



# *We are called to work* for **RACIAL JUSTICE**

**NETWORK**  
ADVOCATES FOR JUSTICE, INSPIRED BY CATHOLIC SISTERS

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“Sisters and Brothers:

We are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us.  
We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

For our sake God made Christ to be sin who did not know sin,  
so that we might become the righteousness of God in Christ.

Working together, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in  
vain.

For God says: ‘In an acceptable time I heard you, and on the day of salvation  
I helped you.’

Behold, now is a very acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”

*2 Corinthians 5:20-6:2*

Welcome to our Lenten journey. This year, we invite you to join us as we dive into the challenging truth of racism in our society and the continuing saga of white privilege. We at NETWORK have been grappling with this reality for years. In the process, we have examined the structural racism in our laws. These often unseen structures keep us bound in social sin through the racial wealth and income gap, health disparities, and more.

Our study has led me to see that our societal structures are woven together with the vestiges of slavery and prejudice and the continued modern structures of racism today. But even more challenging are the many ways that I benefit as a white person in our racist society.

As a staff, we have been reading the book *White Fragility* by Robin DiAngelo. She points out one aspect of white privilege is that we white folks can avoid talking about race. We find it painful and sometimes embarrassing. White folks have the luxury to avoid the conversation. I realized I do this. I worry that I might say something insensitive; I’m personally embarrassed. And I

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*Welcome cont.*

can change the subject. In addition to avoidance, individualism, DiAngelo posits, is at the heart of society's inability to move beyond anecdotal experience and make real systemic change. We white people do not see the structures that secure our privilege and cement the racial divides.

So, we thought that the best topic for our political Lenten reflection is the issue of structural racism and privilege in these very challenging times. Doing this work requires us to embrace our role as ambassadors of the divine, and work together to rid ourselves of the social sin of racism. This is a communal need. If we build awareness of the societal dimension of this sin, then we can work together to dismantle the structural sin of racism. It won't be easy; it will require many of us to awaken to the ways that we white people unwittingly benefit from racism—and still be willing to change.

So let us spend this Lent together in an exploration of structural racism in our time. St. Paul is correct as he writes in the Second Letter to the Corinthians:

**“Behold, now is a very acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”**

*—Sister Simone Campbell, SSS  
Executive Director of NETWORK Advocates for Catholic  
Social Justice*

## **What Does it Mean to Recommit to Racial Justice?**

Thank you for joining us in this difficult but essential work for racial justice. In this time of hyper-polarization and racial strife in our country, it seems important for people of faith to recommit to our shared connection as members of the human family. Consequently, over the course of this Lenten season, we will engage in an extended examination of the systemic use of power and privilege to oppress and disadvantage people in this country based on a racial hierarchy.

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*What Does it Mean cont.*

We are blessed to be in a community of justice-seekers at NETWORK that is racially diverse, geographically diverse, and spans many age groups and life experiences. Racism is a powerful force that touches every aspect of our lives. Therefore, we need everyone to bring their full selves, with all of their gifts and talents, to this effort.

Examining and reflecting on racism in our history, policies, and society and taking action are drastically different experiences for white people and people of color. People of color have been speaking, organizing, and acting against racism for centuries. It is impossible to deny the truth that, while there have been exceptions to the norm, the majority of white people and institutional power in our nation have always (up to and including today) been on the side of white supremacy. It is time for white people to do the work of racial justice, educating themselves and finding ways to act in solidarity with people of color against racist policies and practices.

We created this guide particularly attuned to the work that white members of our Spirit-filled network must do to examine their white privilege and the effects of systemic racism. We hope, however, that the faithful content and spiritual nourishment are valuable to the entire NETWORK community.

If you have any questions or reflections you'd like to share with NETWORK as you engage with this resource, please email them to [info@networklobby.org](mailto:info@networklobby.org).

**A note for white participants about processing this information:** Please be intentional about how you process your learnings about race and racism, and with whom. We cannot assume that people of color are freely available to provide the emotional labor of explaining racism to white people. Unless a person of color has explicitly invited you to reflect on race and racism with them, or is working in a professional capacity and receiving just compensation for their time and effort, refrain from launching an extended discussion about this content with people of color.

**Why NETWORK capitalizes the B in Black and keeps the w in white lowercase:**

We believe that the way we use language has power. While there are many discussions over the proper capitalization (or not) of Black and white, NETWORK has decided to capitalize the B and keep the w lowercase. In doing so, we are making an intentional decision to place power and importance on a community that is often undervalued in our society. Read more about this decision from the Columbia Journalism Review at [https://www.cjr.org/analysis/language\\_corner\\_1.php](https://www.cjr.org/analysis/language_corner_1.php).

## Shared Agreements for Engaging in Racial Justice Work with NETWORK

In our continuing work of becoming an anti-racist and multicultural organization, we have established these shared agreements as a baseline for conversation and reflection about race and racial justice. Often things can be misunderstood or miscommunicated, especially with topics as sensitive as race and racial justice, and it is important to create a space for our reflections and our discussions to be productive and healthy. Please read our shared agreements and consider them carefully before proceeding.

### Speak up/Make space

This is a different iteration of what some people call “step up/step back” that is more mindful of physical ability (that not everyone can or will step). It also exists to dismiss the idea that “moving back” is what anyone needs to do. Speak up/Make space instead means that we need to make a conscious effort to consider who usually speaks up about racism and who remains silent. Additionally, we should also consider whose voices are listened to with more respect and/or authority, why that is the case, and how we can amplify important voices that do not have the audience they deserve.

### We are each experts on our own experiences

We can only speak to our own lived experiences and nobody can invalidate the things that we have seen, heard, or felt. Our personal history and experiences deserve to be examined to understand our social location and our socialization. In conversations about race, be sure that you are only speaking as yourself and not speaking for someone else or their intentions.

*Example:* “When this happened, I felt this way...”

### Respect confidentiality/Continue the conversation

This does NOT mean “what happens in this room stays in this room,” and we will never pick up an important conversation again. It simply means we should process and continue the

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*Shared Agreements cont.*

conversation while being intentional about respecting people's vulnerability and pain.

### Whether or not it has been named, the personal manifestations of power are present

White supremacy and racism are embedded within every institution within the United States. This means that every person is living within that social context, which bestows a unique amount of privilege or disadvantage on each person in the room depending on their identities. Recognize your identity and the identity of others as you participate in conversations about race and racial justice.

### Embrace and express discomfort

Lean into the discomfort that arises when thinking or talking about race and interrogate those feelings internally and externally.

*Example:* "I felt anxious reading ..." or "I noticed myself feeling defensive and I think that came from ..."

### Practice self-care

This work can be emotionally taxing. While we wish for everyone to lean into their discomfort in order to learn, we recognize that for some people this can bring up trauma, and no one can learn when they are feeling traumatized. If necessary, feel free to take a break to collect yourself and return to the content when you are ready.

### Resolution will not happen today

We are not going to solve racism by the time you complete this guide, and that's okay.

Are you willing to agree to these shared agreements as you encounter and reflect upon this content? These principles apply to your experiences with this "**Recommit to Racial Justice**" guide and may also be helpful in other conversations you have around race and racial justice, so feel free to use them.

## Preparing Our Hearts to Recommit to Racial Justice

Lent is a time for repentance. It is a time for setting aside our familiar habits and comforts and for wandering in the desert. For many of us, a desert is unfamiliar terrain and may seem treacherous with its parched sand and rocks and relentless sun and heat.

Lent is also a time for renewal. Though we may stumble and at times question our path through this desert, our 40-day journey is not aimless or without beauty. At the beginning of Lent, God says to us, “Return to Me with all your heart,” (Joel 2:12), and each day we step deeper into the wilderness. Hiking through a desert, you will probably experience deep thirst, perhaps exhaustion from heat, but you will also see towering *saguro* cactus, water flowing through an *arroyo*, a stunning sunrise. As we journey through Lent, we know that we are always walking in God’s love; we know that we are always walking towards the Resurrection.

### *A Meditation for White Participants written by Meg Olson, NETWORK Grassroots Mobilization Manager*

This Lent, NETWORK inviting you to deepen your commitment to working for racial justice and to connect the work of racial justice to your personal faith. Learning about and reflecting on the white supremacy that permeates the structures and society we live in is hard work. The journey is challenging; we may stumble, and we will lament.

*Breathe in. Breathe out.*

**Reflect on your own social power.** How does your racial identity grant you privileges or disadvantages? What about your age, gender, education, economic status, or ability? How might your own social power affect your Lenten journey?

*Breathe in. Breathe out.*

**You will most likely experience discomfort.** Embrace that discomfort. Sit with it and examine it. Explore it as you reflect on the weekly readings.

*Breathe in. Breathe out.*

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*Meditation cont.*

**You may find yourself clinging to the comfort that you already “get racism.” “I serve in the inner-city.” “My church is diverse.” “My adopted grand-daughter is Black.”** Challenge yourself. Name three actions in the last month that show your commitment to being anti-racist. Where do you see your learning edge? What more can you do to dismantle white supremacy? Go there.

*Breathe in. Breathe out.*

**You may find yourself calling out others. “If the Church would only...” “This administration...” “My neighborhood association!”** Turn inward. This is your journey. How do you see racism in your own upbringing or beliefs? How do you see yourself participating in the institutions or structures that uphold white supremacy?

*Breathe in. Breathe out.*

**You may find yourself feeling hopeless. “We’ve been working on this for years and nothing has worked.” “I can’t reach everyone that I want to.” “Legislation doesn’t change hearts.”** Hopelessness prevents us from taking action to dismantle white supremacy; it keeps the current system in place. Think about what you’ve already done. How have you educated yourself about racism? What work have you already done to end economic inequality or promote health equity between white people and people of color? Name where you find hope in the movement for racial justice.

*Breathe in. Breathe out.*

**You may find yourself experiencing tremendous guilt or even self-loathing.** Forgive yourself. If you are doing this work, you are not immoral, and you are certainly not a bad person. Through your whiteness, you are complicit in a system that you may not have been aware of for many years. God is within you and in every part of your life. May this experience of suffering help you be in deeper solidarity with the generations of people who have been hurt by racism.

*Breathe in. Breathe out.*

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**Words of Wisdom**

**Without community there is no liberation, only the most vulnerable and temporary armistice between an individual and her oppression. But community must not mean a shedding of our differences, nor the pathetic pretense that these differences do not exist.”**

— *Audre Lorde, The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House 1979*

*Meditation cont.*

Though we may stumble and at times question our path through this desert, our 40-day journey is not aimless or without beauty. Remember that the narrative of people of color in this country is not just one of oppression and pain, but one of resistance, resurrection, and joy. Know that our collective resurrection will happen when white supremacy is fully dismantled. Know that by recommitting to racial justice this Lent, you are responding to God's invitation, "Return to Me with all your heart."

*A Reflection for Participants of Color written by Tralonne Shorter, NETWORK Senior Government Relations Advocate*

To Fellow Readers of Color:

It is my prayer that you will approach this content with a sense of hope, welcome, and grace. As you read this guide, know that it is not perfect nor is it meant to be a comprehensive exposition on every subject related to race.

Some, upon seeing the title "Recommit to Racial Justice," will presume that this is a call to action for white people alone.

To them I say: Resist the urge to cede your power by bearing little to no responsibility in creating the precipitous change in our world, communities, schools, workplaces, and churches needed to dismantle white supremacy, fragility, and privilege. I encourage you especially to "not grow tired of doing good, for in due time we shall reap our harvest, if we do not give up" (Galatians 6:9).

There is understandably anger, hurt, resentment, frustration, and pain. But remaining in this space obstructs our own liberation. There are no justified resentments, Wayne Dyer said. While we will never forget the pain of our communities and our ancestors, we must find ways to heal ourselves and our families.

We all bear the burden of dismantling the power dynamics that support a false narrative in white spaces, especially progressive white spaces, that sees people of color as tokens of achievement

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*Reflection cont.*

or victims needing saving by privileged, God-fearing white people.

Let us renew our minds and hearts so that privilege no longer dominates us.

*Breathe in. Breathe out.*

**Reflect on your own power.** How does your racial identity grant you privileges or disadvantages? What about your age, gender, education, economic status, or ability? How might your own social power affect your Lenten journey?

*Breathe in. Breathe out.*

**Consider your role in creating the world you wish to see.** Turn inward. This is your journey. How are you called to resist racism against all people of color?

*Breathe in. Breathe out.*

**Find inspiration and reasons for hope.** Remember those who have worked for racial justice before us. Think about what you have already done. Name where you find hope in the movement for racial justice.

*Breathe in. Breathe out.*

**We affirm this truth:** To be Black or Brown is beautiful, strong, resilient, phenomenal, and worthy of love, respect, and a seat at an integrated table. This takes nothing away from white people.

## Take Action

Father Bryan Massingale is a leader in the fields of theological ethics and liberation theology and a noted authority on issues of social and racial justice. His teachings and writings make up critical contributions to the contemporary Catholic conversation around race and racial justice.

In 2017, Fr. Massingale addressed the Ignatian Family Teach-In for Justice, an annual gathering of Jesuit high school and college students. In his speech, he asked “**What ought to be our contribution to racial justice?**” While Fr. Massingale directs his

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*Take Action cont.*

remarks towards the high school and college students attending the Ignatian Family Teach-In, his message is profoundly relevant for justice-seekers of all ages. Set aside some time to watch Fr. Massingale's 50-minute speech, "The Magis and Justice," found at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=eyMYQFjzmZQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eyMYQFjzmZQ).

## *We Pray*

Loving God,

You are with us in oppression; you are with us in liberation.

You are not bound by systems, nor by time or place. You have seen the effects of racism tear apart whole lives, families, communities, and societies. You have been with us in the harm and the confusion, the injustice, and the struggle.

As we sit at this crux of learning, resistance, and healing, may your spirit guide our thoughts and actions. As we reflect on our own humanity in the face of systemic injustice, may your wisdom transform us. Let us come to know our lived experience in the context of institutionalized racism.

We must first understand oppression to move forward on the path to liberation. Allow us grace, humility, and perseverance to process what we are learning. Be with us on the holy path of justice.

Amen.

*Written by*

*Lindsay Hueston, NETWORK Communications Associate*

## **Reflection Questions**

1. Does the learning Sister Simone mentioned in her introduction, that white people have the privilege of individuality, resonate with you?
2. How did you react to the grounding meditation addressed to you as a white participant or person of color? If feelings of defensiveness or indignation arose, take some extra time to think about or journal about why that feeling emerged.

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### *Reflection Questions cont.*

3. One of our shared agreements states that “resolution will not happen today.” Father Massingale, in his address to the Ignatian Family Teach-In, likens the work of racial justice to a relay race (46 minutes into the video). How do you feel about the idea of this work, no matter how hard you try, being incomplete?
4. Father Massingale says “When we are physically ill, we enter into rehabilitation; when we are soul sick, we need to be re-created.” (44 minutes into the video.) Imagine what that re-creation might look like for yourself, your community, our nation, and our world.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### Read

- *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church*  
February 28, 2010

[www.orbisbooks.com/racial-justice-and-the-catholic-church.html](http://www.orbisbooks.com/racial-justice-and-the-catholic-church.html)

Father Bryan Massingale’s 2010 book studies racism in the United States from our early history to the present day, and evaluates the Catholic Church’s historical responses to racism and its institutional support for the work of racial justice.

- “If You Love Me, Do Your Homework”  
April 18, 2018

[www.thewitnessbcc.com/if-you-love-me-do-your-homework](http://www.thewitnessbcc.com/if-you-love-me-do-your-homework)

In this article, Tamara C. Johnson, a Black woman, writes to her “white friends, associates, and churchgoers” to say how draining and damaging to her own health it is to continuously explain racism to them. She calls on white people to educate themselves on systemic racism and gives examples of how to do this, if they are serious about ending racism.

- “11 Easy Mistakes to Make When Thinking About Racial Inequality in the U.S.”

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*Additional Resources cont.*

November 12, 2015

[www.sojo.net/articles/11-easy-mistakes-make-when-thinking-about-racial-inequality-us](http://www.sojo.net/articles/11-easy-mistakes-make-when-thinking-about-racial-inequality-us)

Author Joe Pettit lists “11 easy but serious mistakes well-intentioned people may make when thinking and talking about racial justice.”

- “Put Out Internalized Racism: Why Solidarity Between People of Color Matters”

August 22, 2013

[www.everydayfeminism.com/2013/08/put-out-internalized-racism](http://www.everydayfeminism.com/2013/08/put-out-internalized-racism)

Jarune Uwujaren writes about her personal experiences of racism and how society’s emphasis on privileging white people can lead people of color to hurting one another to get ahead in our racist system.

**Watch**

- “White vs. Whiteness”

March 10, 2016

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=TlpY7LOKbmI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TlpY7LOKbmI)

Portland Community College published this 2 minute video about the difference between the terms “white” which describes skin color and “whiteness” which is a system that divides people based on race and perpetuates racism today.

- “The Socialization and Comfortableness of Microaggressions”

November 14, 2017

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=9YR8jNtV4BE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9YR8jNtV4BE)

In this 17-minute TED talk, Dr. Andrea Boyles explores the roots of macroaggressions, how they can come from people with “good intentions,” and their effects on people of color.

- How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Discussing Race  
November 15, 2011

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=MbdxeFcQtaU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MbdxeFcQtaU)

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*Additional Resources cont.*

Jay Smooth discusses why it is so difficult to accept critique that you may have said something racist, how perfectionism makes it harder for us to become better at being anti-racist, and how we can keep this perfectionism from preventing us having conversations about race. This is a 12 minute TED talk.

**Listen**

- The Code Switch Podcast Episode 1: Can We Talk About Whiteness?  
May 31, 2016  
[www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2016/05/31/479733094/the-code-switch-podcast-episode-1-can-we-talk-about-whiteness](http://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2016/05/31/479733094/the-code-switch-podcast-episode-1-can-we-talk-about-whiteness)

Hosts Gene Demby and Shereen Marisol Meraji lead an interesting discussion on the concept of whiteness, speaking to guests who teach college or talk about whiteness professionally. This podcast episode is 37 minutes long.

- On Being Podcast: Opening the Question of Race to the Question of Belonging  
May 10, 2018  
[www.onbeing.org/programs/john-a-powell-opening-to-the-question-of-belonging-may2018/](http://www.onbeing.org/programs/john-a-powell-opening-to-the-question-of-belonging-may2018/)

Krista Tippett interviews John A. Powell, the Director of the Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society, at UC Berkeley. They talk about race, whiteness, building equity, and relationships with other humans and the earth for 52 minutes.

- On Being Podcast: Let's Talk About Whiteness  
January 19, 2017  
[www.onbeing.org/programs/eula-biss-lets-talk-about-whiteness/](http://www.onbeing.org/programs/eula-biss-lets-talk-about-whiteness/)

Krista Tippett conducts a 52-minute interview with Eula Biss, who wrote an essay titled "White Debt" which was published in the New York Times. They discuss noticing disparate treatment in their communities and finding ways to work against racial discrimination.