

## **Black Lives Matter Prayer-Study-Action**

### **Ella's Song**

*Lyrics and music by Bernice Johnson Reagon  
Sung by Sweet Honey in the Rock*

We who believe in freedom cannot rest  
We who believe in freedom cannot rest until it comes

Until the killing of black men, black mothers' sons  
Is as important as the killing of white men, white mothers' sons

**Prayer:** Use the lines above from “Ella’s Song” or play the video from YouTube (Sweet Honey in the Rock—Ella’s Song--and print out all the lyrics) as a prayerful way to start this reflection.

### **Background**

I was watching my son wiring our BLACK LIVES MATTER sign to the railing on the front porch. My decision to put it up had not actually been a difficult one. It felt important to do as a white person. I live in the St. Louis area, and Michael Brown’s death, along with others, continues to haunt us. I feel like it is ever important for those of us who are white to break the silence of the white community in whatever way we can. Just putting up this sign seemed to be one way to do that.

The legs on the sign had given out—a result of too much wind—or at least I think so. I did wonder when I saw the sign on the ground the first time right after the utility company was working on our street, and then the second time when I found the sign in the gutter also after those workers were there again. But there had been some wind, so....

A woman I work with says her church’s sign has mysteriously disappeared every week. Why is that sign intimidating for some people? Maybe it’s a case of little real knowledge about the movement combined with lots of misinformation, and with separation from each other. But mostly it’s the reality of living in a system and a culture where everything is permeated by racism.

Black Lives Matter (BLM) is an international activist movement that campaigns against violence toward Black people. It began with the use of the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter on social media after the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the shooting death of Trayvon Martin. Three Black women were its founders. BLM became nationally recognized for its street demonstrations following the deaths of Michael Brown (Ferguson) and Eric Garner (New York City) BLM widens the focus of the discussion to include all the ways Black people are continually endangered by the economic, legal, educational, and health care systems in this country.

The connectedness and scope of the movement is often not known. BLM is supportive of rights of the LGBT community, the community of people with disabilities, and of course, it is a strong voice for women.

For people of faith, the core belief that all are created in the image of God means that to do anything that endangers the life of some people is a direct affront to the very nature of God. This belief should provide all of us with an obvious connection to the BLM movement.

So why is there the resistance to the BLM movement? There is the argument that “all lives matter.” Father Maurice Nutt, the Director of the Institute of Black Catholic Studies at Xavier University in New Orleans, puts his response to that argument this way: “When people rebuff the purpose of the Black Lives Matter movement by insisting, ‘All lives matter,’ they not only miss the point that all lives are not at risk but also further diminish the realities of racism and oppression in our country.”

Some people are concerned that support for BLM implies criticism of the police. Father Bryan Massingale, theology professor at Fordham U., answers that question this way, “Yes, we can and must support those who heroically perform the difficult profession of public safety. But we also need to be critical of policing that subjects citizens of color to surveillance, interrogation, arrest, and abuse that would be considered intolerable if routinely experienced by white people” (U.S. Catholic, Dec., 2016).

## **ACTION**

How do we respond to the call of the BLM movement?

Some possibilities include:

1. Intentional prayer, study and conversation about the Black Lives Matter movement, both individually and as a topic for a Pax Christi gathering.
2. Connect with a BLM group in your community, via email, facebook, Twitter, or in person.
3. Get involved with a group engaged in action directed at one or more of the systems that disregard Black lives—education, housing, jobs, health care, criminal justice, etc.
4. Write letters to the editor to your diocesan newspaper challenging the Catholic community and the diocesan structure to be active in the fight against racism.
5. Most of all, believe this:

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

(*Bryan Massingale, **RACIAL JUSTICE AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH***)