Racism and the Catholic Church
Voice of the Faithful New Jersey
Sunday, January 24, 2021 at 4:30 pm

These are the readings that will be discussed at the meeting. Items 6, 7, and 9 are in this pdf. Please click on "follows" or scroll down to their appropriate pages. The rest of the articles here can be accessed on the web through their own external links provided. If you cannot read all of the material, the VOTF team will briefly summarize each item at the appropriate time during the discussion.

1. "Open Wide our Hearts," 2018 pastoral document of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/racism/upload/open-wide-our-hearts.pdf

2. Interview with Bryan Massingale SJ, in Commonweal. https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/worship-false-god

3. Daniel F. Horan OFM, "When Will US Bishops Address Evil Systemic Racism? https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/faith-seeking-understanding/when-will-us-bishops-address-evil-systemic-racism-head

4. Shannen Dee Williams, "The Church must make reparation for its role in slavery, segregation." National Catholic Reporter https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/church-must-make-reparation-its-role-slavery-segregation

5. "Black Catholics: Words Not Enough as Church Decries Racism" AP article. https://www.voanews.com/usa/race-america/black-catholics-words-not-enough-church-decries-racism

6. *Desegregating the Altar: The Josephites and the Struggle for Black Priests*. Book review by Randall M. Miller, published in U.S. Catholic Historian. *[follows in PDF]*

7. Oral History interview with Sister Gwynette Proctor. From *Habits of Change: An Oral History of American Nuns* by Carole Garibaldi Rogers (Oxford University Press, 2011). *[follows in PDF]*

8. Pope Sends Strong Message to US Catholics After Floyd Death" AP article. https://www.voanews.com/usa/pope-sends-strong-message-us-catholics-after-floyd-death

9. Church of St. Francis Xavier, New York. Pastoral Council Statement on Communal Commitment to Establishing Racial Equity and Dismantling Racial Injustice. *[follows in PDF]*

Review
Reviewed Work(s): Desegregating the Altar: The Josephites and the Struggle for Black Priests, 1871-1960 by Stephen J. Ochs
Review by: Randall M. Miller
Source: *U.S. Catholic Historian*, Vol. 11, No. 1, Sulpicians and Seminaries, Prelates and Priests (Winter, 1993), pp. 132-136
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Randall M. Miller

STEPHEN OCHS'S ALMOST LYRICAL STUDY TELLS THE STORY OF A MAN, A mission, and a message. The man was the Reverend John R. Slattery, the dynamic and enigmatic son of Irish immigrants who rose from his New York boyhood to become the English Mill Hill Fathers' American provincial and later the first American superior general (1893-1904) of the St. Joseph's Society of the Sacred Heart, or Josephites, "the sole Roman Catholic clerical society of priests and brothers devoted exclusively to ministry in the Afro-American community" (p. 2). If an institution is the shadow of a man, Slattery was that man for the Josephites. His vision of a black Catholic clergy defined the Josephites' mission and identity long after he resigned in frustration and finally left the church altogether. Other figures loom large in Ochs's history, but Slattery's shadow hangs over them all. Indeed, it serves as Ochs's principal framing device by which he measures the stature and courage of clergy and laity alike as they wrestled with the issue of a black priesthood from the Second Plenary Council of 1866 to the civil rights movement of the 1960s.

The mission was the church's outreach to blacks, both to preserve the faith of those few already within the Catholic fold and to convert Protestants and the unchurched. The mission included catechizing, schooling, and preaching among blacks in the American South, where the Josephites operated from their Maryland foundation and where most blacks resided well into this century. It also demanded educating white Catholics to open their hearts, if not their churches, to accept blacks as fellow parishioners — and as priests.

The message was that the church must invite all God's children to the altar. Everywhere it went in the world, the church sought to recruit native clergy as a means to win converts. Rome insisted that America would be no different. One of Ochs's leitmotifs is the recurrent papal prodding for American bishops to do more for blacks and the American counterpoint, played on a theme of Americanism, that mixed republicanism and racism in defense of American rights. Southern churchmen thought the universal church should

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respect the particular racial etiquette of their region that kept blacks segregated in back benches and out of seminaries. In the end, in conjunction with the modern civil rights movement, the church's message prevailed, redeeming the Josephites' mission and the men, like Slattery, who believed in it.

Ochs begins his account with a survey of early ministries to blacks in the United States. He sets his historical narrative in a larger comparative framework of missionary work elsewhere, reminding readers that the church's centuries-old tradition of recruiting native clergy enjoined American bishops to encourage vocations and to build seminaries, even as the multiethnic American church struggled to define itself and to determine who should rule at home. Before the Civil War the American church had largely failed in its mission to blacks. Understaffed, poor, and self-conscious of its minority status in a stridently evangelical Protestant culture, the church accommodated to local norms on race. Bishops refused even to countenance the ordination of blacks to the priesthood lest they challenge white supremacy and invite hostility toward the church generally. Such an attitude persisted into the mid-twentieth century, and by Ochs's reasoning, constituted a main stumbling block to a black clergy. Even when Josephites and others trained black clergy, southern bishops (and after the "great migration" of blacks northward, northern bishops too) refused them offices. Ochs's understanding of the institutional structure of Catholicism allows him to make clear how unbreachable were ecclesiastical boundaries and how tenaciously bishops clung to their prerogatives. Popular support for a black clergy was never enough. Only the combined forces of pressure from Rome, changing (more tolerant) racial attitudes in America, insistence from black laity, and arguments from various priests finally opened the sacristy to blacks.

With emancipation, Ochs observes, the church lost an opportunity to evangelize among blacks. While southern bishops lined up against Radical Reconstruction, many black Catholics went over to Protestant bodies more attuned to their needs. The American church preoccupied itself with organizing and ministering to the millions of new immigrants after the 1870s, and notwithstanding their concerns (stated in the Second and Third Plenary Councils) about "the Negro problem," the prelates "substituted rhetoric for actions when dealing with blacks. The widespread belief that blacks were morally, intellectually, and spiritually unfit for the priesthood and that white Catholics and southerners would not tolerate a black clergy in any case crippled missionary efforts for the next 70 years.

From the arrival of the Reverend Herbert Vaughan and four other English Mill Hill Fathers in 1871 into the twentieth century, the church's ministry to blacks would largely be in the hands of Josephites. The missionary task proved too much for the English Mill Hill Fathers, who suffered isolation, poverty, and physical exhaustion and in 1878 turned over their American

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work to Slattery. In 1893 the American Josephites became an independent community. The Josephites built churches and ran schools across the South, though they tended to concentrate in the Chesapeake and Gulf regions where most Catholics lived. Most important, at Slattery's insistence and with the support of such powerful "Americanists" as Archbishop John Ireland, the Josephites admitted blacks into their preparatory and major seminaries.

Ochs argues that the ecclesiastical structure of the church worked against Slattery's efforts as bishops refused their parishes to black clergy. Much opposition to black seminarians existed, but it hid behind words such as "qualifications." Slattery, too, doubted blacks' abilities. The unhappy personal relations he had with Charles R. Uncles, the first black Josephite priest (1891), and the repeated humiliations in trying to place the first three black Josephites soured Slattery on the church and blacks on the Josephites. Slattery had compromised his own effort by imposing extra duties on black candidates and limiting admissions to the Josephite seminaries. Paternalistic toward blacks, he was impatient with critics. Amid the rise of Jim Crow in the South and the decline of his Americanist friends in the church, Slattery retreated and in 1904 resigned as superior general. In 1906, fired by modernism, he renounced Catholicism — an act that almost brought down the Josephites and embarrassed the cause of black priests.

From 1904 to 1918, by Ochs's reckoning, the Josephites lacked firm leadership. The Society, he continues, recovered its fortunes under Louis B. Pastorelli, who brought "order, centralization, and businesslike management" during his long tenure as superior general (1918-1942), but conceded to others the training of a black clergy. Pastorelli admitted a few mulattos to the Josephites' Epiphany Apostolic College and St. Joseph's Seminary, largely as a sop to critics who charged the Society with abandoning Slattery's mission, but until the 1930s he categorically excluded black applicants.

At this critical juncture, Ochs points out, activist black Catholics, led by Thomas Wyatt Turner, a biology professor at Howard University, seized the moment. A new generation of black Catholics had grown up emboldened by the prospects for a black clergy and impatient with a patronizing archbishop of Baltimore and superior general of the Josephites. They wanted Jim Crow out of the church and more blacks in it. Through such organizations as the Federated Colored Catholics (1925), they protested against segregation at Catholic University and Pastorelli's policies. Ochs views black lay activism, and the distrust it engendered between blacks and white church superiors, as the seedbed for resentments that sprouted anew in the form of the Reverend George A. Stallings, Jr., and the Imani Temple movement in 1989 — an interesting, though unproved, suggestion. More concretely, Ochs shows that black activists like Turner got sympathetic hearings from papal representatives and missionaries, such as the Reverend Ignatius Lissner of the Society

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of African Missions, which led in 1921 to the establishment of a seminary for blacks (moved to Bay St. Louis, Mississippi, in 1923 and named St. Augustine's Seminary) by the Divine Word Missionaries. Although segregated, the seminary found immediate appeal among prospective black seminarians. Pastorelli was happy to recommend blacks there, as were bishops, understanding that the responsibility for black clergy had been assumed by others while the cause of white missionary work among blacks would remain with the Josephites.

But, as Ochs shows so well in his calibrations on changing social conditions nudging Josephite action, the success of the seminary caused Pastorelli to open the Josephites' doors again, if only to retain influence among black Catholics and his own activist clergy. In 1941 a black Josephite was ordained, the first since 1907. More important, as Ochs emphasizes, a changing of the guard within the church opened up opportunities for black clergy. In 1934 four black priests from St. Augustine's Seminary were appointed to a black parish in Lafayette, Louisiana. Later, northern-born Archbishop Joseph F. Rummel of New Orleans invited black priests into his archdiocese, desegregated schools and altar, and even faced down Leander Perez in Plaquemines Parish.

Edward V. Casserly, Pastorelli's successor, was not shy in advocating a black clergy. Favored by civil rights reform blowing through the South and receptive bishops like Rummel, Casserly and the Josephites reclaimed their primacy among blacks. Under Casserly, during the 1940s, the issue was no longer whether to enroll black seminarians, but how many. The rector at the college feared that too many blacks would alter the Society's character and so fought a rearguard action against admissions, dredging up old canards about blacks' supposedly shallow spirituality and inherent immorality. Casserly resented both the racism and the challenge to his authority and forced admissions. In this, one sees how important strong leadership was in shaping a religious order. Just by controlling the admissions policy to the seminary, for example, the superior general could draw the social, ideological, and spiritual profile of an order. Although Ochs does not explicitly develop that argument, his emphasis on the role of superior generals from Slattery onward suggests it and the Casserly case confirms it.

Ochs closes his masterful history with a characterization of the 1960s and early 1970s as a time of stress. The Second Vatican Council, the "black power movement," and the Vietnam War rent the American church. Black clergy, organized in the Black Catholic Clergy Caucus (1968), decried the lack of leadership roles for blacks and the racism in the church, charges echoed by several Josephites and directed at their own order. In his epilogue Ochs sounds a more optimistic note, pointing to increased black vocations and the elevation of three black Josephites to the episcopacy. He caps the

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story with the installation of Eugene A. Marino, S.S.J., as archbishop of Atlanta. In reality and symbolically, the altar was desegregated.

Ochs's book is both timely and long overdue. The recent upsurge in black visibility within the church — witness both the Marino installation and the Stallings affair — makes Ochs's deeply researched, uncommonly balanced history essential reading for anyone who hopes to understand the evolution of church policy regarding blacks generally and native clergy particularly. Through the lens of the Josephite experience, Ochs reveals the ubiquity and tenacity of American Catholic racism, which, for him as for the black priests he brings to life so well in his book, seemed almost intractable because it had insinuated itself everywhere within the American church in the form of paternalism. The white clergy harbored self-doubts about blacks' abilities, even as they sought conversions and vocations among them. By his exhaustive research in diocesan and religious archives, Ochs plumbs the depths of institutional racism, charting how Catholic institutions pitted self-interest and institutional security against prophetic vision and social conscience. Yet, those same records reveal heart and soul, pointing to the uplifting vision of Slattery, Casserly, Jesuits such as John LaFarge, the Divine Word missionaries, the black priests themselves, the Holy See, black activists such as Turner, and others.

Ochs's work commands attention. Particularly significant, in light of Jay Dolan's recent series on the Catholic parish, Ochs extends his inquiry downward into the parish and among the folk. His book largely focuses on the politics and personalities within the religious orders and episcopal offices, but his attention to the responses of black, and white, lay people to black priests reminds us that the definition of the church had many local permutations. At the parish level at least, people expected the church to mirror society. At the same time, Ochs shows that institutional factors matter. The church is an institution. Missing that fact has caused some recent scholars to misread Catholic experience. Not so Ochs. Like Thomas Spalding's excellent recent work on the Archdiocese of Baltimore (*The Premier See* [1989]), Ochs's superb history succeeds by charting how Catholic institutions developed over time in response both to American culture and society and Catholic teaching and interest. In so doing, Ochs has made a major contribution not only to our understanding of desegregating the altar but to the evolving character of the church itself.

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SISTER GWYNETTE PROCTOR

I returned to Baltimore almost three years after my meeting with Sister Mary Alice Chineworth to interview another African-American woman: Sister Gwynette Proctor of the Sisters of Notre Dame deNamur.

Sister Gwynette, 43, is one of only 10 African-American women in a religious community of 3,000. She holds two master's degrees and has been a teacher, a principal, a youth minister, and executive director of the National Black Sisters Conference. The interview took place at the dining-room table in her apartment, where she lived with another Sister of Notre Dame. Sister Gwynette suffers from severe arthritis; she has had 10 operations on her knees and will ultimately need knee replacement.

Arthritis has not curtailed her activities; she is currently executive director of Our Daily Bread, the largest soup kitchen on the east coast. She spent July 1995 in Nigeria, teaching at the university there.

My mom was a city schoolteacher, and my household was always full of students needing a little extra attention. You came home on a Friday, you met the first-grader, and you got on with life. She brought her students home for more than 25 years.

So for me there was that early experience of community and what it meant to look beyond your immediate family unit. When I was 10, the oldest of four in the family, my parents adopted Norman, and he came in the door with all the privileges of being the oldest brother. There were no distinctions between being adopted or not. I made the mistake one time of screaming in anger, "You're not my real brother." When I got out of my room—like two months later—clearly the message was delivered: That is unacceptable in this house. And that mistake was never repeated.

And then for a period of five or six years we also grew up with four foster sisters and brothers. We went to Villa Maria, which was a home for children who were wards of the state, to get one child and came home with four, all sisters and brothers. We were going to be a weekend family for them. We took bunk beds apart; we made pallets on the living-room floor. Weekends, summers, holidays. And the amazing thing is, we went from four [children] to five and then from five to nine, and none of us can recall ever having any less individually of Mom's or Dad's attention. So I had parents who loved us a great deal, but they were never worried about being our friends. There was no democracy in our house. We knew it. But we never doubted their love for us or their care for us.

When we moved into this neighborhood, Blessed Sacrament was the only [grammar] school that accepted us, although it wasn't necessarily a warm and friendly welcome. There were three Proctors and five Bagwells [our cousins] and two other black students, and that was it in the entire school. Every year the school trip was to a segregated amusement park, which meant we couldn't go.

One year our parents went to the school and said, "This is enough." Unfortunately, the school canceled the trip. Well, that didn't make us very popular in school. So that was painful, and those scars are still there.

In high school I was an athlete, and in my senior year I was vice president of student government. So I developed relationships based on common interests, not on color. But still, those hurts come out of the blue. I still recall to this day my conference with the [guidance] counselor. My grades were A's and B's, but I came out of that counseling session with nothing more than pamphlets to community colleges. And you know how in the school lunchroom, you compare what Sister said to you? And the pamphlets she gave? But my mother said, "Don't give it a second thought." So my parents took me on trips to colleges.

What I didn't find in school, what the dominant culture didn't provide for me, my family and my family network did. I had no doubt there were African-American doctors, teachers, college professors, because that's who came in and out of my house. Those were my aunts and uncles. My parents assumed the role of creating the nurturing environment that gave me the role models I needed. I didn't suffer from any doubt that we had the ability to be teachers. I came home to one every day.

If anything, those early struggles served me well, because I found a welcome with my God that was separate from the institutional Church and its practices and the hurts. I didn't see any African-American religious women in my 12 years of Catholic school; but I always knew that we could be Sisters, because I had three cousins who were [members of the Oblate Sisters of Divine Providence], one of the predominantly black congregations that came into being, because white congregations said no.

I'm clear that God directed me [to the Sisters of Notre Dame deNamur]. The story of St. Julie, our foundress, is one of the few books I've read cover to cover the first time I put it in my hand. Early on, she took on the institutional Church, and that for me was a woman with courage. Her story paralleled one of my other wisdom ancestors, Harriet Tubman. This was a woman I could learn from. My grandmothers were also strong figures in my life. My family had an early influence on the Catholic Church here in Baltimore. My grandfather helped build a couple of churches. And my grandmother would tell the stories about building those churches and then not being allowed in them or being relegated to the top balcony. There never was a moment of bitterness in her tone of voice. She just described it as it was. So my vocation meant immense things to my grandparents.

The biggest question for me when I entered, and still is today, has not been a struggle with the vows. It's not been a struggle with obedience. It's not been a struggle with chastity. It's not been a struggle with poverty. The question I live with is: Do I have what it takes to live in a congregation that's predominantly white? That's the struggle and that's the challenge for me. And that's where I find my greatest blessings and greatest pain.

I told this community when I entered that there were two things that wouldn't happen: I would not bite my tongue for a period of six years of formation, and all of a sudden they'd see a new me after final vows. Wasn't going to happen. They were going to see me right up front, so we would know early on if this was going to be a match or not. Secondarily, I would ask them never to put me in a position to choose between the congregation or my family, because I could tell them they were going to lose that choice. I felt there was room in my life for both, and I intended to nurture both. People needed to know that, so if they had a struggle with it or a problem, they needed to say so. The either-or model is a European-American one. African-Americans have functioned dualistically for a long time, and it works. It costs us a lot, but it works. Fortunately, they came to understand the importance of that—that I can do both, and that I was a better person. I was a stronger person. I was more content. I was more whole.

[During my formation years] I sometimes needed to get away from white people. I needed to be around and see people of color, feel the language, smell the smells—you know, listen to the music. I needed to get grounded again. Nothing major happened. It was that whole sense of the fish bowlness. It just got to me. [One time] there were about four or five of us in the shower—there's like a dozen stalls—and somebody stuck their head in the bathroom and said, "Gwynette, such and such and—" Just by my feet [they knew I was there]! They started talking right off. Fortunately, the key people in my life were not threatened when I said, "I need to get out of here, just get away." I didn't know if it was permitted. I didn't know if it was right or wrong. I knew what I needed. And it was okay. They didn't make me seem strange or act like it was my problem. So I [would go] to my mom's for a weekend.

I also had a need to associate with other women of color who were religious. In 1980, when I entered, I was only the second black in the history of the province. The congregation alone could not nurture my vocation. They simply couldn't. They could tell me about Notre Dame and St. Julie. But I needed to be able to see women who looked like me, who'd been around 40, 50, 60 years, doing the hard things in this Church and in their congregations. The other difficult thing about being in a predominantly white congregation is that you're judged by Eurocentric standards. I'm not Eurocentric. But if I didn't have African-American religious women involved in decision-making [about me], that's the only measure by which I was judged. My province realized I needed to have African-American religious women, who were not Sisters of Notre Dame, involved in my formation. And that's unusual, because formation is sacrosanct to each congregation. Each congregation lives and dies by their formation programs. But they were open to my suggestions.

One of the awarenesses the province needed to come to was that they assumed themselves to be far more progressive or aware or sensitive than they ever were. They had interacted with the African-American culture for a number of years, but always in very limited and very controlling ways. When they interacted with

people of color, they were principals or teachers; and speaking to a parent, you have all the power under your control. You like to think you're as liberal as the next person. It was very different when I entered, when they had to see me as an equal and as a peer.

Some of our Sisters had bought into the stereotypes about people of color, particularly African-American males. I have three brothers. So when my brother would come to the door late at night, I saw fear in their eyes. They were uneasy about opening the door until I said, "That's Terrence." "Who?" "Terrence, my brother." "Oh." And then, of course, the anxiety goes way down. The other phenomenon that would occur is, whenever a black person arrived at the door, I got called. Some people walked into my final vows celebration; [some of the Sisters] brought them into the house, thinking I knew them. I'm opening my gifts at the time, sitting with my back to them. And I look up, and I'm like, "Good evening." They were utter strangers! They were Jehovah's Witnesses! So that was the phenomenon that goes on. Black person at the front door, and I got to be the expert.

When I first moved into this house, each Sister had a night to cook. There were five of us, and we all ate together Monday through Friday. And you had a night to cook. The understanding was that you only invited guests on the night you cooked. If I didn't cook on Monday, I wouldn't invite you to dinner if I ran into you during the day. That would be unfair to the cook. Well, this is strange to me. I come from a people who are hospitable, so I couldn't abide it. If I run into a friend, I'm supposed to say, "Oh, wait a minute. I cook next week on Tuesday. Do you think you could stop by on Tuesday?" rather than, "Come on by to dinner tonight." This is craziness.

I have a ministry to my Sisters of Notre Dame, because I'm their only immediate contact with the African-American culture, whereas they're not my only contact with white people. There's always a teachable moment, and I continually ask myself: "Do I take this stereotype on? Or do I let it go?" It depends on what the energy is on a given day. I have to find a way to respond if I'm going to take that moment to teach. The whole thing with food. It's not a matter of whether they're good cooks or not. It's a matter of it just tastes different. I feel like I'm always eating in another country. We season our food very differently than those in the dominant culture. It's not better or worse, just different. I never grew up on casseroles, and you folks like to make casseroles. I come home, and there's not one pot on the stove. All of dinner is in the oven in a casserole dish. Where do I draw the line so that I can stay whole and healthy and be nurtured? There was a time I would've eaten everything, anything, not knowing what it was I ate sometimes. But everyone else was eating it and enjoying it. So I thought I should, too. I have to make my rules now: "Please take no harm, but I will make a tuna-fish sandwich." They have to understand.

Paula and I have lived together for almost eight years now, in two different houses. She knows my family through and through. She's been over to Mom's

house. She recognizes all my brothers. In fact, they're here sometimes fooling around with her when I come in. There were times in community where I needed to be home in order for any black friends or family to be there, because everyone else was uncomfortable. Paula fixes the vegetables where they're not crunching all the time. Our greens don't crunch for us. My mom always keeps greens frozen, and I will just run by there and pick up a couple of batches and put them in the freezer. If people will cook them longer for me, those are the moments of hope. Because I never look for the big, humongous changes. It's the little [things]—where somebody will take their greens out and leave mine on and let them boil up a bit. To acknowledge that there's another way to do it—not better, not worse, just another way.

But then as soon as we get a third Sister [here], that's going to change. I will have to relate to her in a way that's different. I have dynamic changes every time somebody moves in here or I move. I'm always somebody else's first. So I start over again in building relationships. That's the dynamic I bought into by virtue of living in this congregation. So we get down to [basics]. You know, they bump into my hair, and they touch it, and they realize it's soft, as opposed to whatever their impression was.

There's another side of that coin that makes it exciting—encountering new people and getting to know one another and working through the difficulties to some common ground and acknowledging that there's some places where we disagree. That's an investment that I like making over and over. Obviously—or I wouldn't keep doing it. As much as I know there are moments of pain and misunderstanding in my congregation, I know, too, that there are women out there who love me for who I am. Not who they want me to be, nor their perceptions of me as I should be. But they love me for who I am.

There's an interesting dynamic that we are aware of as African-American women in predominantly white congregations. You come in, and you're treated with kid gloves. Everybody's so afraid you're going to call them racist that basically you can do anything you want. You know people aren't honest with you. They're not dealing with you straight up. I had to live through that phenomenon. Well, it was those handful who didn't let me do anything I wanted, who did risk putting themselves in that posture, but who said no to me. No, everything isn't all right. It's the "child loose in a candy store" notion. They risked my saying, "Well, that's mighty racist of you." It's those individuals that I see now, 15 years later, who helped me to grow and be nurtured. And I know that I have a responsibility to do that for others.

Remember I said earlier that the congregation in and of itself couldn't nurture my vocation alone? It has been the National Black Sisters Conference who provided the role models that I lacked in Notre Dame. Every year we have a conference, and we come together for a week. Most of us come from predominantly white congregations; so for that one week the pressures are totally off. We can be for one another in a way that's familiar to us. We're not on show; we don't

have to mind our p's and q's because somebody might not understand our loud, boisterous [behavior]. We come from our stressful situations, and we're able to mend, and put one another back together, and send each other back out there to do the work of the Lord. It's unimportant what your [order's] initials are, whether you're an SBS or an SSND or SND or Sister of Charity or whatever. Every year we celebrate our jubilarians. We lift up our elders as role models for us. Anytime I feel that this is too much, and I've had it, all I have to do is call to mind the picture of [one of them] and remember they have come through it, that I owe it to myself and to those who are going to come after me to do it, too.

I see the small signs of hope. That's what drives me. Because there are so many awarenesses that the dominant culture in our congregation has come to learn. There are probably 1,800 of us now in the United States, and there are 10 African-American women, but there were never any women of color who were delegates to our chapter meetings. I went to the chapter in 1990. We had to say, "You can no longer speak for us and our experience. You can speak about it, but you can't speak for us. You have no clue of what it's like for me to walk as an African-American in this country. You cannot represent us at chapter. We need our own representation." And our Hispanic Sisters said the same. People have heard that.

I live my life now so that my niece and nephew, who are 10 and 7, will experience a different world when they're 20. I know I'm not going to see ultimate change in my lifetime. But I'm not going to stop fighting for the small changes that, [for example,] will help our Sisters see African-American men in a different light. If it has to be my nephews [who serve as models], fine. I have one nephew who's a concert pianist, and another who is an artist and majoring in Chinese and headed to China next year for his junior year [in college]. These two were raised in the congregation, we say. They brought their bikes to whatever convent I was living in. So it helps for the folks to see them now.

Sometimes when I speak, I think I come off negative. While I speak freely and honestly about what troubles me, certainly I have also experienced a great deal of joy. I hope that has come through, because I would want my Sisters to know that. Even through the difficult times and the pain, I wouldn't have it any other way. I've become who I am—Gwynette Proctor, Sister of Notre Dame—by virtue of the experiences I've described. And I hope in some small way I have influenced people around me. But I know I have felt their influence.

One of the moments of grace that I experience often—and that tell me in a very quiet, settling way that I'm in the right place at the right time; and however hard it might be for me, it's good that I be here—is when a Sister shares with me a moment in which she has grown or come in touch with the racism within her. And somehow she's been able to tell me how I have facilitated that. And that's a big risk, because she has no guarantee what I'll come back with. So I know it's right that I'm here for now. I couldn't see myself as not being a Sister of Notre Dame. *(February 1995)*

Sister Guynette remained in social ministries in Baltimore until 2002 when she moved to Massachusetts to become executive director of the Notre Dame Education Center in Lawrence. The center provides ESL and citizenship courses for new immigrants and teaches Spanish to doctors, nurses, and librarians in the area. Sister Guynette also coached boys and girls basketball teams at Notre Dame High School, part of the Cristo Rey Network of schools for poor students in urban areas where there are few other educational options. In 2008, after she was invited to move into leadership within her community, she returned to Baltimore.

The American culture still wants us to divide. It promotes fear. I will not buy into that because I know different. Religious life is one place where we are pulling away from the culture message. We see differences as gifts not as divisions. There is a richness of life we're missing [in our culture] and we need to be intentional about changing that.

Have you seen changes in attitudes in your community?

Yes! I am blessed to have experienced heartfelt transformations. [In 1995] it was lip service. Now it is heartfelt. We realize that we need each other to do mission. To be an SND [Sister of Notre Dame] is the most exciting thing in my life. We stand with the poor. The call is still there. And the blessings.

Church of Saint Francis Xavier NY

PASTORAL COUNCIL STATEMENT ON OUR COMMUNAL COMMITMENT TO ESTABLISHING RACIAL EQUITY AND DISMANTLING RACIAL INJUSTICE

Recently, a few Catholic social media outlets, web postings and even a cable news outlet drew attention to the Racial Justice Pledge posted on our website and recited by those who wish at the conclusion of Mass. Our livestream Mass which usually garners approximately 1500 views attracted more than 8000 views. Excerpts of the recitation of the pledge, sometimes edited out of context, have appeared, garnering 100s of more views. This statement places the Pledge in the context of our communal faith life. By this statement we also extend an invitation to those who have contacted us regarding the Pledge to engage with us in a prayerful, inclusive conversation that has Christ's message of love for all God's children at its heart.

Our community at The Church of St. Francis Xavier, in carrying out our communal sacramental life in faith, committed itself years ago to putting Catholic social teaching into practice through works of charity and acts of peace and justice. This commitment has led us to provide spiritual direction for parishioners to deepen their prayer life, feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, and offer a spiritual home to the LGBTQ+ community. More than two years ago, in furtherance of a commitment to racial justice that dates to at least 1964, we began a communal examination of institutional and systemic racial inequity – including the manifestation of that inequity in the Catholic Church.

As part of our self-examination we have sought to understand the term "white privilege" and how it operates to re-enforce racial injustice. "White privilege" has been defined as advantages that are taken for granted by white people and cannot be similarly enjoyed by people of color in the same context (government, community, workplace, schools, etc.)." These advantages pertain solely to the color of a person's skin.

It is uncomfortable and often distressing for white people to recognize that simply being white confers a presumptive superiority at the expense of people of color. Initial reactions can be defensive: "Slavery ended in 1865." "My family never benefited from black or brown labor." "I've worked hard for everything I have." These reactions seek to end the conversation. They seek to sidestep personal complicity in perpetuating the systems and institutions that support racial inequity. However, these reactions also confirm the speaker's recognition that racial inequity exists – in housing, health care, education, the enjoyment of personal rights, and income, to name a few contexts.

Once we recognize racial injustice, the Gospel of Jesus compels us to act to remedy the injustice. The Racial Justice Pledge, posted on the parish website and recited at the conclusion of Mass, is an opportunity for us to dedicate ourselves – and our faith community - to the biblical cause of justice. In their pastoral letter on racism, "Open Wide Our Hearts" the US Bishops acknowledged "systemic racism", stating that "all of us are in need of personal, ongoing conversion". The letter continues, "To do justice requires an honest acknowledgment of our failures and the restoring of right relationships between us." The pledge is offered in the spirit of advancing our conversion and restoring right relationships among us. It is our community's hope that the pledge and our other ministries can foster conversations within our immediate and larger faith community. We welcome being at the forefront of this effort.

https://sfxavier.org/news/a-pledge-for-racial-justice

A PLEDGE FOR RACIAL JUSTICE

17

A PLEDGE FOR RACIAL JUSTICE
Question format

The Church of St. Francis Xavier joins with people throughout the world, in committing itself to racial justice. And so we pledge together: Please respond YES

DO YOU SUPPORT justice, equity, and compassion in human relations.

DO YOU AFFIRM that white privilege is unfair and harmful to those who have it and to those who do not.

DO YOU AFFIRM that white privilege and the culture of white supremacy must be dismantled wherever it is present?

DO YOU SUPPORT racial equity, justice, and liberation for every person.

DO YOU AFFIRM the inherent worth and dignity of every person.

Therefore, from this day forward . . .

WILL YOU strive to understand more deeply the injustice and suffering white privilege and white supremacy cause?

WILL YOU COMMIT to help transform our church culture to one that is actively engaged in seeking racial justice and equity for everyone.

WILL YOU make a greater effort to treat all people with the same respect you expect to receive.

WILL YOU COMMIT to developing the courage to live your beliefs and values of racial justice and equality.

WILL YOU strive daily to eliminate racial prejudice from your thoughts and actions so that you can better promote the racial justice efforts of our church.

WILL YOU renew and honor this pledge daily, knowing that our church, our community, our nation, and our world will be better places because of my efforts.

["Racial Equity Pledge" by First Unitarian Church of Dallas, Texas revised by SFX]