups. Students will be responsible for summarizing the essential points of their assigned article with other members of the home group. The article organizer should guide this process.

*Teacher Note: The teacher may want to provide some additional focus questions for home groups to consider, such as:*

- *What similarities and differences do you notice across articles?*
- *Are there examples of interpersonal and/or structural racism? If so, choose the three you consider most important and explain why.*
- In the final phase of discussion, home groups are given the opportunity to share out what they've identified as essential, overlapping features of their assigned articles. There should be some kind of visual display of student insights. After groups have shared, the teacher may open discussion. This could include the teacher asking probing questions that prompt students to make connections across the four days of the lesson.



## TEACHING HUMAN DIGNITY

2. Breakout/small group model: this model is simpler and may benefit younger students.

- Students all read the same article. The best article for this model is one that contains both personal narrative and analysis of the issue.
- Break up into pairs or small groups to discuss their responses they wrote down in their organizers. It may be helpful to break discussion into five distinct rounds to give students ample time for each section.
- Teacher led class discussion. One possible structure is:

### Use a visual chart to identify:

1. Problem/challenge
2. Key stakeholders (ex. pregnant woman, doctors, nurses, etc.)
3. Structures of racism that have contributed to a higher maternal mortality rate for women of color.
4. Historical realities that may impact the present crisis.
5. Indicators of hope. What positive action does the article discuss or can students imagine that would make a difference in this situation?

### Conclusion

After completing the discussion, wrap up the lesson and check-in with students. Some summative questions might include:

- What connections do you see across the four days of this lesson (the teacher will probably need to recap the lesson)?
- Have you had a new insight about racism and racial justice?
- What's on your mind and heart after we've gone through these days?

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