Deep Well of Your Heart

Dear Companion on the Journey,

Spirituality is that deep well of the heart that houses our treasured values and meanings. It is an active movement, an engaging energy source that runs through our core, challenging us to be our best selves.

When our spirituality is one of nonviolence, we intentionally and consciously seek to be and to act in ways that are consistent with the nonviolent Jesus whom we claim to follow.

When our spirituality of nonviolence is coupled with peacemaking, we seek to be finely attuned to the movements within and around us that are hostile, vengeful, and inconsistent with whom we say we are and to actively engage in doing something about these inconsistencies. We seek to be attentive to reading the signs of the times and to find ways to make peace possible within ourselves, our families, our neighborhoods, our workplaces, and in all of the communities of which we are a part.

A spirituality of nonviolence and peacemaking is dynamic, hope filled, counter cultural, and very much needed both in our country and in our world today. May this issue of The Peace Current nourish and challenge the deep well of your heart.

Peace of Christ,
Sr. Patricia Chappell, SNDdeN Executive Director
pchappell@paxchristiusa.org

National Gathering: Building the Beloved Community

125 people attended our 2016 National Gathering, “Building the Beloved Community” August 12-14 in Baltimore. We worked for peace with racial justice, participated in a block clean-up where Freddie Gray grew up (above,) and held workshops on Islamophobia (top right) and Immigration & Racism (bottom right.)
Internalizing Justice, Not Just Acting for It

by Sr. Rose Marie Tresp, RSM, Secretary - National Council

I am a child of the sixties, a child of the Civil Rights era. While attending Mount Saint Mary Academy in Little Rock, an almost all white girls’ high school, I read Black Like Me. This book was my introduction to our racist society. I then read the classics of that era such as Soul On Ice, Malcolm X, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, and Stride Toward Freedom. These books remain engraved in my memory. Yet, at that time, I was only peripherally aware of the integration struggles in the public schools.

After high school, I entered the Sisters of Mercy in Saint Louis with 17 other young women, several of them Mexican-American. I taught GED classes in the Pruitt-Igoe public housing in Saint Louis and attended workshops with women on welfare. However, racism, while an important issue for me, remained intellectual and needed to become personal.

I have come to realize that I must allow learning about injustices to change me and my lifestyle. I am passionate about racism, poverty, immigration, care of the earth, and other social justice issues. I constantly read about them and learn about them, and my ministry as the Director of Justice for my Mercy province means that I spend many hours every day on these issues.

But learning is not enough. While racism is a systemic issue, it is also deeply embedded in people’s psyches. As I have become more aware of my own internalized racism, it sometimes both surprises and embarrasses me. While staying for a few days at a Mercy retirement center where most of the aides were African-American, I saw one white aide. The unbidden thought came immediately to mind: Is she studying to be an RN? Why did I not think that about the other aides?

My white privilege periodically shocks me. For example, when I was stopped for a speeding ticket I was distracted about the cost of the ticket, and I did all the actions African-Americans are told not to do. I didn’t pull over right away. I leaned over and opened the glove compartment. I didn’t keep my hands on steering wheel. I did not have a car registration card. Yet the policeman was kind and even gave me advice on how to lower my speeding ticket cost.

Am I willing to change my internal landscape and my lifestyle in the pursuit of justice? I wonder sometimes if there are “safe” social justice issues that don’t require very much change. Does a focus on

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The Triplets: War, Racism, & Poverty

by Ed Martinez, Vice Chair - National Council

At our 2016 Pax Christi USA (PCUSA) National Gathering in Baltimore last month, Art Laffin, the PCUSA 2016 Teacher of Peace, spoke of our communal work to oppose the three pronged obstacle to peace - war, racism, and poverty. For some this is a difficult concept to absorb and incorporate into strategies for peacemaking. But for many, we are beginning to see the inseparable nature of this triple evil and its power to oppose peace with justice.

My own personal journey to understand the interconnection of war, racism, and poverty began with realizing how disingenuous we are as peacemakers to presume to work for world peace when so many in the United States live under the oppression of systemic racism and poverty. Do we really think these communities in situations of racism and poverty think of us as righteous and Christian when we focus on “world peace and justice” but remain ignorant to their struggles?

Tom Cordaro, PCUSA Ambassador of Peace, in An Anti-Racist Critique of Pax Christi USA’s Theology & Practice of Nonviolence, tells us “If we could fulfill the vision of Dr. King to create a unified movement to end militarism, racism and poverty (and if King were alive today he might add environmental destruction), we could effectively challenge the power of the corporate elites and their handmaidens in government, the media and on Wall Street. It is clear that working separately in our own narrowly defined areas of concern will not get us to the Promised Land.”

The specter of racism is integral in the way the U.S. conducts war. I came from a community in Los Angeles with many Japanese-American families; a number of my contemporaries were born in the Japanese internment camps during World War II. The internment camps were an entirely racist situation; a whole group of people were isolated from society because of how they looked. And these were third, fourth generation Americans who lost freedom and property without due process.

The dehumanizing racism towards Japanese – Americans allowed the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It was more acceptable to cause massive destruction on Japan, than say Germany, because we had already reduced people with Japanese features to less than human stereotypes. It is horrific how racism desensitizes us to violence enacted upon human beings we categorize as other, different, and ultimately less human.

How do we respond to the challenge of dismantling war, racism, and poverty? For me, I find it is best to

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Embracing Christ’s Call to Unity in Diversity

by Cece Campbell

I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity to have participated in the Pax Christi USA Anti-Racism Training. We listened to presenters speak on the history of racism in the Church and discussed our roles as active agents of change.

Revisiting the history of racism as it pertains to black Americans strengthened my understanding of the terrible realities of slavery. More importantly, it reinvigorated my desire to work for social justice and the elimination of modern day slavery, mass incarceration, and housing discrimination that affect today’s African-American community.

Furthermore, I was able to gain a greater understanding of similar struggles for the Latino community. One positive take away was the reminder that we should strive toward unity in diversity. We must not have a monolithic view of racial groups but celebrate the unity in diversity that Christ promises us.

As our Church in the U.S. continues to grow, we must be sensitive to micro aggressions that unintentionally hurt people of color. These racist attacks can be scathing comments, occasional questions, or jokes that further marginalize those in the non-majority. White people are racially dominant in the Church, and they must learn to respect cultural sensitivities and differences for us people of color.

For instance, one way we can positively impact the Hispanic community is to honor various cultural customs that our faith tradition has forgotten or ignored. When we celebrate Catholic devotions to Our Blessed Mother Mary, we often honor Our Lady of Guadalupe as a role model for all Latino people. Yes, her story is significant and important, but we must honor the Marian apparitions within the many Latino cultures.

We can keep Our Lady of Guadalupe as a celebrated figure in our prayer lives, and we can also meet our Blessed Mother of Latin American countries other than Mexico. Learning about Our Lady of Divine Providence, empress of Puerto Rico, Virgen de Suyapa of Honduras, and Nuestra Señora de Luján of Argentina, Uruguay, and Paraguay will broaden our horizons of Latino cultures and traditions.

The themes of the anti-racism training carry Christ-like messages that will benefit students and congregations. I look forward to bringing these lessons to my youth group, people of my parish, students I teach, and all people I encounter!
On the first full day of the Racial Justice Training of Trainers Workshop, participants were asked to consider what the church might look like if it were to fully embrace Catholic Social Teaching. This spurred a lively discussion, and we came up with the idea of a church that was “messy, vibrant and relational.” This description could easily describe our time at Pax Christi’s training.

There was plenty of stimulation for the mind, including fascinating presentations from Sr. Jamie T. Phelps, O.P., Ph.D and Ronaldo M. Cruz, MSW, on the corrective histories of Black African Americans and Hispanic/Latinos in the U.S. and Catholic Church. There are many contributions from people of color to the Catholic Church and the U.S. that are left out of the history books. There are also many omissions of how badly people of color have been treated in the Church and U.S. These presentations were truly eye-opening for me, a college educated, life long Catholic, which demonstrates the work that needs to be done to (re)educate Americans and Catholics on our own history.

But it was the messier, more personal aspects of the training that I found to be the most impactful. I witnessed the passion, bravery, and humility of Sr. Patty Chappell, SNDdeN and Sr. Anne-Louise Nadeau, SNDdeN as they modeled what this racial justice work looks like in actual practice. I listened to men and women of color share honestly about what they experience on a daily basis in this country and in the Church, and I realized all of the ways in which my experience as a white male is so different. I was inspired to go deeper and shine a light on all of the places where racism, prejudice, and privilege have lived within me and within the institutions and structures that have surrounded me.

I need to be more aware of the ways racism continues to manifest in my life. Even as a natural introvert, I often found myself quite comfortably taking up more air time in the small group discussions than the people of color. That’s why it was important for me to brainstorm with and learn from intelligent, kind, and thoughtful folks from all over the country; to be brought to tears by liturgies where the gifts and voices of people of color were not just included but celebrated; and to experience the honest dialogue, vigorous debates, embarrassments, joy, discomfort, laughter, anger, vulnerability, and fellowship that occurred while building real relationships with people who want to dismantle racism.

I know that our time spent honestly exploring the ways we are separated because of race broke down barriers and created a space where we could see each other more clearly. This fills me with hope. We must dive into this work, knowing that it will be messy but also knowing it will be worth it, because we are all beloved children of God. Let us not forget that our God, who “uncovers deep things from the darkness, and brings the gloom into the light” (Job 12:22), is good all the time! Amen?
Justice

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issues like nuclear disarmament, human trafficking, or abortion allow me to feel good about working for social change but not require much personal change? We all need to be willing to be personally uncomfortable in the pursuit of justice too. We cannot shy from important justice issues that also challenge those of us who have built a life on white privilege.

We must ask ourselves what we are personally willing to do to work for justice. Am I willing to attend an immigration rally even though I might be one of a few white people or go to meeting about racial injustice knowing I might be in the minority? Am I willing to change the thermostat or address my own consumerism out of care for creation? Am I willing to not be in denial of how I contribute to social sin on the daily?

In Laudato Si, Pope Francis asks us “to accept the world as a sacrament of communion, as a way of sharing with God and our neighbors on a global scale.” To be in communion with those suffering from the injustices of the world includes allowing my internal landscape and my lifestyle to be changed. This means we cannot avoid working on social justice issues, like anti-racism and care for creation, that challenge us to take a hard look at ourselves and to personally change.

Triplets

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respond intellectually, emotionally and spiritually. First, we must learn about racism: what it is; how it works; and how it manifests. For example, many do not know the fact that the concept of race itself is an artificial construct developed from a white, European perspective of superiority and entitlement. Many are not aware of The Doctrine of Discovery, its racist origin, and the impact it had on militarism and human rights. We must realize that learning about racism is essential for a consistent life ethic based on the premise that all human life is inherently valuable and that all humans deserve to live without violence.

We must also respond emotionally. Pope Francis said, “‘To sustain a lifestyle which excludes others, or to sustain enthusiasm for that selfish ideal, a globalization of indifference has developed. Almost without being aware of it, we end up being incapable of feeling compassion at the outcry of the poor, weeping for other people’s pain, and feeling a need to help them, as though all this were someone else’s responsibility and not our own.” Feeling and acknowledging the strong emotions of our brothers and sisters oppressed by war, racism, and poverty is a great start for unity.

And as members of the national Catholic peace and justice movement seeking to model the Peace of Christ, we must respond spiritually. We can pray and meditate about the Beatitudes, our core Christian message. We can strive to live as part of the Body of Christ working to create and sustain community with and for all and reflect on the meaning of the Eucharist – that we are all ONE with Christ and the world.

Summing it up simply, in theology class years ago I studied about Tertullian, a second century A.D. theologian, who reported that the Romans would exclaim about early Christians, “See how they love one another!” The triplets of war, racism, and poverty keep us from this reality. Let us not hinder our love for one another by forgetting that we must address all three when working for peace with justice.
Current National Council Members

by Rachel Schmidt

We welcome Concetta Smart, the newest member of the National Council and give thanks to all members who served this last year. Below are all the current members for 2016-2017.

Cathy Woodson
Chair
Richmond, Virginia

Chuck Michaels
Baltimore, MD

Concetta Smart
Crete, Illinois

Edward L. Martinez
Vice-Chair
Viroqua, Wisconsin

Isaac E. Chandler
Jasper, Florida

Jean Stokan
Mount Rainer, Maryland

Nancy L. Oetter
Treasurer
Naperville, Illinois

Sr. Regina Ann Brummel, CSJ
Belcourt, North Dakota

Sr. Rose Marie Tresp, RSM
Secretary
Belmont, North Carolina

If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other.

Mother Teresa

We can never obtain peace in the outer world until we make peace with ourselves.

Dalai Lama
BE the Peace You Wish to See

by Rachel Schmidt

We bring peace into the world when we have peace in our hearts. Negativity and war cannot penetrate a person at peace, and violence is stopped in its tracks when it meets a person unwilling to engage in or perpetuate it.

A focus on being peace is one of the most important contributions we can make to the peace movement. A spirituality of nonviolence means union with God that allows a wellspring of creation. Co-creation with God makes more beauty, love, life, and energy.

When we plug into our source we cannot help but create a life and world of goodness, where life flows with ease. Prayer and meditation are invaluable for us peace activists. That's why we at Pax Christi USA are dedicated to providing reflection booklets for the seasons of Advent and Lent. They are currently available by pre-order only.

Visit the “Pax Christi USA Store” at www.paxchristiusa.org. Or contact our Resources Coordinator Lori Nemenz, lnemenz@paxchristiusa.org, 814-520-6245.

Order your reflection booklets today!

“Journey Towards Justice” is available for order through September. “Reconciliation with Justice” is available for order through January 10, 2017.

Journey Towards Justice

*Reflections for Advent & Christmas 2016*
by Cathy Woodson, Sr. Anne-Louise Nadeau, SNDdeN
Published by Pax Christi USA

Reconciliation with Justice

*Reflections for Lent 2017*
by Bernadette O’Neill & Sr. Anne McCarthy, OSB
Published by Pax Christi USA