

Building Anew in the Spirit of Resurrection

At the beginning of our Lenten journey, we acknowledged the need to dismantle and rebuild our systems rather than simply reforming them, to eradicate white male supremacy. Throughout this guide, we have encountered personal stories and reflections on how our current federal policy intentionally and systematically discriminates against different groups — people of color, women, those on the economic margins, and especially our neighbors and family who live at the intersections of these identities. The continued existence of these sinful federal policies further expands racial and economic disparities, but together, we can choose a new path to realize our vision of a just and inclusive society.

As Pope Francis wrote in Paragraph 105 of *Fratteli Tutti*, “Individualism does not make us more free, more equal, more fraternal ... Radical individualism is a virus that is extremely difficult to eliminate.” In the hope of the Resurrection, let us commit to eliminating individualism and building a new political system, economy, and society that intentionally includes everyone, prioritizing the wellbeing of those marginalized by our dominant systems and society.

The four cornerstones of NETWORK’s Build Anew agenda provide the foundation for shaping a new society that upholds the dignity of each person and advances the common good. The following cornerstones, based on the principles of Catholic Social Justice, establish the basis for new federal policies that promote equality and justice for all, especially those most often left out of our care.

With hope, we build our country anew by:

Dismantling Systemic Racism: Structural racism is an attack on the human dignity and lives of people of color in the United States. It is present in our laws, or economy, and our society and must be named and addressed in federal policy.

Cultivating Inclusive Community: As the COVID-19 pandemic has shown, we are all connected to one another and our health, wellbeing, and lives depend on one another. We cannot make policy decisions from an individualistic, self-serving perspective and we cannot choose who to exclude from our care; it will only harm our national community.

Rooting Our Economy in Solidarity: The economy and our political system shape the society in which we live with one another. Therefore, our economy must be based on solidarity and recognize the injustices of a system that fails to meet so many peoples’ basic human needs.

Transforming Our Politics: Our political system is skewed, rewarding voter suppression and polarization. It spreads division and exclusion instead of true inclusion and representation. We have a sacred and ethical obligation to create a democracy that is fair, transparent, and accountable and honors the human dignity of every person.

As Easter invites us to celebrate new life, may we envision a new life for our country with our society transformed so everyone is represented with equity and dignity.

Children's Wellbeing Is Gospel and Resurrection

Each year the Children's Defense Fund hosts faith leaders, advocates, and organizers at Haley Farm in Tennessee for a week of renewal, worship, and skill building. In 2016, I organized a delegation from St. Louis, Missouri of youth leaders and children from our church to attend. During one of the breaks between afternoon workshops and nighttime chapel, the adults from our group met inside while the kids from the congregation joined new friends playing on the front lawn of a building called the Wright House.

It was the last guesthouse built by historian Alex Haley on the property and had been named to honor the family of our founder, Marian Wright Edelman. Confused by its gleaming, snowy exterior contrasting a green roof and window shutters, my youngest son who was five years old at the time called it "the White House."

As the children played, the Rev. Dr. John Kinney, then Senior Vice President and Dean of the Proctor School of Theology at Virginia Union University, arrived for his evening preaching assignment. On the drive down the gravel road through the campus to the lodge at the far end, Dr. Kinney was welcomed by the sounds and scene of children laughing, running, and even a little dancing. The image stuck with him. That night, as this stalwart of the Black church and pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church in Beaver Dam, Virginia stood to preach the good news, he painted the picture of these children playing.

Running with reckless abandon, giggling with bursting joy, and dancing in open air like nobody's watching are signs that children are well. In fact, they are signs that our communities are well. That our nation is doing well.

Our kids could play without reservation because they were safe. They were healthy and well-nourished. There were thoughtful adults nearby — from the church and in the 'White House' — working actively to build a world for them to thrive. Haley Farm is a carefully crafted space for children to flourish. But this does not have to stop on a campus in Tennessee.

When marginalized children flourish, when leaders prioritize their wellbeing and communities wield their power to ensure children can thrive, we experience Resurrection. This is the hope-filled picture of a new day arising. After a pandemic season of Good Fridays marked by loss, mourning, and death and the extended silence of public policy in response to our protests in the Holy Saturdays of recent years, our nation needs a Word of Resurrection. Every time a child smiles God's Word is proclaimed.

Like the Resurrection we prepare for in Lent and celebrate during Eastertide, appearance narratives remind us that new life is possible. To sustain our strength on the journey to justice, every now and then God gives us a glimpse of the world we are working for. These images radicalize our work. They remind us that "we wrestle not" against any lobby or "ism," but **for** a new life in a world where children thrive. It is already, just not yet.

Written by Reverend Doctor Starsky Wilson. Rev. Dr. Starsky Wilson is president & CEO of the Children's Defense Fund based in Washington, D.C., Board Chair for the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy and Vice Chair of the Fund for Theological Exploration.

We Pray

We praise the Great Spirit
who began moving
before the existence of space and time,
before the birth of creation.

As She breathes life into being
calling forth each unique form,
Her cosmos emerges and expands
in unimaginable abundance.

It is then that God calls us
to be stewards and co-creators
of this diverse network
of stardust and dark matter.

With humble and penitent hearts,
we acknowledge our abdication
of this sacred covenant intended
to serve the common good.

As the Word Incarnate,
the Resurrected One, taught us love
of God is true when we love
our neighbors as ourselves.

We repent for our transgressions –
both explicit and implicit --
against God, ourselves,
our neighbors and all of creation.

On this Easter Sunday, compelled
by love of God and neighbor,
we reaffirm our sacred responsibility
as an embodied act of faith.

Blessed as children of the One God,
may we be a faithful network
who uses the gifts of our birthright
in pursuit of the common good.

In the solemnity of this Easter Season,
we vow to build anew as we:
dismantle systemic racism,
cultivate inclusive community,
root our economy in solidarity
and transform our politics.

We pray this in All the Holy Names of God.
Amen.

Alleluia. Alleluia. Alleluia.

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