

ROWING INTO THE DEEP: MAGIS MEET JUSTICE PEACE BUILDING & PCUSA ANTI-RACISM WORK

The decision to go into 'the deep' as highlighted in the title of this years' Ignatian Solidarity Network is one that that definitely requires

- ✓ preparation beforehand
- ✓ the ability to live with the grace and treacherousness found in the 'deep'
- ✓ the knowledge that one is taking a huge risk
- ✓ the maturity to adapt to changing tides
- ✓ the courage to face the ambiguities of the unknown
- ✓ and the realization that your life and the lives of those on board with you will most likely be transformed and consequently, will never be the same

One thing is sure: YOU DO **NOT** GO INTO THE 'DEEP' ROWING. A small, fragile boat propelled by 1 or 2 oars is not a sea-worthy vessel when confronting the obvious AND hidden dimensions of 'THE DEEP'.

I am delighted to have been invited to share with all of you Pax Christi USA's journey into peace building and our work towards dismantling racism.

Allow me a moment to very briefly share with you the context of Pax Christi:
We, Pax Christi USA, are a section of Pax Christi International. We are the oldest, largest, non-violent, peace with justice movement in the Catholic Church. In the US alone we reach over a ½ million Catholics, and are active on various social media, our website and blogs. We network with many other Catholic coalitions, Ecumenical and inter-faith groups who are about peace with justice.

We have 4 major priorities that we hold ever before us:

1. the SPIRITUALITY OF NONVIOLENCE AND PEACEMAKING
2. DISARMAMENT, DEMILITARIZATION AND RECONCILIATION WITH JUSTICE
3. ECONOMIC AND INTERRACIAL JUSTICE IN THE UNITED STATES
4. HUMAN RIGHTS AND GLOBAL RESTORATION.

These initiatives had been agreed up and affirmed by our National Council well over 20 years ago and long before I began serving as Executive Director in 2011. Over the course of those years emphasis was clearly on 3 of the 4 initiatives, and took the shape of programs, statements, publications, prayer/study/action guides and themes of national Gatherings and Convocations. One initiative, was, so to speak, under-developed...that of ECONOMIC AND INTERRACIAL JUSTICE IN THE US.

When the National Council and Search Committee offered me the position of Executive Director, they knew full well that interracial justice was near and dear to my heart and that the membership of Pax Christi USA was going to begin hearing more about this initiative as well as continuing the tradition of raising up the other three.

IF EVER THERE WAS A JOURNEY INTO 'THE DEEP'...THE WORK OF ANTI-RACISM IS JUST THAT.

RACISM, as I understand it from my experience and training is: **PERSONAL RACIAL PREJUDICE PLUS THE MISUSE OF POWER BY SYSTEMS AND INSTITUTIONS.**

(Repeat)

The history of the United States, the country we love enough to be critical of, has a LONG, RICH and SICK history of racism.

- ✓ The arrogance of European settlers to this country is clearly seen in naming this land 'the NEW world'
- ✓ the use and abuse of the native peoples who lived here prior to the European coming. The rag tag group of Pilgrims too quickly forgot the freedom of religion, speech and opportunity they sought by coming here and doled out the pain and oppression they fled from upon the Native Americans. The land that the native peoples cherished was stolen as was their religion and their culture. They were pushed into poverty and reservations, their children were stripped of their innocence by abuse, torture and "re-education", and treaties that were entered into in good faith with the government...even today are being disrespected, discarded and put aside in the name of progress and greed.
- ✓ the 300 plus years of slavery is a tragic testimony of the disease that has infected this country. Because of the inhuman treatment of our African ancestors, the buying and selling of human beings, the breaking up of families, the siring of children by raping the women who were owned by the master...all of this leaves millions of us unable to trace our family

ancestry because we were NOT deemed important enough to be called 'human.'

- ✓ When the settlers needed a system of railroads, bridges, roads, and subways, our government promised citizenship to Asians people if they would come to do the building of our infrastructure...only to exclude them when the work was done, strip them of their naturalized citizenship, no longer allowed to own property and their assets were seized and given to whites.
- ✓ Japanese Americans fared no better when forced to live in concentration camps euphemistically called 'War Relocation Camps in 1942.
- ✓ Our Mexican brothers and sisters, working as domestics and agricultural workers were unable to access Social Security, forced into dire poverty, had no medical benefits and soon realized they had no human rights or due process under the law...and many still do not.

All of these human beings of:

- ✓ African Ancestry
- ✓ African American Ancestry
- ✓ Caribbean Ancestry from Jamaica, Haiti, the Islands
- ✓ Latinas/Latinos from Mex., Latin America
- ✓ Asians from China, Japan, Korea
- ✓ Native Americans
- ✓ Indians
- ✓ Middle Easterners

All of these can be defined as People who form Communities of Color...who have endured...and continue to live with the oppression that is engrained in the psyche of the dominant white culture.

We know that those who took the words found on the Statue of Liberty seriously and arrived at Ellis Island, those Western Europeans (Italians, Irish, French, German and the like) faced their own kind of discrimination because they spoke a different language, ate different foods and had different names...they suffered...yes...but history rather quickly forgot the differentness because visually they resembled the majority culture...they were white and were not subjected to generations of violence, discrimination, marginalization and victimization that we see in communities of color today.

History has taught that all social systems in this country were created to ensure that power and privilege would remain in the hands of white males; and when white women received the right to vote, they bought into that same privilege.

There has **never** been an equal playing field in the legal system, the political systems, the religious systems, the educational systems, the social service systems, the economic system and within the family systems. These systems were so structured so as to be a boot on the backs of communities of color...a boot that strangles them and does not allow them to move up and out of the oppression they experience on a daily basis.

In the course of recent years we have lived with myths and lies that had us thinking that we were no longer a racist society: (1) the Civil Rights Movement and its off-shoots, surfaced the ugliness of racism but that was balanced with the soul searching quest for liberation and equality. Maybe **NOW** was the time to experience the downfall of segregation and the Jim Crow laws. That did not happen! (2) We were also fed the myth that the ideal was to be 'color blind' when it came to accepting diversity. "We are all One" was preached from pulpits and platforms while our actions failed to match the rhetoric that was trying to convince us that we were living in a post-racial world. (3) And perhaps the biggest myth of all was that once we elected an African American President...that we had made it...no more racism in the US. Our proof was living in the White House.

People of color knew all along that all of this was an illusion, a myth, a lie that white people needed to believe so they could feel better. What had changed is that the ugliness of racism was just under the surface and subtle. In 2013 Congress passed the Voter Registration Act in an attempt to make sure that President Obama would not be elected to a second term. This act was aimed at minority voters intended to discourage voting. It required:

- A photo ID to vote
- Slashing early voting, on-line and same-day voter registration
- Redistricting:
 - ❖ Dividing minority communities into other voting districts and then not allowing 'out of district' voting

- ❖ packing minority citizens in as few districts as possible making the lines longer and the opportunity to vote more difficult if the polls do not remain open beyond specified time.

This act became law, but did not achieve its intended result...President Obama was re-elected and stayed in the White House another 4 years.

Another example of systemic racism is the mass incarceration of black/brown men, women and juveniles on drug charges that their white counterparts have money to pay lawyers to get them out of.

And lastly, according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, the Opioid addiction among Black and Latino populations has been dramatically increasing the last 3 years with little to no outcry...now that this addiction has hit the folks in the white suburbs, it is being called an epidemic, and only now are billions of federal and state dollars going into treatment and rehab. None of this is coincidence...it is systemic racism being played out on a grand scale and we must see it for what it is.

Which brings us into the NOW.

In the midst of an embarrassing 2 years of campaigning for the presidency of this country, where bullying, derogatory remarks, sarcasm, lies, bigotry and racism raised its ugly head...Pax Christi USA went into the 'deep'. In the days since the shock of Nov. 8, 2017 where revenge, back biting, shaming, and fabrications of reality are the norm...Pax Christi USA choses to stay on the journey.

Racism is no longer under the surface...it is no longer dormant...it is blatant, all around us...it is the face of white nationalism. Our work has brought us into parishes, colleges, high school, inter-faith groups, Ecumenical coalitions, organizations and communities of women religious. We have done 1 day workshops, parish retreats, weekend long seminars and an 8 day retreat. Going into the 'deep' of racism, at times, is not all welcoming nor appreciated.

We present a Wall of History with marker points of the history of racism AND the history of resistance. Few quibble with the historical evidence. However, things get tense when we ask the question 'how have I/we been complicit with 'America's Original Sin' as Jim Wallis so aptly calls racism.

In answering this question there is no way around confronting the racial oppression that those of us who are people of color have internalized. Neither is there a way around confronting the racial superiority that those who are white have internalized.

In plumbing the depth of these 2 questions, we have to leave our comfort zones, we have to look at our shadow sides, we have to move away from what is 'safe' to what is 'redemptive.' However, we enjoy being ignorant...it is safe. Claims of 'not knowing' aid and abet abusive systems of power that rely on complacency to keep going. Claiming 'ignorance' comes not from a position of naiveté, but from a position of power and the desire to maintain that power. I am comfortable and in staying where it is safe...feeds the fragility of whiteness.

White supremacy is a belief system and a power system that sustains white privilege and maintains racial oppression. Look at what happened in Charlottesville and elsewhere.

The journey into the 'deep' that Pax Christi USA invites people to, is to right relationships and to the formation of the Beloved Community. It is an invitation and a plea to make connections with what is happening now in this country.

There is but **one** common thread woven around the

- ~ immigrant and refugee communities, the DACA and the DREAMERS,
- ~ the same thread that weaves through the environmental degradation of our people and with the slow (and in some cases nonexistent) relief efforts of the recent hurricanes, where toxic wastes are dumped and where water is still lead infested,
- ~ this same thread connects those men and women affected by the Middle Eastern travel bans, our Muslim brothers and sisters,
- ~ the thread around those most likely to be subject to police brutality and violence is the same one that is
- ~ wrapped around those incarcerated and on death row,
- ~ and the same thread is around those women and children caught in the nightmare of human trafficking.

DO WE EVEN SEE THE THREAD? DO WE **WANT** TO SEE IT?

CAN WE MAKE THE CONNECTIONS?

The human beings who are trafficked, banned from entry to this country, barely surviving in our prisons, living on nuclear waste dump sites, immigrants and refugees, those daily threatened with deportation ARE ALL PEOPLE FROM COMMUNITIES OF COLOR...We don't want to see that fact. We think they are isolated incidents, coincidences...but they are connected.

We would rather argue, minimize, distort and explain away the realities that white supremacy produces. We have to stop finding excuses to explain away the suffering and pain of racism. Make the connections, see the intersectionality, see the raw misuse of power as it really is. Our failure to make the connections means we contribute to the complicity, hate and violence that racism breeds.

(Repeat)

This is the push back that Pax Christi USA faces on a daily basis because of our commitment to dismantling racism within our organization and beyond.

My brothers and sisters, we cannot heal what we cannot own. And we all need healing. We cannot be in right relationship with each other if we cannot be open and transparent. We cannot form the Beloved Community if we are frightened by conflict.

The work of PCUSA is based on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ whose words were neither neutral nor detached:

- ~ Lift the broken and forgotten,
- ~ Feed the hungers of the human heart,
- ~ Be gentle with those who grieve,

- ~ Liberate those unjustly bound,
- ~ Let your heart be broken by suffering: your own and that of others.

Our Catholic Social Teachings put our work into perspective and into a larger context:

- ~ exclude no one from your circle of solidarity and equality,
- ~ believe in the human dignity of all life, even the most offensive, undeserving and unpleasant,
- ~ embrace the common good and have a heart for everyone,
- ~ use your participation and belonging to associations as a way of reminding others of 'who are those not at the table',
- ~ know that the 'preferential option for the poor' includes YOU also,
- ~ realize that stewardship is based on what is 'just' and NOT on what is 'fair'

Those of us in this room who are white are so steeped in it that you don't know how to begin being allies. Because you know a handful of people of color and like to hang with them...that does not make you an ally. Because you took a course in Black History and/or Black Literature...does not an ally make. You like soul food and (name some music groups/artists)...you may have good taste, but that doesn't make you an ally.

An ally does not make excuses for stepping into and talking from his/her white privilege and being hurtful. The words "I'm sorry" are spoken much more frequently than "I didn't mean that."

An ally does not have to have something to say all of the time, about everything. We do not have to prove how liberal and anti-racist we are on social media or elsewhere. We need to listen more.

An ally needs to be about his/her own education on racist systems and institutions in this country. Asking people of color to do your white homework and to point out to those of you who are white what racism is...is irresponsible and lazy.

I could go on with the 'do's' and don'ts' of being an ally, but we, people of color also have homework to do.

In order to heal from our internalized racial oppression we need to stop pitting communities of color against each other. We too often scapegoat the Latino/a community with the Mexican one...the Puerto Rican community with the Islanders, the African born community with the African Americans, etc. We need to realize that suffering and pain is suffering and pain and that we are all in this struggle for liberation together.

In order to heal we need to share our stories with each other and with our white brothers and sisters. But to share our stories we need a safe place to be vulnerable and honest. We need people to really listen to us and respect our experience with silence and deep empathy. Something happens when both speaking and listening is revered...it is a sacred moment that can lead to

transformation. It is not merely a 'Kum Bi Yah' moment or a peek into the pain of another. It is the beginning of being in right relationship with each other.

In order for people of color to heal we have to find respite from the exhaustion, weariness and violence of living as marginalized people in this world. We need people who look like us to nourish us, affirm and support us so as to go back out there and continue the work of liberation. No offense, but there are days when I cannot spend another moment with white folks!!

You as young adults, bring tremendous gifts to the movement to bring about peace with justice:

- You are open to working through what it means to be an ally.
- You have an energy and a passion for justice.
- You have the ability to speak up and to show up.
- And in addition to asking lots of questions you also have the ability to do critical social analysis...to look at things with a critical eye and to feel deeply when justice is denied.

Journeying into the 'deep' is the work of a life time. It is neither a fad nor a whim. It is not for the faint hearted, nor the whiner, nor the one looking for instant gratification and immediate results.

I read recently that **"I lose my moral right to speak on peace if I have not previously spoken on injustice."** (Repeat). This is our moment in history, my brothers and sisters and WE MUST shout from the housetops the injustices that

we see all around us...for unless we do, we have no right to speak of, much less desire the peace that we all so deeply crave.

Racism in the US is our greatest injustice...it has crippled ALL of us in the human community. It is our national disease and in our collective DNA. While getting sick was not our fault, getting well and healing together is our responsibility.

Dismantling racism is something we must do together. Peace building is something we must do together. We build 2-way bridges to form the Beloved Community...not walls. We support and affirm one another ...not dictate. We lay claim to our innate goodness: ours and that of the other.

In closing:

- ~ I wish us ALL the moral courage to speak up...
- ~ I wish us ALL the passion to show up...
- ~ I wish us ALL the empathy to keep up...
- ~ and I wish us ALL the humility to look up...for, **“as leaders of justice, like the stars, you will shine forevermore.”** (Dan. 12:3)

THANK YOU

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Pax Christi USA
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Ignatian Solidarity Network