



Mother Mary Lange



Mother Mary Lange
Artist: Chloe Becker, 2020.

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WOMEN WITNESSES FOR RACIAL JUSTICE



Mother Mary Lange
Chloe Becker, 2020.

“My sole wish
is to do
the will of God.”
~Mother Mary Lange

Mother Mary Lange

Elizabeth Clarisse Lange, later known as Mother Mary Lange founded the first community for Black women religious in the United States. She had a profoundly transformative impact on the life of the Catholic Church.

Of African descent she was born in Santiago de Cuba circa 1794. Her family fled the violence and uncertainty of the Haitian Revolution immigrating first to Cuba in one of Santiago’s French-speaking neighborhoods. During her childhood, she received an excellent education.

Sometime in the early 1800s Elizabeth and her mother Annette left their lives of relative wealth and comfort in Cuba to come to the United States. Her father did not join them. Although the reason for their departure is not clear, some speculate that the mother and daughter decided to leave in 1808 when the newly established government in Cuba required all non-Spanish citizens to sign an oath of allegiance to the king of Spain. Mother Lange always identified herself as French - even to her soul.

They arrived in the United States at Charleston, South Carolina but only remained a short time before making their way to Norfolk, Virginia and finally to Baltimore, Maryland by 1813. Here Elizabeth made her home in the Fells Point area of the city. Her mother, on the other hand, returned to the West Indies.

In the United States, Lange courageously faced multiple oppressions.

First, she was a Black woman in a white male dominated culture.

Secondly, she was an immigrant and a Catholic in a nation where virulent anti-immigrant, anti-Catholic movements

were rearing up. Native-born Protestants, mostly in urban areas, felt threatened by the new arrivals. To many Protestants, the Catholic Church represented tyranny and potential subjugation to a foreign power. On a practical level, competition for jobs increased as new laborers arrived. As anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic feelings arose, nativist groups began to form in cities across the United States.

Finally, Lange was a free Black woman in a nation where slavery was fiercely defended and religiously sanctioned. Because Maryland was not part of the Confederacy, the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 did not take force. It was not until November 1, 1864 that Maryland declared slaves free which was just a few months before Congress approved the 13th Amendment abolishing slavery.

Opening the country's first school for Black Catholic girls

The French Revolution and a slave insurrection on the French Island of Saint-Domingue resulted in a significant influx of French speaking Haitian refugees to America. By July 1793, some 1,500 Haitian immigrants, of whom 500 were Black, had poured into Baltimore settling in the Fells Point area. Among the so-called "colored" emigres were some who were free, educated and wealthy, but there were also many more who were poor free Blacks and some who had been slaves.

The nucleus of religious activity for the French speaking immigrants, both Black and White, was St. Mary's Seminary lower Chapel established by the Sulpicians, themselves emigres from revolutionary France. This racially mixed group easily and naturally maintained its separate identity in Baltimore. At the time of Elizabeth Lange's arrival around 1813, the Sulpician Chapel was the center for religious activity for their descendents.

As Elizabeth Lange settled into her home and became acquainted with the conditions of Black people in Baltimore, she realized there was no public education provided for Black children. That would not happen for another fifty years. Unlike other southern states, Maryland did not have a law prohibiting the education of Black children; but neither was education for them encouraged by local officials. There were some small schools for Black children operated by Protestant groups, but there was little being done to educate Black Catholic children, especially those of the French-speaking population. So Elizabeth Lange opened a school for Black children in her home with the assistance of a

Haitian refugee, Marie Magdalene Balas.

Sulpician Father James Hector Joubert was familiar with the barriers children of color faced having taught catechism class. He reached out to Lange and Balas having learned about their educational efforts. They all agreed on the need for taking steps to improve the education of the children.

Founding the country's first religious order for Black Catholic women

In addition to educating children, Elizabeth Lange desired to become a member of a religious order. She knew that the existing orders took only white women as members and would not accept Black women. The sin of racism was as prevalent in Catholic religious communities and in the Catholic Church as it was in society. Yet, she told Joubert that she had wanted to serve God as a religious for more than ten years. .

She and Father Joubert, himself a white refugee from Santo Domingo, agreed it would be necessary to establish a new and separate order for Black women. The advantages seemed obvious to both of them.

First, it would open up opportunities for Black women who desired a religious life. Secondly, it would allow some of those women to become teachers at a time when vocational opportunities for both Black and white women were restricted, much more so for Blacks than for whites. Through such an order, a continuing supply of teachers could be trained to teach the Black children



Mother Mary Lange

Mother Mary Lange Timeline

- Born circa 1783 - 1794
(various census reports)
- Lange Family fled Haiti to Cuba
1787 = 1793
- Immigrated to the United States
1802 -1812
- Opened first Catholic School for
children of color 1818 = 1828
- Began religious Formation 1828
- Founded St. Frances Academy 1828
- Made Religious Consecration
July 2, 1829
- Foundress and First Superior 1829 -
1832 (and 1835 - 1841)
- Receives approval of Congregation
from Rome 1832
- Serves as nurse for Cholera victims
1832
- Serves as Treasurer 1833 - 1875
- Serves in Seminary Ministry
1849 - 1851
- Becomes Mistress of Novices
1851 - 1857
- Chosen Assistant Superior (by Mother
Gertrude) 1851 - 1857
- Principal and Superior of St. Benedict's
School, Fells point 1857
- Director of Novices 1858 & 1867
- Member of the Council
- Disabled, relieved of duties c.1876
- Mother Lange dies February 3, 1882

in schools supported by the Catholic Church, staffed by the new religious order.

When whites opposed their plans, Father Joubert assured Lange and Balas that they should “rest on the purity of their intentions...[and] must not stop because of the judgment of men who often judge things through their passions and prejudices.”

The approval of the Archbishop of Baltimore was necessary before a new religious order could be founded, and that proved to be no obstacle. Archbishop James Whitfield gave his enthusiastic consent and did a lot to calm Lange’s fears about white people being offended to see Black women in religious habits. He said, “The finger of God is in this.”

Elizabeth Lange was joined in her enterprise by two friends, Marie Magdalene Balas and Rosine Boegue. Their novitiate began on June 13, 1828. Lange was named the Superior of the nascent community..

As they began their formation for religious life, the three women established a school “for colored children” in a rented house “on the corner of the alley of the [Sulpician] Seminary, near Paca Street.”

Funding for the new school was raised among the members of the Black community in Baltimore with the help of a wealthy Black woman, Mrs. Charles Arieu. Additional funds were raised by Mrs. Ann-Catherine Ducatel and Mrs. Jeanne-Marie Chatard, two wealthy white women who were refugees from Haiti.

At first all the students were French speaking, but they came from various social backgrounds. Three of the boarders were orphans. Almaide Duchemin, a blonde, blue-eyed, daughter of an English father and Haitian African mother also joined. Her mother, Marie Anne Maxis, had taken the name Betsy Duchemin, the name of a French refugee family that brought her to Baltimore in 1793. The young Almeide came to Elizabeth Lange in 1828 with the intention of joining the new order. Elizabeth encouraged her interests, and as the fourth novitiate, she chose the



name of Sister Mary Theresa.

Facing discriminatory housing policies

By the end of 1828, the school had to move. Once the school had moved away from the immediate physical presence of the Sulpicians, Sister Mary Lange's worst fears were realized as they began to face growing opposition from the community. The landlord of the St. Mary's Court house, a Mr. Hoffman, notified his tenants that he had new plans for his property at the end of their one year lease, and they would have to leave. Other houses in the vicinity suddenly acquired very high rents. Whites did not want a

school for Black children in their neighborhood and the budding Oblate community faced discriminatory housing practices that would continue in Baltimore and become policy -- policies that, to this day, have exacerbated the economic and racial divide leaving many Black citizens impoverished.

As the time for their first vows grew near, the four women in formation were busily engaged in finding new patrons. In a story that has all the elements of a melodrama, Dr. Chatard, husband of the first benefactor, Mrs. Jeanne-Marie Chatard, appeared at the right moment and offered to sell them a house on Richmond St. on very liberal terms.

First vows and a secure home

As they took their first vows on July 2, 1829, the Sisters could look forward to a more secure and permanent location for their school, the heart of their work.. Elizabeth Lange took the name Sister Mary; Marie Magdaleine Bala took the name Sister Mary Frances; Marie Rose Boegue became Sister Mary Rose; and Almaide Duchemin took the name Sister Mary Theresa.

In the fall they gave their new school the name, Saint Frances School for Colored Girls. It was the first of its kind in the whole of the United States -- truly "a pioneer in the field of education in Baltimore for neglected colored children," and earliest teacher training institute in Baltimore for Black women.

The order grew quickly with both sisters and students. Within a year it was necessary to buy the adjoining house. In 1836 more property was purchased and a chapel was built next to the convent. Here regular masses were held, as well as baptisms, and all other sacraments. This was the first church (although not a recognized parish) for use by the African American Catholic community in Baltimore. The sisters did not get insituational support, but helped finance the expansion by sewing and selling vestments made from fine silks imported from France. The lay congregation supported the Sisters by sponsoring fairs, benefits and holding lotteries. This unheard expansion of Black Catholic worship was off to a very good start.

Sister Mary Lange's talents as a teacher and administrator began to attract women from outside of Maryland. Among the first to join the Oblate Sisters of Providence were members of the Noel family of

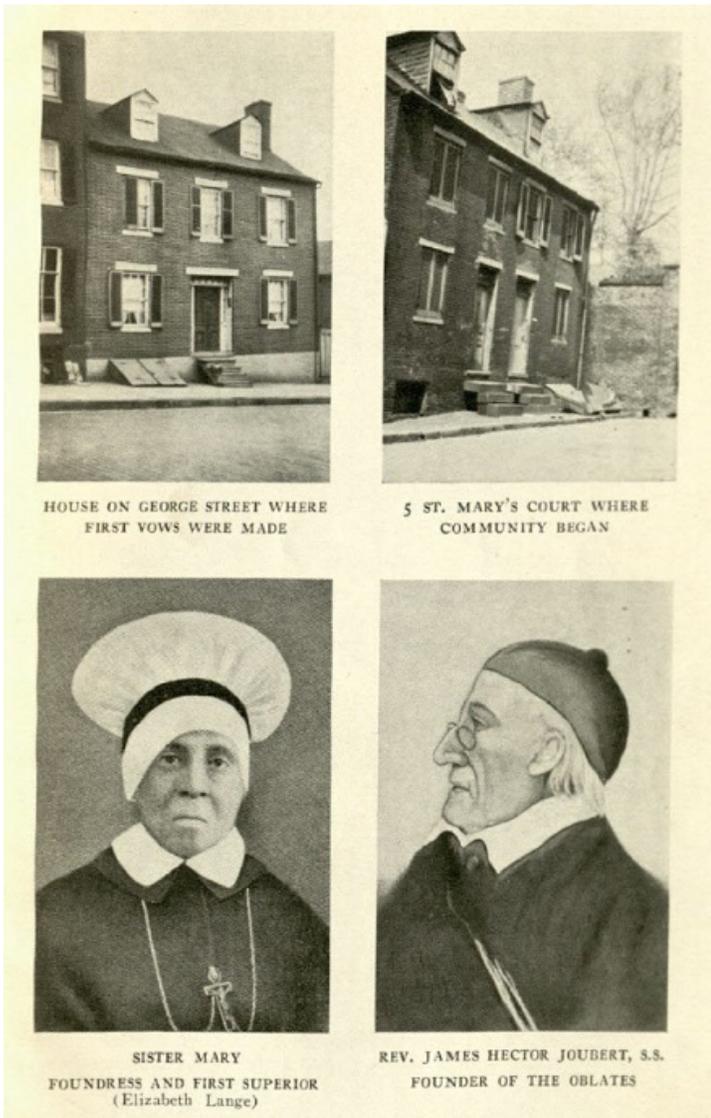


Plate from *The Oblates' Hundred and One Years* by Grace H. Sherwood. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1931.

Wilmington, Delaware. They, too, were descendants of Haitian refugees. Although the congregation continued to be bilingual, the first American sister, Marie Anne Barclay, was admitted into the order in 1830, and she also was the first sister to be accepted without a dowry.

The pupils, many of whom became novices, included orphans taken in by the order and former slaves. The rules of the community, however, did not permit anyone to enter while there was any “claim of ownership



Oblate Sisters
Late 1800s

against her person.” The Oblates did not offer a haven for runaways. Considering that Sister Mary’s most important benefactors were slave owners, to have followed a different policy was unthinkable.

Help during a cholera epidemic

During the summer of 1832, a cholera epidemic broke out in Baltimore and the Bureau of the Poor appealed to local religious orders for nurses to minister to the sick in the almshouse. Although the Oblate Sisters were a teaching order and were not obligated to care for the sick, Sister Mary Lange, the Superior at the time, permitted four volunteers to help. All returned alive. But the foundress had good reason to feel chagrined afterwards because no official thanks were ever tendered to the Oblates even though the Sisters of Charity, a white nursing order, did receive public recognition for their

efforts.

Sister Mary served as Superior General of the Order from its beginning to 1832. She was reelected in 1835 and again in 1838 for three-year terms. During those early years, she played the major role in establishing educational programs and charting the direction of future growth. From 1841 until her death 41 years later, she continued to teach, even though between 1845 and 1849 she also served as housekeeper at the Sulpician Seminary near her school’s first home on Paca Street.

Reunited with her mother

Mother Lange wanted her aged mother, who had returned to Cuba, to be given a home in the Oblates’ house. Annette Lange arrived in 1836 to be reunited with her daughter and to add a gayer note to the often somber atmosphere of the Oblates. The elderly Mrs. Lange, known as “Dede,” admitted to being awed by her daughter’s seriousness and was ill at ease in the presence of the Sisters’ self-abnegation. Nonetheless, the two managed their differences during the short time they



1875

had together.

The Oblates’ house on Richmond Street lacked space. The classroom served as a community room, sewing room, the place for ironing the Sisters’ caps and collars, as well as for recreation. After a day of teaching and religious devotions in one room, the only change came during dinner. At 5:00 p.m. they reassembled in the classroom, sisters and pupils together for reading, knitting and sewing.

After supper came recreation in the same room again until the first bell rang for silence. At 8:30 p.m. prayers

were said and all retired for the night. It was during recreation periods that Annette Lange gleefully entered into what gaiety there was. Only fear of her daughter's displeasure dampened her spirits somewhat.

On one occasion the young sisters were so engrossed in a Cuban dance Annette was performing for them that they failed to hear the "bell for silence." Amidst the laughter and the clapping, it was "Dede" who shouted the alarm at the top of her voice: "Mistress is coming!" The transgressors were properly admonished by Mother Lange who allowed for no exceptions, not even her mother. Annette Lange died on July 3, 1837, two months after she received her First Communion.

Difficult times, then surprising expansion

The Oblates' most difficult time came in the 1840's with the threat of an impending episcopal directive under Archbishop Samuel Eccleston (a slave holder) to disband the order. Father Joubert had died in 1843 and the Sulpicians refused to continue direction of the order. Some of the Sisters left. Two of the very light-skinned sisters went to Michigan where they passed as white and established a new order, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. To protect their new identity they refused admission to an Oblate Sister from Baltimore who was obviously Black. The record tells us nothing of Sister Mary Lange's reaction to the Michigan incident, but it must have caused some consternation because one of those who founded the new order now was her first protegee" Alneide Duchemin, now Sister Mary Theresa Maxis.

As women began to leave, once again a benefactor arrived in time to save the Oblate Sisters.

Since the Sisters no longer had a priest to give them daily mass the Sisters began to go out more and more for mass at Saint James and Saint Alphonsus – both staffed with Redemptorist priests. Although the Redemptorists generally ministered to the growing population of German immigrants in the city, many of the priests spoke French since the order was founded in Belgium. It was about this time that the Oblates began to have more interaction with the Redemptorist (Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer CSsR) priests through retreats, renewal of vows, and masses. In particular one priest, Father Thaddeus Anwander, CSsR was drawn to the Sisters and their current plight. Although he was newly arrived in America he vowed to learn English in order "to help the poor colored people." Anwander's

Redemptorist superior, John Neumann (now saint,) appointed him "to take charge of the Oblate Sisters." In order for him to become their spiritual director he had to have approval from Archbishop Eccleston. He first refused Anwander's requested but after much begging on Anwander's part relented and gave his approval. A new day had dawned for the Sisters and a bright ray of sunshine was finally visible.

Father Anwander went straight to work implementing



Late 1800's

programs to improve school enrollment and ease financial woes. Not only did they bounce back from the brink of extinction they grew substantially in number and ministries. While he was their director and chaplain he received and professed nine new Oblate Sisters of Providence.

Within a decade, Sister Mary Lange, now as novice-mistress, was able to increase the Oblate membership to the point where they could attempt to branch out into new activities.

The Evolution of the Oblate's Educational Force

The School for Colored Girls under the direction of the

Oblate Sisters of Providence was begun in a row house, 5 St. Mary's Court. Faculty, boarders, three orphans, and day scholars lived, studied and prayed in that dwelling. The significance of this school was its originality. In 1828, there was no model of a Black Catholic school. No one had institutionalized the educational process for the Black Catholic child. The Colored School, later to be known as St. Frances Academy, was the work of experienced Catholics as well as educators.

The foundresses of St. Frances, as free women of color, were a group able to function and perform without the restrictions of slavery. Twenty five years had elapsed since many Santo Domingans had sought refuge with the Sulpician Fathers at St. Mary's. Classes that were once in their native tongue were now taught in English. Parents saw their children being degraded by the slavery system. The children needed role models and an atmosphere of faith and hope in which to grow. The sisters were their role models who provided that atmosphere of faith and hope. In 1828, the Black Catholic parents were ready for a Black Catholic school.

The sisters personified Black leadership. While religious doctrine and training were foremost, the curriculum also included: Reading; Writing; Geography; English; Arithmetic; Music; and courses in craft work.

In 1852, Reverend Thaddeus Anwander, C.Ss.R, built a boys school and a hall for the various parish societies to hold their meetings. The Boys School grew from the start and Oblate Sister Angelica Gideon was the first principal. Sister Angelica had been a little girl who may have been under a slaveholder. She wanted to become a sister. Her grandparents had been enslaved.. Whether Angelica or her sister, Almira, were free or enslaved is uncertain. Father Joubert bought the girls and immediately set them free. Angelica's manumission papers are in the archives of the Oblate Sisters of Providence. Sister Angelica remained principal during the life of the school.

In 1857, Saint Michael's, located in a section of East Baltimore, asked the Oblates to open a school for the Black Catholics of the area. It only was in operation for three years. The chronicles of the Oblate Sisters show that the sisters eventually purchased the building from the Redemptorist Fathers and conducted the school themselves.

Also in 1857, Rev. William Clark, SJ asked the Oblates to oversee Saint Joseph School. It was the first parish school conducted by the Oblate Sisters. Clark, wishing

to start religious education for the Black children, bought some property near the Church. The sisters took residence on Wayne Street.



The Know-Nothings, a nativist political party and movement in the United States that was anti-Catholic, anti-immigration, populist, and xenophobic.

Two days before opening the school, the sisters were attacked and intimidated by rioters breaking down the doors. Throughout Baltimore, the Know-Nothings, a nativist political party and movement in the United States that was anti-Catholic, anti-immigration, populist, and xenophobic, were rioting. There was at least one killing that day, and a house where German politicians were meeting was attacked.

Fearful that living under such conditions would bring harm to the sisters, Reverend Mother Gertrude decided it best to withdraw from the situation. The Oblates eventually returned to St. Joseph's and the school succeeded.

Oblates Open a Free School and Orphanage for Orphans of Civil War

One of the many disasters of the Civil War was the large number of Black children who were homeless or without families in Baltimore. Some were orphans, as war often produces, some were children of freed slaves, some were migrants coming from fields to city.

Nevertheless, in 1864 there were no schools for this segment of Blacks. Two Oblates, under the direction of

Father Miller, S.J., opened a free school for Black girls in conjunction with Saint Frances Academy.

1865-Saint Frances Orphan Asylum, Baltimore

Although the Oblate Sisters had officially taken children in as “children of the house” to care for and educate free, it was not until after the civil war that the Saint Frances Orphanage became an institution. It opened in 1865 and the orphans were educated in the free school. The Sisters now directed what was called The Saint Frances Institutions, the Academy, the Free School and the Orphan Asylum.

Beyond Baltimore

As the sisters moved to other parts of the country they always managed to take in homeless children and educate them gratis. Like Saint Frances, orphanages were started in New Orleans, St. Louis and Leavenworth. Philadelphia was the only place where there are no records indicating the sisters took in orphans.

In 1863, Blessed Peter Claver, in Philadelphia, was the first out-of-state foundation of the Oblate Sisters. The pastor at the time, Reverend Felix Barbelin, S.J., had provided a well-furnished house for the Oblate Sisters. The annals recorded that Father Barbelin showered kindness on the sisters. Immediately, the school flourished and it was necessary to send another sister. So eager was the Black population for education (where at the time it was still forbidden to teach Black people in public schools in Philadelphia) that a night school was added for adult women. Financial and racial problems surfaced and, in 1867, Oblates were forced to leave this mission.

In 1872, another attempt was made by the Oblate Sisters to open a school for Black children on Seventh Street, above Pine. Again, the sisters suffered severe trials and humiliations in the work. The Oblates had little money to work with and under the constant display of prejudice, they were forced, once again, to close their school and return to Baltimore.

In 1964, the Oblate Sisters for a third time returned to Philadelphia and today their pre-school Gesu Bambino is still in operation.

In 1866, while Bishop John Odin was in Baltimore he asked the Oblate Sisters to open a branch of their order in New Orleans. New Orleans already had one Black sisterhood, but the need seemed to call for a second group

of sister to meet the pressing needs of Black Catholics. The coming of the Oblate Sisters to New Orleans was in response to a request that the sisters take charge of an orphanage which was to be sponsored by a charitable group. The Oblates also opened Saint Joseph School, a boarding and day school, in 1866.

In 1885, Saint Ann School in Washington D.C., founded in 1885 as a private institution, is most important in the chronology of the Oblates’ role in Black Christian education. It represents a school that grew into a parish, similar to the experience in Baltimore’s St. Francis Xavier parish. It showed throughout its history the support of the Black Catholic laity for their nuns. The school was the kernel for the Oblates’ expanded work in Washington, D.C., which was then part of the archdiocese of Baltimore.

In October of 1880, the first three Oblates to work in Missouri arrived in St. Louis. In coming to take charge of St. Elizabeth’s School, the Oblates found waiting for



them a strong support group of Black Catholics. The parish, begun as a chapel in St. Xavier Church, had been under Jesuit supervision since 1856, and it had grown in numbers and leadership. The school had been conducted by lay people.

The St. Louis mission is important in the nineteenth-century chronology of Oblate history because it was the first permanent foundation of the Oblate Sisters outside of Saint Frances. It is significant because the sisters went to an area when Black leadership of the Catholic community combined with the administration of the institutional church provided those tangible happenings that allowed the Oblate Sisters to minister to the Black Catholics. That support is still present, a century later.

In 1889, the Oblates established Saint Frances Home in Normandy, Missouri. Attached to the orphanage was a school which taught the curriculum of the day.

Religious education as demonstrated by the Oblate Sisters of Providence was a pioneering effort in a world that did not particularly care about the education and care of Black children. But there was a gradual awakening. From 1853 to 1872 none of the schools under Oblate direction became permanent but beginning with the midwestern foundation a new era of concern for Black Catholics was beginning to emerge. Perhaps because of the Third Plenary Council and the subsequent collection for Indians and Blacks, the institutional church was more alert to the Black problem. What is clear is that the Oblate Sisters as pioneers in meeting the needs of the nineteenth-century Black Catholic community and setting the stage for a new era.

The sisters' role was to serve and keep alive the "hope and faith" in the hearts of the Black people until the institutional church was ready to truly minister and help. In short, the Oblates desegregated the institutional Church and called it to care fully for all its people.

All in all, the Oblates opened schools in sixteen states across the United States by the mid-twentieth century, all serving children of color.

During the twentieth century, the Oblates expanded into Latin America, building schools and orphanages in Cuba, Colombia, Costa Rica, and more.



The Oblates opened schools in sixteen states across the United States by the mid-twentieth century, all serving children of color.

The school Mother Mary Lange founded still stands after



Oblates in Cuba

190 years and 99% of its students attend college.

Mother Lange's health begins to fail

Mother Lange returned to the mother house in 1866, and although she was in failing health, Mother Lange continued to remain active in the Order. The absence of water and kitchen facilities did not deter her from working in preparation for the opening of the new school on Chase Street in 1871. The new school was to be known as Saint Frances' Convent and Academy.

By the end of 1871, of the original four women, only Mother Lange remained. After the death of Sister Rose, her old friend, Mother Lange's physical condition seemed to worsen. Her eyesight became increasingly poor and she, who had always been a prodigious reader, could no longer read the books that had been so precious to her. She took her meals in her room.

Yet, Mother Lange enjoyed having the children and young Sisters visit with her in her room and she often would recount to them stories about the Caribbean

revolutions and the customs of Cuba.

In 1879, walking with the aid of two Sisters, she was able to attend the celebration of the Oblates' fiftieth anniversary. She had been the leader when masses were held in the church basement; when they faced anti-Black opposition; when she led through the hard times. Elizabeth Clarisse Lange, a woman who had devoted her life to the service of her church and the education of people, died on February 3, 1882.

She was close to one hundred years old.

Mother Mary Lange lived a long time, long enough to see the direction that the Oblate Sisters of Providence would take in their future work as teachers and protectors of the young and the aged. St. Frances Academy is still in existence, located today on Chase Street in Baltimore City. The novitiate moved to spacious grounds on Gun Road in Arbutus on land first purchased in 1933. In 1972, the Mount Providence Child Development Center opened on the Gun Road property, and the following year the Mount Providence Reading Center was added. A portion of the ground floor of the Motherhouse at present is rented to Baltimore County public schools for children with mental disabilities.

One factor has changed little since Elizabeth Lange founded the community. Although a few white women have entered, the Order is still made up primarily of Black women as a matter of choice and tradition.

The path to sainthood

In 1990 a committee was formed to investigate the possibility of proposing Mother Mary Lange for sainthood by the Catholic Church. It was determined that she did indeed possess the virtues and qualities of a saint so the work began to initiate the canonization. Part of the process requires that her remains be disinterred and placed in a closed and secure environment. In 2013 her remains were exhumed and moved to an oratory in the chapel at Mount Providence Convent and Motherhouse. For identification purposes a forensic anthropologist did an extensive examination of her remains. Several observations were made from his evaluation: she was very old at her time of death - in her mid to late 90s, the one original photograph we have of her is indeed her (evidenced by a comparative photographic overlay,) and from DNA and anthropological characteristics she was not of mixed race as was once thought, but only of West or Central

African descent.

In December 2019 Archbishop William E. Lori delivered an update on Lange's cause for sainthood. The "positio", a document arguing for Lange's sainthood, will be published and submitted to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. After the Congregation views the document, it goes to the pope who will decide if she is to be made "venerable." After that two miracles must be attributed to her. If canonized, she will be the first Black American Saint.



Enduring legacy

From the beginning, the Oblate sisters demonstrated leadership by, first, establishing their own pioneering community for Black Catholic women, then by establishing the first school of its kind for the education of young Black Catholic girls. While enduring poverty, the extremes of racism which barred them from the same opportunities afforded white women who wanted to join religious life, and untold hardships, the Oblate Sisters labored to evangelize the Black Catholic community through Catholic education. The sisters opened and staffed schools for young people, conducted night classes for women, provided homes for widows and orphans, offered vocational and career training, opened a free school for children whose parents could not afford Catholic education and started an institution for Civil War orphans.

In collaboration with the clergy who ministered to them, the sisters formed sodalities for men and women, taught religion classes, and held vespers and benediction on



Sunday afternoons. During Holy Thursday services of 1837, girls served as acolytes.

Of major significance is the fact that the chapel of the Oblate Sisters was the focal point of worship for the Black Catholic community of Baltimore until 1857. During the mid-nineteenth century, Black Catholics so crowded their chapel on Richmond Street, that the Foundress, Sister Mary (Elizabeth Lange) designated the last six pews for “whites only” as a gesture of gratitude to the white benefactors who regularly attended mass at St. Frances.

Black Catholic history tells us of the fearlessness and providential trust of these Black women who dared to meet the total needs of the Black Catholic community. This is easily perceived by the multiplicity of works taken on in spite of their evident shortage of personnel and their definite shortage of financial resources. The sufferings, humiliations and perseverance of the nineteenth-century Oblates have contributed to the flowering of the twentieth century, e.g., a Black cardinal, eleven Black bishops, a Pastoral on Racism, the resurrection of the Black Catholic Congress, a National Pastoral Plan for Black Catholics, and a Black Secretariat functioning under the auspices of the National Council of Catholic Bishops and more. Statistics show us that more than 50% of the population of the Catholic

The origins of the Oblate Sisters of Providence in the United States marks an important transitional moment on both a social and religious level. Socially speaking, they represent an important aspect of women’s hidden history. From the beginning of their evolution as a small pious union, wholly dependent on their founding

Mother, the Oblate community has built a formal congregation featuring an elaborate bureaucracy and a variety of ministries. While such trends are typically manifested in Catholic religious congregations long after the passing of the original leader, the Oblates were transformed while Mary Lange still lived and firmly controlled the order’s affairs. Despite the pressures of social conditions and persistent financial difficulties, Lange increasingly focused on building institutional guarantees for the organization she had once sustained through sheer energy and ingenuity. The result of these efforts was that the Oblate Sisters proved able to survive even the great trauma of Mother Lange’s death in 1882, and her legacy was the foundation upon which the congregation has expanded its work to the present day.

Liberating Catholicism from Androcentrism, Racism, and Eurocentrism

Importantly, her congregation helped liberate American Catholicism from its more pronounced androcentric and Eurocentric prejudices. Their evangelization efforts, educational activities, and social work extended the ministry of the Church to encompass African-American and Afro-Caribbean female reality as well as dynamic factors of culture and environment.

Accordingly, the congregations’ pioneering spirit was kindled by an inner urge or sense of moral and social responsibility toward Afro-Caribbean and African-American peoples. This spirit was first manifested in missionary work among Afro-Caribbeans and African Americans in Baltimore. And by the end of the nineteenth century, this missionary spirit was renewed and directed to evangelistic work and education among African Americans across the United States. This was the stage that may be termed the home missionary period. Now the framework was in place for the congregation to undertake an international mission.

The Latin American enterprise of Catholic missions plays a large part in molding the history of the Oblate Sisters in the twentieth century. The congregation’s interest in Latin America coincided with a national push for overseas expansion, a major wave of religious evangelism, and the formation of foreign missions.

The congregation’s story in this enterprise is part of several histories: the history of African liberation, of spirituality, of social reform, and of women. It is a story about African-American and Afro-Caribbean women who accepted their subordinate status within the nineteenth-century American Church, but it is also a story of struggle and empowerment, of the strength of a

group of women who worked against daunting odds to improve the world for themselves and their people.

They set up schools, orphanages, and other services for Black Catholics in Cuba, Colombia, and Costa Rica where they worked in Base Ecclesial Communities and saw their work as bearing “the preferential option for the poor.”

Taken altogether, the Oblates were the bearers of Catholicism, Hispanic culture, and tradition not as ordinary women, but as Catholic women religious in a public role. In this way the Oblates wielded considerable influence to shaping their own affairs and engendering a sense of self-determination in those who might have been otherwise regarded as powerless - a pattern that was clearly manifested in the congregations involvement within the African diaspora in the United States and in Latin America.

The work of Black Catholic education begun by the Oblate Sisters of Providence in 1828 in Baltimore and spread across the United States and beyond. Their innovative faith continues to shape the Catholic tradition that we share today as the Oblates continue to call us to live the Gospel as true sisters and brothers as the People of God.

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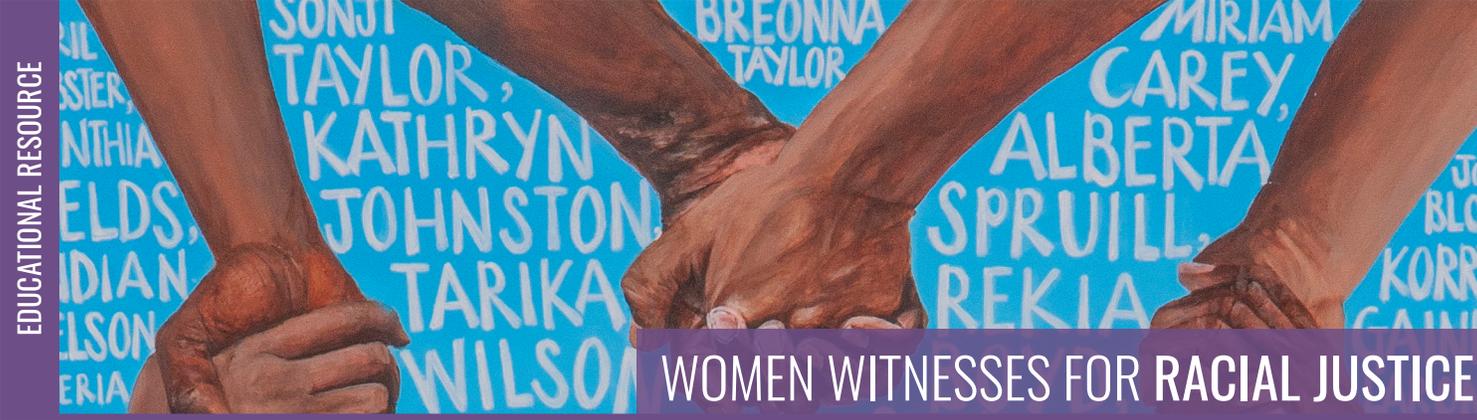
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WOMEN WITNESSES FOR RACIAL JUSTICE

How the Oblate vision challenged and changed the Catholic Church

The Oblate Sisters of Providence formed the first permanent community of Roman Catholic sisters of African descent in both the United States and the world.

Elizabeth Clarisse Lange and the Sulpician priest James Hector Joubert co-founded the Oblate community in Baltimore in 1828. These two individuals also shared a French cultural heritage, Caribbean refugee status, a fervent devotion to the Catholic faith, and an abiding commitment to the education of Black children. Theirs proved to be a collaboration of extraordinary individuals.

As a Catholic priest and white male in the antebellum South, James Joubert transcended prevailing institutional and social attitudes towards both Black people and women in conceptualizing the Oblate Sisters of Providence. In aspiring to establish a community of Black women religious, Elizabeth Lange defied the subordinate status ascribed her as a free woman of color in a slave society.

Unlike founders of white religious communities serving white society, Elizabeth Lange and James Joubert proposed to provide for a despised population both a corps of teachers from its own ranks and an education, which the general public considered neither serving a public need nor consonant with prevailing social values. Indeed, some Americans proscribed education for free Negroes as much as for slaves. The Oblate Sisters' very existence as free women of color organized into a community of Catholic religious to educate Black girls challenged prevailing social and episcopal attitudes about race and gender. If not revolutionary, the foundation of the Oblate Sisters constituted a heroic feat.

As the term culture denotes the total way of life of a society at a given time, so the term charism signifies the culture of a religious community. Just as unique cultural practices differentiate societies, the specific charisms informing religious communities serve as spiritual fingerprints distinguishing one from the other.

In defining themselves in their original Rule as “a religious society of Coloured women... [who] renounce the world to consecrate them selves to God and to the Christian education of young girls of color,”⁵ the Oblate Sisters stated their awareness that the issue of race informed their particular charism. Although they shared many traits with other sisterhoods, this articulated racial consciousness proved unique to the Oblate experience. While issues of gender woven into the nineteenth-century social context affected the Oblate Sisters and white sisterhoods comparably, the pervasive strands of racism woven warp and woof into the American social fabric ensnared the Oblate community alone.

During the 1830s the Oblate Sisters forged the patterns of their communal life and executed their teaching ministry.

Both Church and society ascribed to the Oblate membership outsider-within status, predicated on Oblate identity as both women of color and as institutionalized religious. The Oblate Sisters nevertheless sought acceptance as a legitimate constituency within both the Roman Catholic Church and southern society.

The Oblate community functioned in a climate of heightened racial tension in Church and society. Yet, even in their first decade, the Oblate Sisters demonstrated “the utility of Black women’s relationships with

one another in providing a community for Black women's activism and self-determination."

The extraordinary faith of the Oblate Sisters of Providence defined them and empowered them as Black women and committed religious, in spite of their social ascription as "other" or outsiders within both the American Church and society of the 1830s.

Oblate provenance in Baltimore, literally the capital of the Catholic United States in 1830, proved to be a defining feature of their nineteenth-century experience. The Oblate Sisters joined three other communities of women religious previously established in the archdiocese: the Carmelite Nuns (1790), the Visitation Sisters of Georgetown (1800), and the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph, Emmitsburg (1809).

By 1837 all four sisterhoods maintained missions in the city of Baltimore. The Oblate community enjoyed exceptional exposure to and recognition from the national and international Church dignitaries and officials who visited Baltimore, the premier see, or unofficial seat, of the American Catholic Church.

Yet, in addition to other issues, considerations of race informed the Oblate Sisters' position within the antebellum Church. From 1789 through the 1830s, the Church in the South remained the foundation of American Catholicism. In 1789 over half of the 35,000 Catholics in the United States lived in the South, the largest number by far in Maryland.

Waves of European Catholic immigration shifted the concentration of the American Catholic population from Maryland to the cities of the Northeast from the 1840s, but the Catholic Church in the United States retained the imprint of its southern provenance through the nineteenth century. In fully embracing the tenets of southern nationalism, the Catholic Church in the South accommodated racism and the institution of slavery.

Although allowing that slavery as practiced in the United States constituted a social evil, Church teachings maintained that in principle slavery did not constitute a sin. Insisting on the equality of all people before God, the Church nevertheless interpreted such equality in its moral and spiritual dimensions only, not in a social sense. The universal Church historically had not perceived its role as that of social reformer and had challenged neither serfdom nor slavery, considering

them exclusively social institutions. However, because the Church held that enslaved status did not deprive an individual of her or his humanity, it insisted that the owner-slave relationship entailed reciprocal obligations.

Neither more nor less than did Protestant denominations, the Roman Catholic Church condemned abuses and atrocities perpetrated by slaveowners against their slave property.

American clergy and religious not only tolerated the institution of slavery, they also actively participated in and profited from the ownership and sale of human chattel. Several distinguished prelates, including John Carroll, the first Roman Catholic bishop in the United States, and his colleagues and successors Louis DuBourg of Louisiana, Benedict Flaget of Kentucky, and Samuel Eccleston of Baltimore, held or had held slaves.

Communities of priests including the Jesuits, the Vincentians, the Sulpicians, and the Capuchins held slaves. Congregations of women religious such as the Carmelites, the Sisters of the Visitation, and the Sisters of Charity also held slaves.

The Oblate Sisters of Providence were free women of color; nevertheless racism and consequences of the system of racial slavery entrenched in the United States intruded on their antebellum experience.

In sanctioning the foundation of the Oblate Sisters of Providence as a community of black women religious in 1829, the Church affirmed free black people as a legitimate spiritual constituency. Yet the pervasive debasement of all black people ensuing from the racial basis of slavery in the United States convinced most white people in America including the Catholic hierarchy of universal black inferiority. The existing evidence fails to corroborate a recent assertion that the Catholic clergy and religious of Baltimore "found no difference between the Oblates and other religious." Throughout the antebellum period, ambivalence toward the Oblate Sisters as black women religious plagued the institutional Church.

In June 1829 the disapproval of the Oblate foundation expressed within the Baltimore Catholic community evidently by clergy as well as laity dismayed the four charter Oblate members. Oblate spiritual director James Joubert noted, "these good girls...admitted to me

that after all they had heard said, only through obedience would they be determined to take the religious habit.” Joubert further revealed, “I had myself heard much talk. I knew already that many persons who had approved the idea of a school for pupils disapproved very strongly that of forming a religious house, and could not think of the idea of seeing these poor girls (colored girls) wearing the religious habit and constituting a religious community.” That same month Sulpician priest John Chanche had refused a favor requested by Joubert on the Oblate community’s behalf. Chanche’s refusal had “amazed and mortified” Joubert. The outcry against the idea of black sisters had come to the attention of even Archbishop James Whitfield who, according to Joubert, “knew very much himself, even more than I did, and he advised me not to be in the least discouraged.” The “persons” who confronted the sisters, challenged Joubert, and complained to the archbishop about the concept of a community of black women religious undoubtedly included clergy, Sulpicians among them, who were more likely to have access to the sisters, Joubert, and Whitfield than the general laity.

Joubert had told the four dismayed Oblate novices to “rest on the purity of their intentions, and since their actions were misinterpreted by certain persons, they should put their confidence in God; that until now their work seemed good, so they must not stop because of the judgment of men who often judge things through their passions and prejudices.”

The Oblate Sisters incorporated Joubert’s sage words into their communal response to all encounters with racial discrimination. From their beginning the Oblate Sisters of Providence enjoyed the support of several extraordinary individuals among the clergy who both affirmed and promoted the spiritual mission of the Oblates. Yet clerical support of the Oblate Sisters never included significant financial donations commensurate with those that the communities of white women religious established in the archdiocese of Baltimore received at their foundations.

Mapping the disparities between white religious communities and the Oblates

The disparities between white religious communities that formed in Baltimore and the Oblate community

were stark, especially when it came to institutional financial support for their budding communities.

Carmelite Nuns formed their first foundation in the United States at Port Tobacco, Maryland in 1790. The Jesuit priest Charles Neale, a scion of the long established, immensely wealthy, and devotedly Catholic Neale family of Maryland, served as both spiritual director and generous benefactor to this first Carmelite mission in America. Within three months of their arrival in Maryland in 1790 from the Antwerp, Belgium, Carmelite community, the four charter American Carmelites took possession of an 800-acre plantation provided them by Charles Neale in exchange for his own property and a cash payment of approximately \$6,535.

By 1830 the Carmelite order owned slaves valued at \$9,000. When in 1830 economic reversals forced the Carmelites to move to Baltimore, Archbishop James Whitfield involved himself personally in the task of locating suitable accommodations for the cloistered nuns. On 6 June 1830, after “looking all over Baltimore,” Whitfield wrote triumphantly to the Carmelite mother superior, “I have discovered a most beautiful garden, with a brick house, in a very respectable part of the city....

The Carmelite order purchased the house in 1830 for \$6,250. Whitfield personally contributed \$100 towards their expenses.

The Sisters of the Visitation established their first foundation in the United States in Georgetown in 1800. Leonard Neale, Jesuit priest, brother to Charles, and future Archbishop of Baltimore made the Visitation Sisters “the principal focus of his interest and energies until the assumption of his archiepiscopal role.” Between 1800, when the Georgetown Visitation began with three charter members, and 1805, Neale served as the sisters’ spiritual director and also purchased an entire block of Georgetown real estate for \$5,670. He then deeded all of the property to the Visitation Sisters in 1808 for one dollar. The French priest Joseph Cloriviere, the third spiritual director of the Visitation Sisters from 1819 until his death in 1826, contributed \$9,354,605 of his own money to their community.

Elizabeth Ann Seton founded the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph in Baltimore in 1809. Seton professed her

vows before Archbishop John Carroll in March 1809. Samuel Cooper, a student preparing for the priesthood at St. Mary's Seminary, generously donated \$10,000 to Seton for the purchase of property suitable for a convent and school. Three months after professing her vows, Seton and the four other charter Sisters of Charity occupied their new estate at Emmitsburg, Maryland.

Only the membership between the Oblate Sisters of Providence and the three white religious communities preceding them in the archdiocese of Baltimore was similar in terms of experience. The Carmelites had four members; the Visitation sisters, three, the Sisters of Charity, five, and the Oblate Sisters, four.

No priest or bishop disbursed thousands of dollars in cash or property to the fledgling Oblate community. The priest Adolphus Williamson repeatedly recognized the Oblate Sisters with non-pecuniary favors. Although in 1830 Williamson donated \$3000 of his personal fortune to provide cut granite for the facade of the Sulpician institution St Charles College, some fifteen miles outside Baltimore, evidently he did not consider financial support of the Oblate Sisters a suitable investment.

When circumstances required the Oblate Sisters to relocate three times between June 1828 and December 1829, no priest or bishop personally helped defray their moving expenses. Unlike the other archdiocesan sisterhoods, the Oblate Sisters of Providence had to rely exclusively on their own resources and the generosity of the lay community for financial support.

Few clerics matched the unstinting zeal and total commitment to the Oblate cause evinced by their co-founder, Rev. James Joubert. Archbishop James Whitfield approved the Oblate foundation in 1829. Several Sulpician and other priests and prelates demonstrated varying degrees of support for the Oblate Sisters throughout the 1830s. Yet clerical support of these black women religious never equalled the clerical patronage bestowed on the white sisterhoods in the archdiocese of Baltimore.

Issues of race and the grip of the institution of slavery on social attitudes inhibited the response of the institutional Church to the Oblate community. Issues of race, ethnicity and religion informed the position of the Oblate Sisters of Providence within southern society.

The Oblates' black Catholic identity earned the suspicion of a substantially Protestant nation, which viewed the Church alternately as the perpetrator of a popish plot to conquer the United States and as the evil genius holding in thrall the teeming masses of immigrants invading America.

As black women religious, members of the Oblate community observed vows of chastity in a society which denigrated the virtue of all black women, slave or free, and consequently considered the concept of chaste black women an oxymoron. Indeed, the commitment to chastity embraced by all sisterhoods would have found favor with few nineteenth-century Americans who subscribed to the cult of domesticity and its promulgation of the virtues of matrimony and maternity. As women religious living in community, the Oblate Sisters of Providence endured with other sisterhoods nativist hostility in 1830s Baltimore. Whatever concerns for their safety the white sisterhoods entertained in the wake of nativist agitation, the black Oblate Sisters also experienced concerns for their safety derived from their racial identity.

During their first decade the Oblate Sisters encountered incidents of racism, both subtle and overt, in their interactions with the citizenry of Baltimore. The racial identity of the sisters and their students complicated their securing a suitable, permanent residence. Unexpectedly evicted from their first rented property in April 1829, the Oblate Sisters experienced a discriminatory housing market familiar to minority populations in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Joubert reported that the Oblate community "found several [houses] but the price asked was exorbitant; several refused absolutely to let us have them, when they were informed that it was for a school, and still more a school for colored children." Fortunately for the community, within a month of their eviction notice Dr. Peter Chatard, a wealthy white San Domingan emigre, offered them his Richmond Street property on generous terms.

The Oblate Sisters' willing service as nurses during the cholera epidemic of 1832 demonstrated their strong sense of mission and empowerment. However, significant racial dimensions inhered in this Oblate service to the city of Baltimore. Except for the letter from Archibald Stirling, the Oblate Sisters enjoyed no public recognition for their civic service in nurs-

ing the sick. Yet the white Sisters of Charity received significant public acknowledgement of their efforts. The existing evidence does not specify whether the Oblate Sisters nursed black or white cholera patients at the almshouse; it does suggest, however, that the cholera incident provided another opportunity for the Oblate Sisters to serve the Baltimore black community. The outbreak of cholera in Baltimore in 1832 ravaged the free black community disproportionately to its presence in the total population. In the first week in September, 254 Baltimoreans died from cholera; 104 victims were black and of these, 92 were free. Although composing only 14% of the city's population, in that one week free black victims accounted for more than one third of the cholera dead. Crowded and inadequate housing conditions for Baltimore's black residents and municipal negligence in maintaining minimum standards of public sanitation partially explain this severe black mortality from cholera. Also, most nineteenth-century public and private institutions, asylums, hospitals, and orphanages did not accept black people. Those that did, like the Baltimore City and County Almshouse, enforced a policy of strict racial segregation.

The Oblate Sisters did not directly protest their marginal social status. They functioned within the parameters of racial discrimination sanctioned by Church and society. When Oblate Sister Stanislaus Kostka (Cassandra Butler) died in 1832, Joubert sought from the Trustee of the Cathedral "a lot in that part of the cemetery where they buried colored people," without hesitation or comment.

In forming a community of black women religious within the Roman Catholic Church, the Oblate Sisters of Providence had exercised their spiritual agency to indemnify the virtue of black women in defiance of prevailing social attitudes. In responding to incidents of racial discrimination? even within Catholic Church? as opportunities for spiritual transcendence, they exercised their spiritual agency to transform intended racial denigration and humiliation into spiritual benefit, in defiance of prevailing social intent. The blossoming of the Oblate community in 1830s Baltimore proved remarkable achievement. These black women religious both challenged responded to the prevailing attitudes of the Catholic Church and the South about race, gender, religion, and ethnicity.

As Oblate Sisters of Providence, Catholic women of color in the antebellum South utilized their piety and spiritual fervor to defy their socially ascribed inferior status and to exercise agency in service to others. As black people, as women, as Roman Catholics, as religious living in community, the Oblate Sisters formed the antithesis of the white, male, Protestant family patriarch who typified the empowered citizen in nineteenth century American society.

Oblate membership never exceeded twenty sisters before 1860. Nevertheless, this small band of determined women forged an institution suffused with religious fervor and inculcated into their communal consciousness positive senses of themselves as black women and as committed religious, in defiance of their racially derived status as "other" or outsiders within Church and society. Their spiritually empowered self-image prevailed for the Oblate membership over both the ambivalence toward them as black women religious plaguing the institutional Church and the disdain toward them as both black people and women religious demonstrated by white southern society.

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Prayer before reflecting

Four people whom we never knew have been murdered. It is merely the tip of an iceberg. The details of each heinous act are so horrifically unjust that there is no sense to be made of them. Each of the four was victimized. Each of them was Black, but their race was not the cause of death. Each was murdered because of the systemic structures that endow white people with an unimaginable authority and privilege based on the perpetuation of lies. The onus is not on the victims but on the perpetrators and their oppressive and unjust systems.

“Am I Next,” Leslye Colvin, (May 2020).

<https://www.leslyecolvin.me/>

[leslyeslabyrinth1/2020/05/am-i-next.html](https://www.leslyecolvin.me/leslyeslabyrinth1/2020/05/am-i-next.html)

Lord, have mercy.

George Floyd of Minnesota.

Your nation failed you.

Rest in God's peace.

Kyrie eleison.

Christ, have mercy.

Breonna Taylor of Kentucky.

Your nation failed you.

Rest in God's peace.

Christe eleison.

Lord, have mercy.

Ahmaud Arbery of Georgia.

Your nation failed you.

Rest in God's peace.

Kyrie eleison.

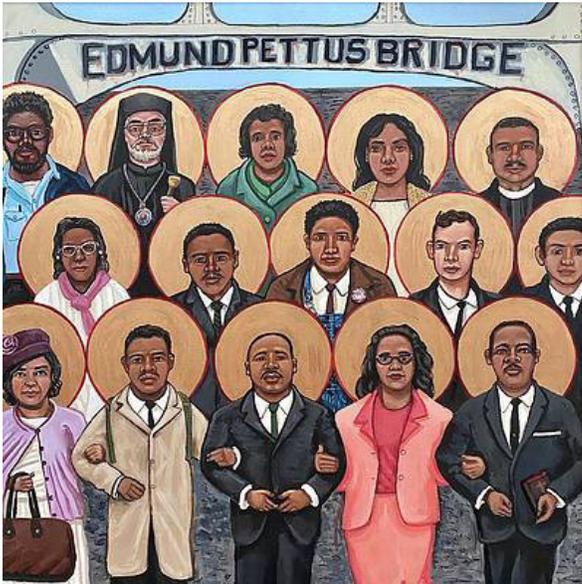
Christ, have mercy.

Tony McDade of Florida.

Your nation failed you.

Rest in God's peace.

Christe eleison.



"The Saints of Selma"
Kelly Latimore
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The Oblate Sisters changed the course of Catholicism, in the United States and beyond. They helped liberate American Catholicism from its pronounced androcentric, racist, and European prejudices.

Reflection Questions

Not much is known about Mother Mary Lange's inner life. She left few written records and only a handful of her quotes have been captured in the archives. What we do know of her is revealed in her actions, her consistent push throughout the course of her life to take up the cause of educating Black Catholics, young and old, against the racism and slavery of her day.

As you read the accounts of Mother Mary Lange and the Oblate sisters, what stood out for you? What gave you joy? What caused you concern? What emotions did you feel?

The one quote that is famously attributed to Mother Mary Lange is, "My sole wish is to do the will of God." Mother Lange was a prophet in her day. She cared for those who had been deemed "lesser." She saw the destruction of white supremacy and white privilege and worked to create an alternative vision. She did this, all the while believing God was on her side.

How do you think Mother Lange came to envision a God that cared for the lives of Black people, a people seen as subordinate to white people - who could be enslaved because white people believed it? Have you ever had a similar vision or understanding of God's call -- of the way the Gospel must be lived today? If so, how did it manifest for you? What did you do in response?

The Oblate Sisters changed the course of Catholicism, in the United States and beyond. They helped liberate American Catholicism from its pronounced androcentric, racist, and European prejudices.

Did you ever think of the work of the Oblate Sisters in this way? In what ways have you challenged the androcentric, racist, and European prejudices of the Catholic Church?

Essential Reading # 1



The church must make reparation for its role in slavery, segregation

by Shannen Dee Williams

This article appeared in National Catholic Reporter (June 15, 2020) <https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/church-must-make-reparation-its-role-slavery-segregation>. Reprinted with permission.

The ever-expanding protests over the epidemic of police violence and systemic racism in the United States, manifested most recently in the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery, have brought our society to another monumental crossroad.

At the intersection of these enduring crimes against humanity and protesters of varying hues and creeds screaming, “Enough is enough,” is a global system of anti-Blackness and violence that has strangled Black communities in the United States and across the African Diaspora since the rise of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. That these murders and protests have erupted amid a global pandemic that is disproportionately killing Black

and Brown people only underscores the unchecked ferocity of institutionalized systems of white supremacy in our society.

In recent days, Catholic statements condemning the sin of racism alongside some clergy and sisters at #BlackLivesMatter protests across the country and world offers hope to those who have long struggled against the plague of white supremacy within and outside church boundaries. This is especially true for many Black Catholics who initiated the fight against racism in the Catholic Church in the modern era and Black Catholic women and youth who have been shouting Black Lives Matter since the hashtag emerged from three Black women activists in 2013 following George Zimmerman’s acquittal in the murder of Trayvon Martin.

That it has taken so long for the institutional church and many non-Black Catholics to embrace the rally cry of #BlackLivesMatter, however, cannot be ignored. It must be said, too, that the recent Catholic statements on racism and rising protests fall way short when it comes to acknowledging the church’s role in the contemporary crisis and direct complicity in the sins of anti-Black racism, slavery and segregation in the modern era.

While Catholic social teaching affirms “the right to life and dignity” of every person, the fact remains that the church egregiously violated these teachings through its participation in the trans-Atlantic slave trade and imperial practices of African slavery and segregation in the Americas, Europe and Africa.

In the 15th century, the Catholic Church became the first global institution to declare that Black lives did not matter. In a series of papal bulls beginning with Pope Nicholas V’s *Dum Diversas*

(1452) and including Pope Alexander VI's Inter Caetera (1493), the church not only authorized the perpetual enslavement of Africans and the seizure of "non-Christian" lands, but morally sanctioned the development of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. This trade forcibly transported at least 12.5 million enslaved African men, women and children to the Americas and Europe to enrich European and often Catholic coffers. It also caused the deaths of tens of millions of Africans and Native Americans over nearly four centuries.

In the land area that became the United States, the Catholic Church introduced African slavery in the 16th century long before 1619. In fact, at various moments in American history from the colonial era to the U.S. Civil War, the church was the largest corporate slaveholder in Florida, Louisiana, Maryland, Kentucky and Missouri. We must also never forget Roger B. Taney, the nation's first Catholic Supreme Court Justice and a descendant of prominent Catholic slavers from Maryland, infamously declared that Black people "had no rights which the white man was bound to respect," while denying the freedom petitions of Dred and Harriet Scott and their two daughters in 1857.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, Catholics, including religious orders of men and women, were also the largest owners of enslaved people during the colonial era. In Brazil, which received the largest number of enslaved Africans imported to the Americas, the Jesuits were at the center of the brutal sugar economy. Like their counterparts in the United States, Black Brazilians today, who are mostly Catholic, are fighting systemic racism and one of the highest rates of police murder against Black and Brown people in the Americas.

The systematic denial and erasure of Black Catholic history denies the fundamental truth that Black history is Catholic history.

Following the abolition of slavery, the Catholic Church stood as the largest Christian practitioner of segregation. In the United States, where the history of many Black Catholics predates that of white and ethnic white Catholics by over three centuries, the vast majority of Catholic institutions and religious orders of men and women systematically excluded African-descended people,

especially U.S.-born Blacks, from admission solely on the basis of race well into the 20th century.

The historical record is inundated with gut-wrenching examples of Black Catholic faithfulness in the face of unholy discrimination and segregation in white Catholic parishes, schools, hospitals, convents, seminaries and neighborhoods. Yet, this history is rarely incorporated into dominant narratives of the American Catholic experience.

The systematic denial and erasure of Black Catholic history denies the fundamental truth that Black history is Catholic history. It also a part of the system of white supremacy that continues to inflict harm on the descendants of the enslaved people who literally built this country and the American church and those who continue to benefit from the brutal history of colonialism, slavery and segregation.

In New Year 2020, I outlined a plan of action for Catholic reparation for slavery and segregation in Catholic News Service. This included:

- Making formal apologies for the church's own histories of slavery and segregation;
- Stopping the closings of active African American parishes;
- Reinvesting in and expanding the Black Catholic educational system;

- Requiring the teaching of Black and Brown Catholic history in every Catholic school and seminary;
- Endowing scholarships, fellowships and professorships for Black and Brown scholars at Catholic colleges and universities;
- Broadening formal church leadership to include anti-racist women and members of the laity.

I also called upon Catholics to take leading roles in campaigns working to protect Black lives, eliminate racism in the health care system, end mass incarceration and bail, and secure police reform and accountability.

In the wake of uprisings sweeping the world, the obscenely high unemployment rates in the Black community as a result of the pandemic, and the growing use of militarized police forces against protesters, additional actions are warranted. I now wonder if Catholic reparation must also include creating institutions to help establish more formal connections and foster long-term engagement between African American Catholics and African Catholics in Africa. Over the past few years, significant numbers of African Americans and other members of the African Diaspora living in the West have begun to repatriate to Africa in response to the rise of white supremacist and state violence threatening Black communities.

The earliest documented roots of the Catholic Church are in Africa. Considering the fact that the church is also currently experiencing its greatest rates of growth on the continent, it would be a substantial development for major U.S. Catholic universities to follow the lead of Webster University in Missouri and begin establishing African American and African-led campuses in Catholic Africa with exchange, enrichment and study abroad programs at every level from K-12 to the university and the adult laity.

While I do not yet foresee a mass Black exodus from the United States, assisting in efforts to

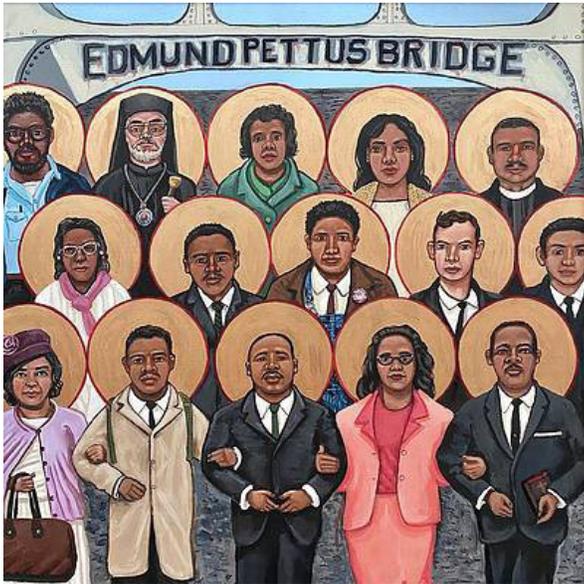
reconnect Black people to the land of their ancestors and growth in Africa is essential. Moreover, if there ever came a time when Black Americans did need to flee for their safety, the church could play a leading role.

The denial of the dignity and sanctity of Black life is a part of the DNA of this country. It is also a foundational sin of the American Catholic Church. Black Catholic history reveals that the church has never been an innocent bystander in the history of white supremacy. If there will ever be a chance for true peace and reconciliation, the Catholic Church must finally declare with all of its might and resources that Black lives do matter.

The goal for Black people has never been charity; it is full justice, human rights, freedom and the complete dismantling of white supremacy, beginning with the church.

Shannen Dee Williams is the Albert Lepage Assistant Professor of History at Villanova University. She is completing her first book, [Subversive Habits: Black Catholic Nuns in the Long African American Freedom Struggle](#). In 2018, she received the inaugural Sr. Christine Schenk Award for Young Catholic Leadership from FutureChurch for using history to foster racial justice and reconciliation in religious congregations of women.

Essential Reading # 1: Reflection & Dialogue



“The Saints of Selma”
Kelly Latimore
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The goal for Black people
has never been charity;
it is full justice, human rights,
freedom and the
complete dismantling of
white supremacy,
beginning with the church.

Shannen Dee Williams

Dr. Williams notes that following the abolition of slavery, the Catholic Church, Catholic institutions and religious orders stood as the largest Christian practitioner of segregation.

Were you aware of the history of racial discrimination within the Catholic Church? What was your own response upon learning that history?

Dr. Williams outlined a plan for action for Catholic reparation that includes formal apologies, stopping the closings of active African American parishes, reinvesting in Black Catholic education, requiring the teaching of Black and Brown Catholic history in every Catholic school and seminary, endowing scholarships, fellowships and professorships for Black and Brown scholars at Catholic colleges and universities, and broadening formal church leadership to include anti-racist women and members of the laity.

What is your response to her suggestions? What about her plan consoles you? What about her plan challenges you? What are the barriers you face? How can you overcome those barriers?

Dr. Williams states that the goal is justice. She calls Catholics to take leading roles in working to protect Black lives, eliminate racism in the health care system, end mass incarceration and bail, and secure police reform and accountability.

In what ways are you already contributing to the work of justice? What more can you and your community do?

Essential Reading # 2



The assumptions of white privilege and what we can do about it

By Bryan N. Massingale

This article appeared in National Catholic Reporter (June 1, 2020) at https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/assumptions-white-privilege-and-what-we-can-do-about-it?fbclid=IwAR2NFcE74LOhTsrjRuGKdYeRghXUe3sbhzN-88wI9NDldiAK_w9N0PE1AQ Reprinted with permission

“Every white person in this country — I do not care what he says or what she says — knows one thing. ... They know that they would not like to be Black here. If they know that, they know everything they need to know. And whatever else they may say is a lie.” — James Baldwin, “Speech at the University of California Berkeley,” 1979

It has never been easy to be Black in America. Still, the past few months have pushed me to depths of outrage, pain and despondency that are unmatched in my 63 years of life. Look at what has transpired:

- The COVID-19 pandemic showed that while all might be vulnerable, we are not equally vulnerable. Blacks, Latinos and Native peoples are the vast majority of those infected and killed by this virus. In some places, the levels of “disparity” (such a sanitizing word!) are catastrophic. But as tragic as this is, it was entirely predictable and even expected. The contributing factors for this vulnerability have been documented for decades: lack of insurance, less access to healthcare, negligent treatment from and by healthcare professionals, overcrowded housing, unsafe and unsanitary working conditions. All of this compounded by how the least paid and protected workers are now considered “essential” and must be exposed to the virus’ hazards. As a young Black grocery clerk told me, “Essential is just a nice word for sacrificial.” Sacrificed for the comfort of those who can isolate and work from home, who are disproportionately white.

The past few months have pushed me to depths of outrage, pain and despondency that are unmatched in my 63 years of life.

- Ahmaud Arbery, an unarmed 25-year-old Black man, who was executed on Feb. 23 as three white men stalked him while he was jogging in Brunswick, Georgia. One of the killers had ties to local law enforcement. Only after public protests and the passing of 74 days were any arrests made and charges filed over this death.

- Breonna Taylor, a 26-year-old African American woman, who was killed by Louisville police officers on March 13 after they kicked in the door of her apartment unannounced and without identifying themselves. Fearful for their lives,

her boyfriend fired his lawfully possessed gun. Breonna was killed with eight bullets fired by three officers, under circumstances that have yet to be satisfactorily explained.

- Christian Cooper, a young Black man — a birdwatcher — who was reported to the police May 25 by Amy Cooper (no relation), a young white woman, who called 911 to say that “an African American man” was threatening her in New York’s Central Park merely because he had the gall to ask her to comply with the park’s posted regulations to leash her dog.

- George Floyd, an unarmed 46-year-old African American man, who was brutally killed on May 25 in Minneapolis by a white police officer who knelt on his neck for 8 minutes and 46 seconds, despite being restrained, despite the urgent requests of onlookers, despite his repeated desperate pleas: “I can’t breathe.”

- Omar Jimenez, a Black Latino CNN reporter, who was arrested on May 29 in the middle of doing live reports on events in Minneapolis, while a white CNN reporter doing the same thing, at the same time in the same neighborhood, was not only not arrested but was treated with “consummate politeness” by the authorities. The stark contrast was so jarring that Jimenez’s white colleagues noted that the only possible difference was the race of the reporters.

All of this weighs on my spirit. I try to pray, but inner quiet eludes me. I simply sit in silence on Pentecost weekend before a lit candle praying, “Come, Holy Spirit” as tears fall. Words fail me. I ponder the futility of speaking out, yet again, trying to think of how to say what has been said, what I have said, so often before.

Then it occurred to me. Amy Cooper holds the key.

The event in Central Park is not the most heinous listed above. The Black man didn’t die — thankfully. Compared to the others, it has received

little attention. But if you understand Amy Cooper, then all the rest, and much more, makes sense. And points the way forward.

White privilege

Let’s recall what Amy Cooper did. After a Black man tells her to obey the posted signs that require her to leash her dog in a public park, she tells him she’s going to call the police “and I’m going to tell them that there’s an African American man threatening my life.” Then she does just that, calling 911 and saying, “There’s a man, an African American, he has a bicycle helmet. He is recording me and threatening me and my dog.” She continues, in a breathless voice, “I’m being threatened by a man in the Ramble [a wooded area of Central Park]. Please send the cops immediately!” This despite the fact that Christian Cooper’s camera records the events and shows that he made no threatening moves toward her, spoke to her calmly and without insult, and kept his distance from her the whole time.

In short, she decided to call the police on a Black man for nothing more than politely asking her to obey the park’s rules. And made up a lie to put him in danger.

She knew what she was doing. And so do we. The situation is completely “legible” as my academic colleagues would say. What did she and rest of us know? Why did she act as she did?

- She assumed that her lies would be more credible than his truth.
- She assumed that she would have the presumption of innocence.
- She assumed that he, the Black man, would have a presumption of guilt.
- She assumed that the police would back her up.
- She assumed that her race would be an advantage, that she would be believed because she is white. (By the way, this is what we mean by white privilege).

- She assumed that his race would be a burden, even an insurmountable one.
- She assumed that the world should work for her and against him.
- She assumed that she had the upper hand in this situation.
- She assumed that she could exploit deeply ingrained white fears of Black men.
- She assumed that she could use these deeply ingrained white fears to keep a Black man in his place.
- She assumed that if he protested his innocence against her, he would be seen as “playing the race card.”
- She assumed that no one would accuse her of “playing the race card,” because no one accuses white people of playing the race card when using race to their advantage.
- She assumed that he knew that any confrontation with the police would not go well for him.
- She assumed that the frame of “Black rapist” versus “white damsel in distress” would be clearly understood by everyone: the police, the press and the public.
- She assumed that the racial formation of white people would work in her favor.
- She assumed that her knowledge of how white people view the world, and especially Black men, would help her.
- She assumed that a Black man had no right to tell her what to do.
- She assumed that the police officers would agree.
- She assumed that even if the police made no arrest, that a lot of white people would take her side and believe her anyway.
- She assumed that Christian Cooper could and would understand all of the above.
- (And she was right. He clearly knew what was at stake, which is why he had the presence of mind to record what happened).

I am not a mind reader. I have no access to Amy Cooper’s inner thoughts. But I know, and we all know, that without these assumptions, her words and actions — her lies — make no sense. We also have to admit that her assumptions are not

unreasonable. In fact, we have to admit that they are well-founded. They match what we know to be true about how the country works and about how too many white people think.

**The fundamental assumption
is that white people matter
more than people of color.
Amy Cooper knew that.
We all know that.**

All of this was the almost instantaneous reasoning behind her actions. By her own admission, she acted out of reflex. No one taught Amy Cooper all of this. Likely, no one gave her an explicit class on how whiteness works in America. But she knew what she was doing.

And so do we. We understand her behavior. We know how our culture frames whiteness and folks of color. We know how race works in America.

The fundamental assumption behind all the others is that white people matter, or should matter, more than people of color. Certainly more than Black people. That Black lives don’t matter, or at least not as much as white lives. That’s the basic assumption behind Amy Cooper’s decisions, actions and words. That’s the basic assumption that links Christian Cooper with COVID-19, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd and Omar Jimenez.

Amy Cooper knew that. We all know that. So who taught her? Who taught us?

The ways of whiteness

This is where things may get uncomfortable for most of you, who I assume (and hope) will be white. Because just as no one gave her an explicit class on the ways of whiteness and how it works in society — and for her — most likely you never received a formal class or explanation either. It’s just something that you know, or better, that you realize on some

distant yet real part of your brain. At some early age, you realized that no matter how bad things got for you, at least you would never be Black. And it dawned on you, though you rarely consciously say it, that you would never want to be Black. Because you realized, even without being explicitly told, that being white makes life easier. Even if you have to do some hard work along the way, at least you don't have to carry the burden of Blackness as a hindrance.

And if you're really honest, something else dawned somewhere in your mind. You realized that, if you wanted, by being white you could make things hard — much harder — for others. Especially Black folks.

How did you, how did I, how did we all learn this? No one taught you. No one had to. It's something that you absorbed just by living. Just by taking in subtle clues such as what the people in charge look like. Whose history you learned in school. What the bad guys look like on TV. The kind of jokes you heard. How your parents, grandparents and friends talked about people that didn't look like you.

I can hear some of you protesting. You don't want to admit this, especially your ability to make life rough for people of color. You don't want to face it. But Amy Cooper made the truth plain and obvious. She knew deep in her soul that she lived in a country where things should work in the favor of white people. She knew the real deal. We all do.

That's the reason for the grief, outrage, lament, anger, pain and fury that have been pouring into our nation's streets. Because folks are tired. Not only of the individual outrages. But of the fundamental assumption that ties them all together: that Black lives don't matter and should not matter — at least not as much as white ones.

We struggle to admit that Amy Cooper reveals what W.E.B. Du Bois calls “the souls of white folks.” Because, to quote James Baldwin again, facing the truth “would reveal more about

America to Americans than Americans want to know.” Or admit that they know.

What don't we want to admit? That Amy Cooper is not simply a rogue white person or a mean-spirited white woman who did an odious thing. Yes, we should and must condemn her words and actions. But we don't want to admit that there is a lot more to this story. That she knew, we all know, that she had the support of an unseen yet very real apparatus of collective thoughts, fears, beliefs, practices and history.

This is what we mean by systemic racism. I could call it white supremacy, although I know that white people find that term even more of a stumbling block than white privilege. Essayist Ta-Nehisi Coates gives the best short description of this complex reality called white supremacy. He describes it as “an age-old system in America which holds that whites should always be ensured that they will not sink to a certain level. And that level is the level occupied by Black people.” Amy Cooper knew that. And so do we. I could call it white supremacy, although I know that white people find that term even more of a stumbling block than white privilege.

We don't want to admit that Amy Cooper is not simply a bad white woman. We don't want to face the truth about America that her words and actions betray. We don't want to admit that present in Central Park that morning was the scaffolding of centuries-long accumulations of the benefits of whiteness. Benefits that burden people of color. Benefits that kill Black and brown people.

Without facing this truth, Amy Cooper's actions make no sense. She knew what she was doing. And so do we. Even if we do not want to admit it.

Where do we begin?

“But I don't know what to do with this information.” That's what a white male student declared in class after I gave a lecture detailing the long tragic history of medical experimentation and maltreatment inflicted upon African Americans

by the medical establishment, that is, by white doctors and nurses, by white hospitals, including Catholic institutions sponsored by white religious communities.

I understand the feelings of helplessness, confusion and even despondency that can afflict us. It's easy to be overwhelmed by the magnitude of the problem, by the immense weight of centuries of accumulated fear, resentment, privilege and righteous anger. It can be shocking to confront the vastness of this nation's commitment to white benefit and advantage. Where do we begin?

Let me be more specific: what are white people to do now that they know that they know what Amy Cooper knows — assuming they want to do anything? (The reason for the specificity will become clear).

First, understand the difference between being uncomfortable and being threatened. There is no way to tell the truth about race in this country without white people becoming uncomfortable.

**There is no way to tell the truth
about race in this country
without white people
becoming uncomfortable**

Because the plain truth is that if it were up to people of color, racism would have been resolved, over and done, a long time ago. The only reason for racism's persistence is that white people continue to benefit from it.

Repeat that last sentence. Make it your mantra. Because until the country accepts that truth, we will never move beyond superficial words and ineffective half-measures.

The only reason for racism's persistence is that white people continue to benefit from it.

Repeat that sentence.

Make it your mantra.

The only reason for racism's persistence is that white people continue to benefit from it.

Systemic racism benefits white people. That's the truth that Amy Cooper knew and that we all know. That truth supports all the assumptions that sustain the racial craziness and insanity in which we live. I know that bluntly stating that systemic racism benefits white people makes people — especially white people — uncomfortable. I also feel a pang of discomfort in being so direct. (I know the kinds of online comments and emails that are sure to follow.)

But avoiding and sugarcoating this truth is killing people of color. Silence for the sake of making white people comfortable is a luxury we can no longer afford.

If white people are unwilling to face very uncomfortable truths, then the country is doomed to remain what Abraham Lincoln called "a house divided." And he warned that such a house cannot stand.

What to do next? Nothing. Sit in the discomfort this hard truth brings. Let it become agonizing. Let it move you to tears, to anger, to guilt, to shame, to embarrassment. Over what? Over your ignorance. Over the times you went along with something you knew was wrong. Or when you told a racist joke because you could. Because you knew that your white friends and family would let you get away with it, or even join in. Because you thought it was "just a joke." Or the times you wouldn't hire the person of color because you knew your white employees would have a problem with it and you didn't want the hassle. Or when you knew the person of color was in the right, but it was easier not to upset your white friends. Or

wealthy donors, who are almost always white. (By the way, the wealth disparity didn't just happen nor is it due to Black and brown folks' laziness. Look at the complexions of our "essential workers" for proof.) Most of all, feel the guilt, the pain, the embarrassment over doing nothing and saying nothing when you witnessed obvious racism.

Stay in the discomfort, the anxiety, the guilt, the shame, the anger. Because only when a critical mass of white folks are outraged, grieved and pained over the status quo — only when white people become upset enough to declare, "This cannot and will not be!" — only then will real change begin to become a possibility.

Third, admit your ignorance and do something about it.

Understand that there is a lot about our history and about life that we're going to have to unlearn. And learn over. Malcolm X said that the two factors responsible for American racism are greed and skillful miseducation. We have all been taught a sanitized version of America that masks our terrible racial history.

For example, most of my white students — and students of color, too — know nothing of the terror of lynching. They don't know that for a 30-year period from 1885-1915, on average every third day a Black person was brutally and savagely and publicly murdered by white mobs. This wasn't taught, or it was taught to mean only that, in the words of a white student, "some people got beat up real bad." (Note the passive voice, which obscures who did these beatings and why).

Yet without knowing this history, the Civil Rights Movement only becomes a feel-good story about desegregation and bringing races together — sharing schools, drinking fountains and (maybe) neighborhoods. The brutal, savage and sadistic violence that whites inflicted with impunity upon

Black — and brown and Asian — people in order to defend "white supremacy" (their words, not mine) is never faced. Nor do we have to face the truth that most racial violence in our history has been and continues to be inflicted by whites against people of color.

To create a different world, we must learn how this one came to be. And unlearn what we previously took for granted. This means that we have to read. And learn from the perspectives of people of color. (Not to toot my own horn, but my book *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church* is a good place to start).

Have the courage
to confront
your family
and friends.

Demand that your parish and diocese sponsor not just an evening on race, but a whole series. How about during Lent? Tell your priests and religious education directors to make anti-racism a staple feature of their homilies and your children's religious formation. Insist that your children learn a truer picture of the world than you did, and not only during Black History Month.

Take a stand and say you'll take your presence and dollars elsewhere if they don't. And when they do the right thing, write them a note of support — because, trust me, they will hear plenty from the other side.

While you're at it, **write your bishop and ask how anti-racism is part of your church leaders' formation for ministry.** Ask how he is actively educating himself to become anti-racist. Let him know that if seminarians and candidates for ministry and religious life are unwilling or unable to be actively anti-racist, then they do not have a vocation for church leadership since they haven't embraced a fundamental requirement of Christian discipleship.

Fourth, have the courage to confront your family and friends. I tell my white students that they will see and hear more naked racial bigotry than I do.

Because when I am in the room, everyone knows how to act. Sociologist Joe Feagin documents how white people behave one way when on the “front stage,” that is, in public. But “backstage,” in the company of fellow whites, a different code of behavior prevails. Here racist acts and words are excused: “That’s just the way your father was raised.” “Your grandmother is of a different generation.” “It’s just a joke.” “But deep down, he’s really a good person.” “But if you ignore all that, he’s a really fun person to be with.” “You can’t choose your family, but you gotta love them anyway.” “It’s only once a year.” “I wish he wouldn’t talk that way. But you can’t change how people feel.”

I understand the desire to have peaceful or at least conflict-free relationships with family and friends. But as the Rev. Martin Luther King said so well, “There comes a time when silence is betrayal.” Silence means consent. Or at least, complicity.

Until white people call out white people, there will always be safe places for racial ugliness to brew and fester. And people like Amy Cooper will continue to assume that white people will always have their backs, no matter what. And they won’t be wrong. And Black people will continue to die.

Fifth, be “unconditionally pro-life.” These are the words of St. Pope John Paul II from his final pastoral visit to the United States. He summoned Catholics to “eradicate every form of racism” as part of their wholehearted and essential commitment to life.

This has a very serious consequence: You cannot vote for or support a president who is blatantly racist, mocks people of color, separates Latino families and consigns brown children into concentration camps, and still call yourself “pro-life.” We need to face, finally and at long last, the uncomfortable yet real overlap between the so-called “pro-life” movement and the advocates of racial intolerance.

In the name of our commitment to life, we must

challenge not only these social policies, but also the attitude that cloaks support for racism under the guise of being “pro-life.” John Paul declared that racism is a life issue. Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd and the many Black and brown victims of COVID-19 prove it. It is way past time for Catholics to become “unconditionally pro-life.”

In the name of our commitment to life, we must challenge not only these social policies, but also the attitude that cloaks support for racism under the guise of being “pro-life.”

Finally, pray. Yes, racism is a political issue and a social divide. But at its deepest level, racism is a soul sickness. It is a profound warping of the human spirit that enables human beings to create communities of callous indifference toward their darker sisters and brothers. Stripped to its core, white supremacy is a disturbing interior disease, a malformed consciousness that enables white people to not care for those who don’t look like them. As historian Paul Wachtel succinctly declares in his book *Race in the Mind of America*, “The real meaning of race comes down largely to this: Is this someone I should care about?”

This soul sickness can only be healed by deep prayer. Yes, we need social reforms. We need equal educational opportunities, changed police practices, equitable access to health care, an end to employment and housing discrimination. But only an invasion of divine love will shatter the small images of God that enable us to live undisturbed by the racism that benefits some and terrorizes so many.

In her essay, “The Desire for God and the Transformative Power of Contemplation,” Baltimore Carmelite Sr. Constance FitzGerald writes, “The time will come when God’s light will invade our lives and show us everything we have avoided seeing. Then will be manifest the confinement of our carefully constructed

meanings, the limitations of our life projects, the fragility of the support systems or infrastructures on which we depend ... [and] the darkness in our own heart.”

**This soul sickness
can only be healed
by deep prayer.**

God’s love is subversive and destructive. It exposes self-serving political ideologies as shortsighted and corrosive.

And yet FitzGerald and the Carmelite tradition insist that God subverts our plans and projects for the sake of new life. FitzGerald relates how, through unmasking the shallowness of our “achievements,” God leads us to “new minds, as well as new intuitions, new wills, and passionate new desires.”

Perhaps, then, the grace of this dark time in our nation is that it reveals how racially toxic our politics, society and culture have truly become, in order to spur us to build a new culture based not on the exploitation of fear but on solidarity with and for the least among us.

We need to pray for a new infusion of the Spirit and for the courage to let this Spirit transform our hearts. Come, Holy Spirit!
(Do we dare to really make that our prayer?)

Is this enough?

I can hear some of you saying, “But is this enough?” I am under no illusion that these actions, by themselves, can erase the accumulated debris of centuries of commitment to white preference and Black detriment. None of us can do all that is required at this moment.

But just because we cannot do everything doesn’t mean we should not do something. We are not as helpless as we fear. Moreover, helplessness is an emotion that we cannot afford to indulge. As James Baldwin believed, despair is an option that only the comfortable can afford to entertain.

We can create a new society, one where more and more people will challenge the assumptions of white racial privilege that sustain Amy Cooper’s universe. Our universe. One built on a different set of assumptions, one where all lives truly do matter because Black lives finally will matter.

I end with the final words of *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church*:

Social life is made by human beings. The society we live in is the outcome of human choices and decisions. This means that human beings can change things. What humans break, divide, and separate, we can — with God’s help — also heal, unite, and restore.

What is now does not have to be. Therein lies the hope. And the challenge.

***Come, Holy Spirit!
Fill the hearts of your faithful.
Enkindle within us the fire of your love.
Come, Holy Spirit!
Breathe into us a fiery passion for justice.
Especially for those who have the breath of life
crushed from them.***

Amen.

Fr. Bryan N. Massingale is a theology professor at Fordham University in New York. He is the author of [Racial Justice and the Catholic Church](#).

Essential Reading # 2: Prayer Before Reflecting

Litany for Those Not Ready for Healing

by Dr. Yolanda Pierce

Let us not rush to the language of healing, before understanding the fullness of the injury and the depth of the wound.

Let us not rush to offer a bandaid, when the gaping wound requires surgery and complete reconstruction.

Let us not offer false equivalencies, thereby diminishing the particular pain being felt in a particular circumstance in a particular historical moment.

Let us not speak of reconciliation without speaking of reparations and restoration, or how we can repair the breach and how we can restore the loss.

Let us not rush past the loss of this mother's child, this father's child...someone's beloved son.

Let us not value property over people; let us not protect material objects while human lives hang in the balance.

Let us not value a false peace over a righteous justice.

Let us not be afraid to sit with the ugliness, the messiness, and the pain that is life in community together.

Let us not offer clichés to the grieving, those whose hearts are being torn asunder.

Instead...

Let us mourn Black and brown men and women, those killed extrajudicially every 28 hours.

Let us lament the loss of a teenager, dead at the hands of a police officer who described him as a demon.

Let us weep at a criminal justice system, which is neither blind nor just.

Let us call for the mourning men and the wailing women, those willing to rend their garments of privilege and ease, and sit in the ashes of this nation's original sin.

Let us be silent when we don't know what to say.

Let us be humble and listen to the pain, rage, and grief pouring from the lips of our neighbors and friends.

Let us decrease, so that our brothers and sisters who live on the underside of history may increase.

Let us pray with our eyes open and our feet firmly planted on the ground

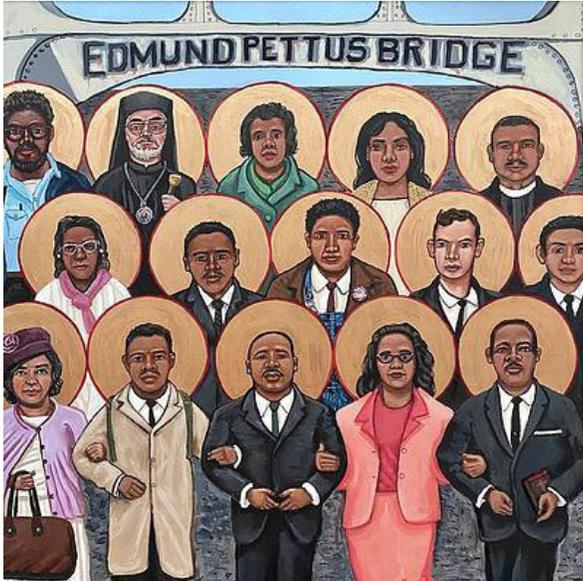
Let us listen to the shattering glass and let us smell the purifying fires, for it is the language of the unheard.

God, in your mercy...

Show me my own complicity in injustice. Convict me for my indifference. Forgive me when I have remained silent. Equip me with a zeal for righteousness. Never let me grow accustomed or acclimated to unrighteousness.

Amen.

Essential Reading # 2: Reflection & Dialogue



“The Saints of Selma”

Kelly Latimore
Used with permission

Stay in the discomfort, the anxiety, the guilt, the shame, the anger. Because only when a critical mass of white folks are outraged, grieved and pained over the status quo — only when white people become upset enough to declare, “This cannot and will not be!” — only then will real change begin to become a possibility.

Fr. Bryan Massingale

Fr. Massingale begins his essay with a very personal reflection. He says that “It has never been easy to be Black in America. Still, the past few months have pushed me to depths of outrage, pain and despondency that are unmatched in my 63 years of life.”

How have you responded to the past few months of seeing so much violence against Black women and men? Have you felt outrage, pain, despondency? Have you had other feelings?

Fr. Massingale points out that there is no way to discuss racism, white privilege, and white supremacy without making white people feel uncomfortable.

Do you agree with Fr. Massingale? To what extent have you felt uncomfortable confronting your own white privilege?

Fr. Massingale exhorts us to have the courage to confront our family, friends, colleagues, and people in our Catholic parishes and communities when racist language is spoken. He notes that white people behave one way when in public, but in the company of fellow whites, a different code of behavior prevails. Here racist acts and words are excused.

Think of a time when you heard racist language, racist jokes, and racist speech from a family member or friend. What did you do then? What might you do now?



Mother Mary Lange
Artist: Chloe Becker, 2020

No lie can live forever.

Martin Luther King Jr.

The denial of
the dignity and sanctity
of Black life
is a part of the DNA
of this country.

It is also
a foundational sin
of the American
Catholic Church.

Dr. Shannen Dee Williams

Ways to Take Action

From Fr. Bryan Massingale and Dr. Shannen Dee Williams

- **Admit your ignorance**, do something about it.
- **Confront your racism. Sit with the discomfort.** There is no way to tell the truth about race in this country without white people becoming uncomfortable.
- **Confront racism elsewhere** your family, friends, and colleagues courageously. Do not be silent. Until white people call out white people, there will always be safe places for racial ugliness.
- **Demand** that your parish and diocese sponsor a series on race. Tell your priests, religious educators, and ministers of the Word to make anti-racism a regular feature of their homilies and religious formation.
- **Contact your bishop** and ask how anti-racism is part of your church leaders' formation for ministry. Ask him to require the teaching of Black and Brown Catholic history in every Catholic educational institution.
- **Work for reparative justice.** Work to stop the closings of active African American parishes while reinvesting in and expanding the Black Catholic educational system.
- **Work in your community to protect Black lives**, eliminate racism in our systems, end mass incarceration, and secure police reform and accountability.



Witnessing for Racial Justice Prayer Service

Opening Song: *Open My Eyes* J. Manibusan

*Open my eyes, God, help me to see your face.
Open my eyes, God, help me to see.*

*Open my ears, God, help me to hear your voice.
Open my ears, God, help me to hear.*

*Open my heart, God, help me to love like you.
Open my heart, God, help me to love.*

Opening Prayer:
The prayer leader welcomes the gathered community and invites all to pray:

LEADER: We give you thanks, O God,
That you speak to us
in ways that often surprise.
And so we pause once more
to remind ourselves to listen for your voice
and to ask for your grace.

ALL: Open our eyes to read the signs of the times.
Open our ears to hear the voices of the poor and oppressed;
the voices of our Black siblings who are enduring the violence and dehumanization
of white supremacy and white privilege in our communities and in our institutions.
Open our hearts that we might see anew and work together
for a new way of being church.

We ask this in the name of Jesus
and the communion of Black saints who are with us and who have gone before us,
that we, your church, might be transformed. AMEN.

Scripture Reading: 1 Kings 19: 11-15

Then God said [to Elijah]: “Go out and stand on the mountain before the Eternal; I will pass by.”

There was a strong and violent wind rending the mountains and crushing rocks before God—but God was not in the wind; after the wind, an earthquake—but God was not in the earthquake; after the earthquake, fire—but God was not in the fire; after the fire, a light silent sound.

When he heard this, Elijah hid his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave.

A voice said to him, “Why are you here, Elijah?”

He replied, “I have been most zealous for God, the Eternal, but the Israelites have forsaken your covenant. They have destroyed your altars and murdered your prophets by the sword. I alone remain, and they seek to take my life.”

God said to him: Go back!

The Word of God
Thanks be to God!

Listening for the Voice of God:

Our Scripture reading reminds us that God often speaks to us in surprising ways and in surprising places. The passage also reveals a truth that so many of us know from experience: the voice of God often asks us to “move.” Normally the movement God is calling us to make, as individuals and as institutions, is a “metanoia” – a conversion of our very way of being and doing in the world. We take a moment now to listen for God’s voice.

Sung Response: *I’m Gonna Do What the Spirit Says Do* Traditional Spiritual

*I’m gonna move when the Spirit says ‘move’
I’m gonna move when the Spirit says ‘move’
When the Spirit says ‘move, I’m gonna move, oh yeah,
I’m gonna move when the Spirit says ‘move’*

Readings

The witness of Philonise Floyd, brother of George Floyd who was murdered on May 25, 2020 by police officer Derek Chauvin, who knelt on George’s neck for 8 minutes and 46 seconds as he cried out for his mother.

George always made sacrifices for our family. And he made sacrifices for complete strangers. He gave the little that he had to help others. He was our gentle giant. I was reminded of that when I watched the video of his murder. He called all of the officers “sir”. He was mild mannered; he didn’t fight back. He listened to all the officers. The men who took his life, who suffocated him for eight minutes and 46 seconds – he still called them “sir” as he begged for his life.

I can’t tell you the kind of pain you feel when you watch something like that. When you watch your big brother, who you’ve looked up to your whole entire life, die? Die begging for his mom? I’m tired! I’m tired

of pain, the pain you feel when you watch something like that. I'm here today to ask you to make it stop. Stop the pain. Stop us from being tired.

Sung Response

The witness of Shannen Dee Williams, an African American Catholic and Historian

Slattery, John (2015, May 05). *The Church is Not Yet Dead: An Interview with Dr. Shannen Dee Williams*. *Daily Theology*. <https://dailytheology.org/2015/05/05/the-church-is-not-yet-dead-an-interview-with-dr-shannen-dee-williams/>

For the longest time, I could not wrap my mind around my mother's staunch loyalty to the Catholic Church, especially since I knew her experiences in the Church had been less than ideal. You see, my mother was in the first class of women admitted to the University of Notre Dame in 1972, and I grew up with a large, extended family that often celebrated the fact my mother was Notre Dame's first Black woman graduate.

But, over the years, I watched my mother cringe every time the fact was mentioned and quickly change the subject. When I finally mustered up enough courage to ask my mother about her experiences at Notre Dame, she simply intimated that it was better left unspoken and immediately tried to change the subject. When I pushed harder, she made it plain that she did not want me to attend Notre Dame for college and then shut down completely.

I know my mother's experiences must have been truly horrific, which of course left me fiercely resistant to the idea of remaining in the Church as I left home for college.

But, I stayed—in large part because of my mother's influence, but also because worshiping in Atlanta's historically Black Catholic parishes during college finally taught me that racism and white supremacy did not have to be a defining part of my church experience.

My journey in the Catholic Church, like my journey as an American citizen, has been frequently peppered with experiences of overt and covert racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination. As a consequence, there have been more than a few times when I felt that I needed to leave the Church for my own sanity and survival. Yet, I have refused to abandon my faith or the Church of my birth.

While loyalty to my devout Catholic, African-American mother and attending predominantly Black and thoroughly integrated parishes (when able) kept me in the Church through my mid-twenties, my "discovery" of Black Catholic history during my doctoral studies at Rutgers cemented my resolve to remain in the Church. It also helped me to understand that Black people have never been marginal to Catholic history and that the most authentic expressions of Catholicism have always come from the marginalized and the dispossessed.

U.S. Catholic history is filled with extraordinary testimonies of African-American faith and resilience in the face of strident white supremacy and unholy discrimination. Everyday I am strengthened by the fearlessness embodied by those African-American Catholics who steadfastly refused to abandon the faith even after they were forced to sit in segregated pews, relegated to the back of Communion lines, or physically thrown out of parishes by white Catholics, religious and lay, solely on the basis of race.

Indeed, Our faith is based on the belief in the death and resurrection of a brown social revolutionary who was put to death by the state for declaring with his words and actions that the lives of the poor, marginalized, and dispossessed matter. If the U.S. Catholic Church, and indeed the global Church,

cannot collectively respond to the ever expanding #BlackLivesMatter movement in an uncompromisingly supportive and radical way, then the Church (in its present structure) is DEAD. But I do not believe that the Church is yet dead.

Sung Response

The witness of Tamika Palmer, the mother of Breonna Taylor who was killed by police officers who entered her home in Louisville while she was asleep. <https://www.thecut.com/2020/06/breonna-taylors-mother-speaks-on-her-daughters-birthday.html>

I was always telling [Breonna] growing up, “We got to change history.”

I just think she was destined to be great. Breonna just loved life, and people gravitated towards her. She lit up a room and had this aura about herself. She was everybody’s Mama. She was everybody’s counselor. She wanted to take care of and protect everybody. She did everything right. She always wanted to do anything that would help her be a better friend, a daughter, a girlfriend.

I was definitely in awe of her. For her to die the way she did was a smack in the face. It just feels like they took a piece of me. It’s hard to breathe without her. It’s hard to think without her.

Sung Response

The witness of Olga Marina Segura, a freelance writer and the opinion editor at National Catholic Reporter who previously served as associate editor at America Media and was a co-founder and former co-host of the podcast, “Jesuitical.”

Every day, Black women and men are faced with the reality that in America, all it takes is one person to see your body and the color of your skin as a threat. Black people are routinely viewed by white citizens and police as suspicious, dangerous and unworthy.

Many Black and brown Catholics are turning to the church for solace, only to find, at worst, silence, and at best, a delayed response.

Black people are suffering. How can the church show that it is listening?

Sung Response

The Witness of Adrienne Andrews Harris from St. Peter Claver parish in Philadelphia <https://why.org/segments/saying-goodbye-to-philadelphias-first-Black-catholic-church/>

(For the last 30 years, former parishioners of St. Peter Claver have hoped for a miracle. They have prayed, lobbied, and begged for some intervention that will revive their church, officially closed by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia in 2014. They have appealed for help from everyone they could think to ask, including writing Pope Francis at the Vatican. Their efforts slowed but did not stave off the Archdiocese’s closure or now its plan to sell the 176-year-old church.)

I don’t want [St. Peter Claver] sold.

I think the history is too important, especially at this time when this country is so racially divided and things are so ugly. This is not a time to throw out Black history.

This is holy ground. Our ancestors had their feet here. They sat in these pews... but anything Black is replaceable.

Sung Response

The witness of Tia Noelle Pratt, sociologist of religion and the scholar-in-residence at the Aquinas Center in Philadelphia <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2019/09/18/there-time-church-support-Black-catholics-if-it-has-will-do-so>

As the Catholic landscape changes, the centers of Catholic life in the United States are seeing many schools and churches close, with parishes being reorganized accordingly.

These changes disproportionately impact the poor and racial minorities. At a time when economic inequality is growing rapidly and the effects of racism are being felt more strongly than at perhaps any time in the last 50 years, Black Catholics who need their church the most are losing their resources.

The moment has not passed. The work of racial justice is ongoing. There is still time for church leadership to stand with and for young people if they only have the will to do so.

Sung Response

The witness of Leslye Colvin, writer, teacher, activist

<https://www.leslyecolvin.me/leslyeslabyrinth1/2020/11/20/pierce-your-hearts-desire-in-black-catholic-history-month>

As we prepare to enter a new liturgical year, 2020 will be remembered as a most challenging one for the Body of Christ on this land. We have witnessed and are struggling with the convergence of a flawed ideology of white body supremacy with an equally flawed sense of Christian nationalism. Both are threats to the Body of Christ and especially to those of us who identify as BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color).

A Catholic with a white body recently asked me what she could do to dissuade the anger and hurt of those of us with Black bodies. Our anger and hurt are warranted in all aspects of society including our beloved Church. My guidance is to learn and to listen so that when the Spirit provides an opportunity, you may respond accordingly. Learn about the lived experience of Catholics with Black bodies. Listen to that which brings you discomfort. Begin to see what you have been socialized not to see.

Mark Black Catholic History Month 2020 as a new beginning for you and your family. Contemplate our 400-year old journey. Hear our litany. Allow this cry to accompany you and pierce your heart's desire.

The witness of Fr. Bryan Massingale, professor of Ethics at Fordham University <https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/assumptions-white-privilege-and-what-we-can-do-about-it>

It has never been easy to be Black in America. Still, the past few months have pushed me to depths of outrage, pain and despondency that are unmatched in my 63 years of life.

The COVID-19 pandemic showed that while all might be vulnerable, we are not equally vulnerable. Blacks, Latinos and Native peoples are the vast majority of those infected and killed by this virus.

Ahmaud Arbery, an unarmed 25-year-old Black man, was executed on Feb. 23 as three white men stalked him while he was jogging in Brunswick, Georgia.

Breonna Taylor, a 26-year-old African American woman, was killed by Louisville police officers on March 13 after they kicked in the door of her apartment unannounced and without identifying themselves.

Christian Cooper, a young Black man — a birdwatcher — was reported to the police May 25 by Amy Cooper (no relation), a young white woman, who called 911 to say that “an African American man” was threatening her in New York’s Central Park merely because he had the gall to ask her to comply with the park’s posted regulations to leash her dog.

George Floyd, an unarmed 46-year-old African American man, was brutally killed on May 25 in Minneapolis by a white police officer who knelt on his neck for 8 minutes and 46 seconds, despite being restrained, despite the urgent requests of onlookers, despite his repeated desperate pleas: “I can’t breathe.”

Omar Jimenez, a Black Latino CNN reporter, was arrested on May 29 in the middle of doing live reports on events in Minneapolis, while a white CNN reporter doing the same thing, at the same time in the same neighborhood, was not only not arrested but was treated with “consummate politeness” by the authorities.

All of this weighs on my spirit. I try to pray, but inner quiet eludes me. I simply sit in silence on Pentecost weekend before a lit candle praying, “Come, Holy Spirit” as tears fall. Words fail me. I ponder the futility of speaking out, yet again, trying to think of how to say what has been said, what I have said, so often before. Then it occurred to me. Amy Cooper holds the key. The event in Central Park is not the most heinous listed above. But if you understand Amy Cooper, then all the rest, and much more, makes sense.

After a Black man tells her to obey the posted signs that require her to leash her dog in a public park, she tells him she’s going to call the police “and I’m going to tell them that there’s an African American man threatening my life.” Then she does just that, calling 911.

She knew what she was doing. And so do we.

She assumed that her lies would be more credible than his truth.

She assumed that she would have the presumption of innocence.

She assumed that he, the Black man, would have a presumption of guilt.

She assumed that the police would back her up.

She assumed that her race would be an advantage, that she would be believed because she is white. (By the way, this is what we mean by white privilege).

No one taught Amy Cooper all of this. Likely, no one gave her an explicit class on how whiteness works in America. But she knew what she was doing. And so do we. We know how race works in America.

So who taught her? Who taught us?

It’s something that you absorbed just by living. Just by taking in subtle clues such as what the people in charge look like.

That’s the reason for the grief, outrage, lament, anger, pain and fury that have been pouring into our nation’s streets. Because folks are tired. Not only of the individual outrages. But of the fundamental assumption that ties them all together: that Black lives don’t matter and should not matter — at least not as

much as white ones. This is what we mean by systemic racism.

The only reason for racism's persistence is that white people continue to benefit from it.

Repeat that last sentence. Make it your mantra.

Sung Response

Reflection: *allow for silent reflection, or a shared reflection by the group*

In whose witness do you hear the voice of God calling you or our church to move or change our way of being and doing?

What might be a faithful response to that call?

Prayers of Petition

LEADER: Confident that God always hears us, we now lift up our voices in prayer.

Response: Hear us, O God.

For our Black siblings and their families and communities who have suffered unimaginable violence in our country. May we stand in solidarity and love with them and have the courage to fight racism and white supremacy where ever it is found, we pray:

For our white siblings, that they may hear and respond faithfully to the voice of Christ calling us to both personal and communal conversion and transformation. When our prophets speak, may they will have the courage and humility to listen, we pray:

For the leaders of nations; that they may to give voice to justice and compassion in our chaotic, tumultuous, and divided world, we pray:

For those who carry truths that must be spoken; may they be strengthened by Christ and the People of God in their prophetic work, we pray:

For those who are rendered voiceless by those in power; that we – and all people of good will – come forth to be their advocates, we pray:

For all of us gathered here; that we we may open ourselves to God who speaks to and through us, we pray:

And for the prayers we now voice we pray:

Closing Prayer

LEADER: Holy God,

Let us take the words we have heard today deep into our hearts.

May we find the strength to transform ourselves and our world

so that all may truly live together as your people in justice, peace, and in the fullness of life you have promised.

Together, let us pray:

(prayer by Dr. Yolanda Pierce)

Let us not rush to the language of healing,
before understanding the fullness of the injury and the depth of the wound.

Let us not rush to offer a bandaid,
when the gaping wound requires surgery and complete reconstruction.

Let us not offer false equivalencies,
thereby diminishing the particular pain being felt in a particular circumstance
in a particular historical moment.

Let us not speak of reconciliation without speaking of reparations and restoration,
or how we can repair the breach and how we can restore the loss.

Let us not rush past the loss of this mother's child, this father's child...someone's beloved son.

Let us not value property over people;
let us not protect material objects while human lives hang in the balance.

Let us not value a false peace over a righteous justice.

Let us not be afraid to sit with the ugliness, the messiness, and the pain t
hat is life in community together.

Let us not offer clichés to the grieving, those whose hearts are being torn asunder.

Instead...

Let us mourn Black and brown men and women, those killed extrajudicially every 28 hours.

Let us lament the loss of a teenager, dead at the hands of a police officer
who described him as a demon.

Let us weep at a criminal justice system, which is neither blind nor just.

Let us call for the mourning men and the wailing women,
those willing to rend their garments of privilege and ease,

Closing Song: We Shall Overcome

Civil Rights Anthem attributed to Charles Albert Tindley

We shall overcome

We shall overcome

We shall overcome some day

Oh, deep in my heart I do believe

We shall overcome some day

We'll walk hand in hand

We'll walk hand in hand

We'll walk hand in hand some day

Oh, deep in my heart I do believe

We shall overcome some day

We shall all be free

We shall all be free

We shall all be free some day

Oh, deep in my heart I do believe

We shall overcome some day

We are not afraid

We are not afraid

We are not afraid some day

Oh, deep in my heart I do believe

We shall overcome some day

We are not alone

We are not alone

We are not alone some day

Oh, deep in my heart I do believe

We shall overcome some day...

WOMEN WITNESSES FOR RACIAL JUSTICE



*Mural at Magnificat High School
Artist: Chloe Becker*

Select resource list

THE MOST COMPREHENSIVE READING LIST

#BlackCatholicSyllabus by Tia Noelle Pratt

<https://tiapratt.com/Blackcatholicssyllabus-2/>

BOOKS

- **Copeland, M. Shawn.** 2018. *Knowing Christ Crucified: The Witness of African American Religious Experience.* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books
- **Copeland, M. Shawn,** ed. With LaReine-Marie Mosely and Albert Raboteau. 2009. *Uncommon Faithfulness: The Black Catholic Experience.* Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books.
- **Davis, Cyprian.** 1990. *The History of Black Catholics in the United States.* New York: Crossroad Publishers.
- **Massingale, Bryan N.** 2010. *Racial Justice in the Catholic Church.* New York: Orbis Books.
- **Williams, Shannen Dee.** Forthcoming. *Subversive Habits: Black Nuns and the Struggle to Desegregate Catholic American after World War I.*

WEBSITES

- **Black Catholic Theological Symposium** <http://www.bcts.org/>
- **Institute for Black Catholic Studies** <https://www.xula.edu/ibcs>
- **National Association of Black Catholic Administrators** <http://nabcatholic.org/>

- **National Black Sister's Conference** <https://www.nbsc68.com/>
- **National Black Catholic Congress** <https://www.nbccongress.org/>

ARTICLES

- **Black Catholic Women: Voice Embodied** by Kathleen Dorsey Bellow
<https://www.ncronline.org/news/coronavirus/Black-catholic-women-voice-embodied>
- **Black Lives Matter in a Worshipping Church** by Kim Harris
<https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/Black-lives-matter-worshipping-church>
- **Black Sisters Urge Catholic Church Leaders to Do More to End Racism** by Carol Zimmeman
<https://cruxnow.com/church-in-the-usa/2020/09/Black-sisters-urge-u-s-catholics-church-leaders-to-do-more-to-end-racism/>
- **Black Theology and a Legacy of Oppression** by M. Shawn Copeland
<https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2014/06/24/Black-theology-and-legacy-oppression>
- **Chaos or Community: The Choice is Ours** by Sr. Nicole Trahan
<https://www.globalsistersreport.org/news/social-justice/column/chaos-or-community-choice-ours>
- **God is Beyond Race and Gender: It's Time Our Sacred Art is Too** by Bryan Massingale
<https://uscatholic.org/articles/202009/god-is-beyond-race-and-gender-its-time-our-sacred-art-is-too/>
- **How can Catholics help lead the fight against racism?** By Olga Segura.
<https://www.americamagazine.org/politics-society/2020/05/29/how-can-catholics-help-lead-fight-against-racism>
- **If Racial Justice and Peace Will Ever Be Attained, it Must Begin in the Church** by Shannen Dee Williams
<http://thedialog.org/opinion/if-racial-justice-and-peace-will-ever-be-attained-it-must-begin-in-the-church-shannen-dee-williams/>
- **My unbridled tongue challenges inequities that threaten Black women's lives** by Valerie Dee Lewis-Mosley
<https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/my-unbridled-tongue-challenges-inequities-threaten-Black-womens-lives>
- **Radical Habits: Unearthing the History of Black Catholic Nuns in the Black Freedom Struggle** by Shannen Dee Williams https://www.Blackwomenradicals.com/blog-feed/radicals-habits-unearthing-the-history-of-Black-catholic-nuns-in-the-Black-freedom-strugglenbsp?fbclid=IwAR2dww-YJVMo-Q_15EFElbyTOsRFDgSxYOeIoVocUOIP6v5iOasbEw_y8
- **The Assumptions of White Privilege and What We Can Do About It** By Bryan Massingale <https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/assumptions-white-privilege-and-what-we-can-do-about-it?fbclid=IwAR3kBtA0vtDkTjCMhXfbLkqwSI2bvMrLKNjHKRSGuBZwilhj-ttA9zdTMCU>
- **The Church is Not Dead Yet: An Interview with Dr. Shannen Dee Williams** by John Slattery
<https://dailytheology.org/2015/05/05/the-church-is-not-yet-dead-an-interview-with-dr-shannen-dee-williams/>

- **There is Time for the Church to Support Black Catholics if it has the Will to Do So** by Tia Noelle Pratt
<https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2019/09/18/there-time-church-support-Black-catholics-if-it-has-will-do-so>
- **To Conquer Racism, Become Truly Catholic** by Shannen Dee Williams
<https://catholicphilly.com/2019/12/commentaries/to-conquer-racism-become-truly-catholic/>
- **What Black Lives Matter Can Teach Catholics About Racial Justice** by Olga Segura
<https://www.americamagazine.org/politics-society/2019/02/01/what-Black-lives-matter-can-teach-catholics-about-racial-justice>

CATHOLIC WOMEN PREACH on Racial Justice

- **Dr. C. Vanessa White** We cannot predict the future, but we can allow ourselves to be open to receiving that Sweet Holy Spirit that will give us what we need in the days ahead.
<https://www.catholicwomenpreach.org/preaching/05312020>
- **Sr. Nicole Trahan, FMI** Progress cannot be made without struggle.
<https://www.catholicwomenpreach.org/preaching/08302020>
- **Shawnee M. Daniels-Sykes** For there is no difference between Jews and Samaritans, disabilities and abilities, men, women, and children, Black, brown, and white bodies. Yes, we are all one in Christ Jesus.”
<https://www.catholicwomenpreach.org/preaching/10132019>
- **Sr. Anita Baird, DHM** As disciples of Christ, it is our baptismal and Eucharistic responsibility to bring Jesus into the fullness of his glory by standing in solidarity with a sister or brother who is struggling to reclaim his or her human dignity, by working to chip away at the walls of division and hatred; and to bear witness in the breaking of the bread that at the banquet of the Lord there is no room for hatred or division. <https://www.catholicwomenpreach.org/preaching/04302017>
- **Sr. Anne Arabome, SSS** As an African woman Catholic, I have heard the voice of the Good Shepherd calling me by name, emboldening my imagination, and strengthening my resolve strive for fullness of life for me, for my sisters and for my brothers.
<https://www.catholicwomenpreach.org/preaching/05072017>
- **Dr. Marcia Chatelain** There is a temptation, that we all live with, in the United States and that is the temptation to serve racism, to serve inequality, to bow down before it in order to see the riches that we can have.
<https://www.catholicwomenpreach.org/preaching/03012020>
- **dr. timone davis*** Enemies and haters are obstacles set up to entice me to forget the promises of God. But I must remember “If God is for us who can be against us” (Romans 8:31)? We must never forget that the love God gives us, is God Herself.
<https://www.catholicwomenpreach.org/preaching/06282020>
(*dr. timone davis uses lower case letters in the spelling of her name to indicate her willingness to embody the credal assertion in John 3:30 in her everyday living)

- **Sr. Jamie Phelps, OP** Gang violence among and between Black, Latino, Asian and Euro American gangs[1] and Police brutality reveal ethnic-racial and class division and systemic oppression. God calls us to embody God's universal unconditional love. Only then does our true identity as the People of God become visible.
<https://www.catholicwomenpreach.org/preaching/11272016>
- **Dr. Jeannine Hill Fletcher** In Charlottesville, and Philadelphia, and New York City, people are finding the courage to stand and to march, to show up and stand against the blood the flows from White insecurities and White supremacies which refuse to acknowledge that Black Lives Matter.
<https://www.catholicwomenpreach.org/preaching/06302018>
- **Sr. Sara Fairbanks, OP** Like the Roman Empire, our country has subjugated other peoples for its own profit and prosperity. Pax Romana looks a lot like Pax Americana. A culture of racism continues in our own day. White privilege continues to promote unfair social and economic benefits for white citizens, while bringing cruel discrimination and costly disadvantages to people of color.
<https://www.catholicwomenpreach.org/preaching/12232018>
- **Dr. Kate Ott** The racist laws and practices that King and those in the civil rights movement sought to overturn were unjust. Throughout history, those with power have established and enforced laws, rules, even claimed they were fulfilling the commandments at the expense of the powerless.
<https://www.catholicwomenpreach.org/preaching/02162020>

RESOURCES FOR PRAYER/LITURGY

- **Black Catholic History Rosary** by Dr. Kirk P. Gaddy
<https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/cultural-diversity/african-american/upload/Rosary-for-50th-Aniversary.pdf>
- **The Gift of African American Sacred Song** by Sr. Thea Bowman
<https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/cultural-diversity/african-american/resources/upload/The-Gift-of-African-American-Sacred-Song-Sr-Thea-Bowman.pdf>

2017 National Black Catholic Caucus Priorities

In light of the theme of the XII National Black Catholic Congress, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me: act justly, love goodness, and walk humbly with your God”, we, the delegates of the Pastoral Plan of Action, propose the following as Pastoral Priorities:

We believe the Holy Spirit, who is Lord and Giver of Life, is upon us: Because of this, we recommit ourselves to live our Baptism as Catholics, be “authentically Black and truly Catholic” and seek leadership in our Church on all levels.

We commit ourselves to promote the causes for canonization of the five holy women and men being considered for sainthood in our Church.

We commit ourselves to act justly by living in proximity with those who are suffering and neglected. Specifically, we seek to promote the dignity and life of everyone person from the unborn to natural death. We commit ourselves to dismantle racism in all forms, which is an obstacle to justice and evangelization. We also commit ourselves to address the challenges of mental illness, mass incarceration, domestic violence and others.

We commit ourselves to love goodness by sharing our Faith with others using creative ways, especially social media, as we evangelize in our community. We commit ourselves to support our Catholic Schools in our community.

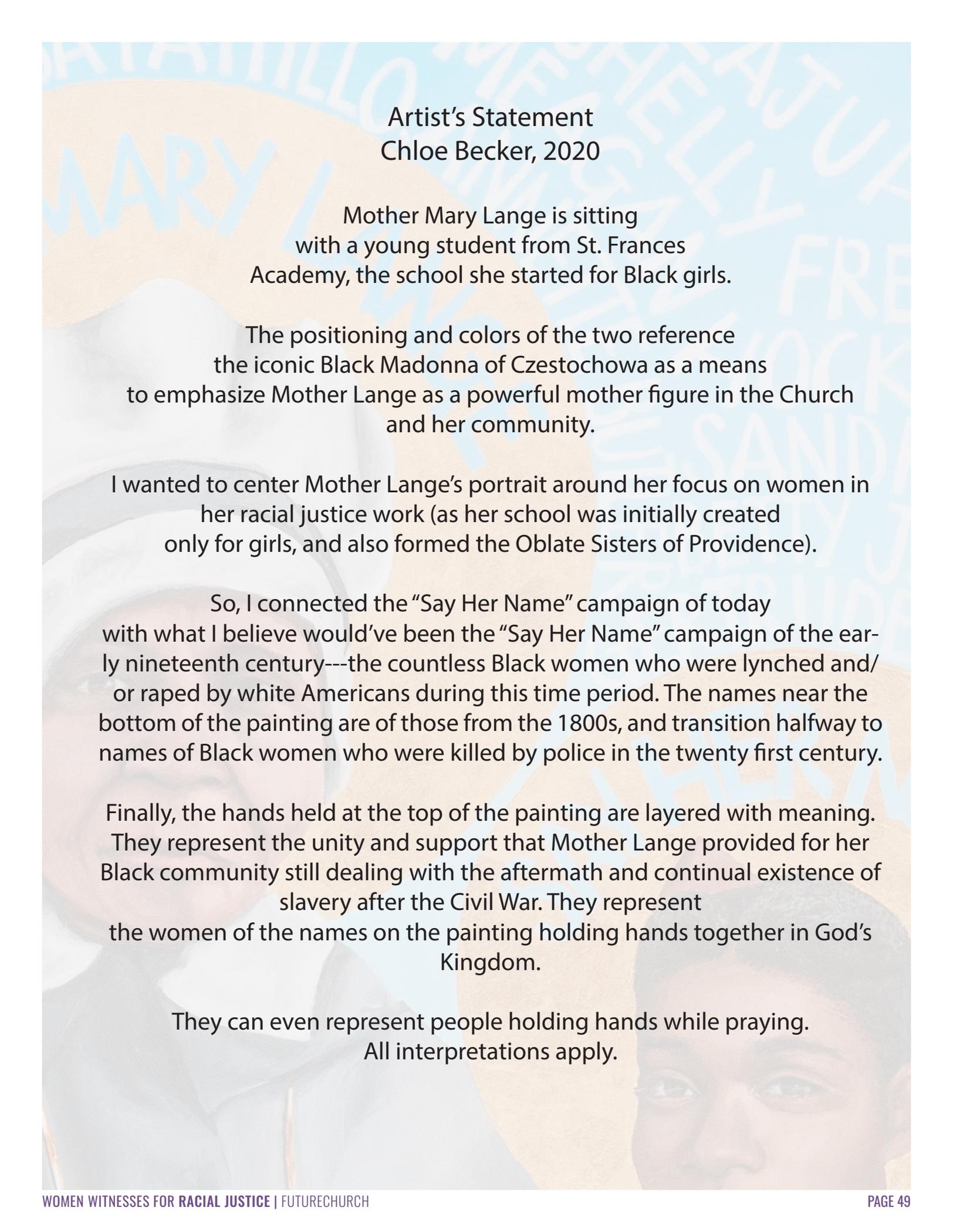
We commit ourselves to walk humbly with our God and affirm the universal call to holiness as it is lived out in all forms of vocations in our Church marriage, single life, consecrated women and men and clergy.

We commit ourselves to listen and respond to the needs of the youth and young adults in our community as we pass on this legacy of our Faith. We commit to align these priorities with the outcomes of the Convocation of Catholic Leaders as “missionary disciples” called to spread the joy of the Gospel.



Photo by Gail DeGeorge





Artist's Statement
Chloe Becker, 2020

Mother Mary Lange is sitting with a young student from St. Frances Academy, the school she started for Black girls.

The positioning and colors of the two reference the iconic Black Madonna of Czestochowa as a means to emphasize Mother Lange as a powerful mother figure in the Church and her community.

I wanted to center Mother Lange's portrait around her focus on women in her racial justice work (as her school was initially created only for girls, and also formed the Oblate Sisters of Providence).

So, I connected the "Say Her Name" campaign of today with what I believe would've been the "Say Her Name" campaign of the early nineteenth century---the countless Black women who were lynched and/or raped by white Americans during this time period. The names near the bottom of the painting are of those from the 1800s, and transition halfway to names of Black women who were killed by police in the twenty first century.

Finally, the hands held at the top of the painting are layered with meaning. They represent the unity and support that Mother Lange provided for her Black community still dealing with the aftermath and continual existence of slavery after the Civil War. They represent the women of the names on the painting holding hands together in God's Kingdom.

They can even represent people holding hands while praying.
All interpretations apply.