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## Plenty Good Room: Using Negro Spirituals to Bridge the Racial Divide

Darnell Allen St. Romain

*Southern Methodist University*, [darnells@smu.edu](mailto:darnells@smu.edu)

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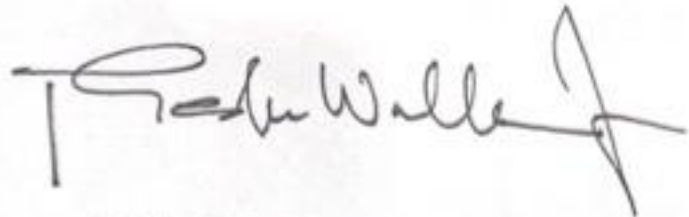
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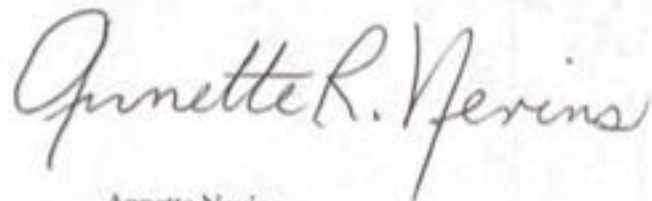
Approved by:



Dr. C. Michael Hawn  
University Distinguished Professor  
*Emeritus* of Church Music  
Adjunct Professor, Doctor of Pastoral Music  
Program



Dr. Theodore Walker  
Associate Professor of Ethics and Society



Annette Nevins  
Visiting Professor of Practice

PLENTY GOOD ROOM:  
USING NEGRO SPIRITUALS  
TO BRIDGE THE RACIAL DIVIDE

A Thesis Presented to the Graduate Faculty of

Perkins School of Theology

Southern Methodist University

in

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Pastoral Music

by

Darnell Allen St. Romain

B.M., Organ Performance, Louisiana State University  
M.M., Organ Performance, Southern Methodist University  
M.S.M., Sacred Music, Organ, Southern Methodist University

April 24, 2024

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To my identical twin brother, Darrell St. Romain, you have been with me every step of the way and have completed every degree program with me, including the Doctor of Pastoral Music Degree. Thank you for always pushing me to achieve excellence.

St. Romain, Darnell Allen

B.M., Organ Performance, Louisiana State University  
M.M, Organ Performance, Southern Methodist University  
M.S.M. Sacred Music, Organ, Southern Methodist University

Plenty Good Room:  
Using Negro Spirituals  
to bridge the racial divide

Advisor: Dr. C. Michael Hawn  
Doctor of Pastoral Music conferred May 11, 2024  
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### ABSTRACT

In 2020, the United States experienced a global pandemic and the murder of Mr. George Floyd. With the murder of Floyd, many churches were confronted with the racial divide in the United States. This thesis is a response of one community, the Prince of Peace Catholic Church in Plano, Texas. Using the folk song of Black Americans, namely the Negro Spirituals, as the foundation of an ethical-theological framework, this thesis poses one way for addressing the anti-Black structure prevalent in the Catholic Church in the United States of America. This work progresses from despair to hope, addressing the link between the institution of Slavery and the Negro Spirituals, providing an overview of Catholic documents on racism and reconciliation, and illustrating a theology of accompaniment championed by Pope Francis, to provide strategies on addressing the racial divide.

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## Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my wife, Hannah, and my daughter, Zadie.



## INTRODUCTION

“I’ve Been ’buked and I’ve Been Scorned”

*I’ve been ’buked an’ I’ve been scorned,  
I’ve been ’buked an’ I’ve been scorned, children;  
I’ve been ’buked an’ I’ve been scorned,  
I’ve been talked about sho’s you’ born.*

### Introduction

I did not, when a slave, understand the deep meaning of those rude and apparently incoherent songs. I was myself within the circle; so that I neither saw nor heard as those without might see and hear. They told a tale of woe which was then altogether beyond my feeble comprehension; they were tones loud, long, and deep; they breathed the prayer and complaint of souls boiling over with the bitterest anguish. Every tone was a testimony against slavery, and a prayer to God for deliverance from chains. . . . To those songs I trace my first glimmering conception of the dehumanizing character of slavery.<sup>1</sup>

These words by Frederick Douglass describe what the enslaved Africans expressed when singing, “I’ve been ’buked.”<sup>2</sup> This “tale of woe” expresses a life of harshness and oppression or “bitterest anguish” that the enslaved lived. There is an acknowledgment of the extreme injustice accompanying the reality of lifelong involuntary servitude and oppression when the enslaved sings: “I’ve been talked about sho’s you’ born.” “Dere is trouble all over dis worl” moves beyond the personal situation of the enslaved and connects their troubles and existential calamities to the evil found in this world. “Ain’ gwine lay my ’ligion down” expresses hope and “a prayer to God for deliverance.” The enslaved exhibit steadfastness in the face of adversity,

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1845] 1999), 24.

<sup>2</sup> “I’ve been ’buked” was first recorded by the Tuskegee Institute Singers in 1916. The spiritual became more influential in the middle part of the twentieth century. Most famously, “I’ve been ’buked” was sung by Mahalia Jackson right before Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his “I have a dream” speech in Washington D. C. in 1963 as shown in this video: <https://www.cbsnews.com/video/mahalia-jackson-wows-crowd-at-march-on-washington/> (accessed March 1, 2024).

believing that one day God will surely free them from captivity. Even though this song originated during slavery, it deeply resonates with generations of Black folk in the United States of America.<sup>3</sup>

The life of harshness and “bitterest anguish” continues to this day. On May 25, 2020, a former Minneapolis police officer murdered Mr. George Floyd. The officer knelt on Floyd’s neck for nine minutes and twenty-nine seconds. Floyd’s murder sparked international protests against police brutality and systemic racism. The protesters chanted “Black Lives Matter” in the streets. In turn, pastors responded to the demonstrations in pulpits across America with peaceful, healing, and comforting words.

African Americans are resilient people. Since colonizers forcibly transplanted shackled Africans on the shores of the United States in 1619, enslaved Africans endured the virulent system of chattel slavery, Jim Crow, the Civil Rights movement, and now the enduring after-life of slavery—systemic racism.<sup>4</sup> Enslaved Africans created folk songs—spirituals—to articulate a fabric of life amid human degradation and brutality. During the Civil Rights movement, African Americans revised their spirituals to embody unity and solidarity.

During the Summer of 2020, I was confronted with two circumstances, the global pandemic of COVID-19 and police brutality resulting from years of systemic racism. I asked: how can I challenge my community of faith to see the atrocities Black people have experienced over the years and in the present moment? How can we, as the church respond? How can I begin the conversation at my parish, Prince of Peace Catholic Church in Plano, Texas? What is the first

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<sup>3</sup> In this thesis, when referring to demographic racial groups, I will capitalize the “B” in “Black” and the “W” in White. Black with a capital B refers to people of the African diaspora. Lower case black is a color. The capitalization of “White” allows us to reflect on how Whiteness survives and is supported.

<sup>4</sup> Katie Walker Grimes, *Christ Divided: Antiblackness as Corporate Vice* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017), 7, Kindle.

step, and then the following actions? Will the conversation be fruitful? Will the theory of systemic racism be rejected? My first thought was to design a service of racial reconciliation, to create a space where the church acknowledged its participation and silence in racism, and then to use the service as a launching point to engage in conversations around systemic racism in the church and society.

In June 2020, Prince of Peace Catholic Church—where I am the associate director of liturgical music—held a service of racial reconciliation: *A Service for the Breath of Life*, interweaving spirituals and God’s word to create a space for acknowledging racism and promoting unity. Arthur C. Jones suggests that spirituals are “sources of wisdom and guidance in addressing current societal issues.”<sup>5</sup> How can spirituals help address current societal issues? Will singing spirituals help change attitudes on race? Incorporating the singing of spirituals in the Mass will encourage Prince of Peace’s parishioners to address the systemic racial injustices within its community.

I grew up in a Black Catholic Church, St. Paul the Apostle Catholic Church in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Singing spirituals in the Mass was an experience that was familiar to me. The entire community would sing the songs of their ancestors, and these moments spoke life to all those present: “Steal away home / I ain’t got long to stay here,” “Hold on just a little while longer / everything will be all right,” Hush, hush, somebody’s calling my name,” “Fix me, Jesus, fix me.” These are some of the words that sustained the congregation. However, will spirituals have the same effect on a mostly White, upper-middle-class congregation, such as Prince of Peace, whose ancestors were not enslaved?

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<sup>5</sup> Arthur C. Jones, *Wade in the Water: The Wisdom of Spirituals* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993), xiv.

Why sing spirituals in Mass? Spirituals incorporate the liberating power of God, the God of Moses, and the Exodus: “Tell ole Pharaoh to let my people go.” The Exodus event (Exod 11–19) is a story of faith that recalls how God delivered his chosen people from the horrors of slavery into a life free of captivity. Freedom from captivity is not exclusively for or about Black people; it is for all God’s children. Singing about God’s liberation will empower one to “hold on just a little while longer” until “everything will be alright.”<sup>6</sup>

Once God delivered the Israelites from captivity, they did not immediately possess the promised land. The enslaved improvised a theme on the battle Joshua faced to lead the Israelites into the promised land (Josh 5–6). “Joshua fit de battle of Jericho” is a spiritual that is anamnestic, proleptic, and eschatological. It is anamnestic because when singing the spiritual it recalls the biblical event of the past. It is proleptic because future “walls” can tumble down. It is eschatological because hopefully one day we too will reach our heavenly promised land. Following closely to the biblical depiction, the spiritual recalls the battle. Joshua walks up to the walls of Jericho with his spear in hand. Then Joshua cries out to blow the ram horns because the “battle am-a in my hands.” Finally, Joshua commands the Israelites to shout, “and the walls come tumbling down.” What are these walls? To the enslaved, it was slavery. To a student involved in a civil rights protest, it is Jim Crow. To a Black man singing in 2020, it is police brutality and racism. It is hard to miss the characterization that what Joshua did in ancient times can be done now and over again in the future.<sup>7</sup>

“Plenty good room” is an eschatological vision. In the present moment, when the church gathers around the eucharistic table, there is division, and racism is present. Although gathering

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<sup>6</sup> Negro Spiritual, “Hold On Just a Little While Longer.”

<sup>7</sup> John Lovell, Jr., *Black Song: The Forge and the Flame: The Story of How the Afro-American Spiritual Was Hammered Out* (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 229; Arthur C. Jones, *Wade in the Water: The Wisdom of the Spirituals* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1993), 52.

around the eucharistic table is a symbol in the Catholic Church of the unity of the people partaking in the Body and Blood of Christ, that in itself does not change that the people who gather are themselves often divided along racial grounds. However, “Plenty good room” envisions the eucharistic table free of racial injustice. The enslaved spoke of sitting around the table with the same people who oppressed them, as the refrain indicates: Plenty good room, plenty good room, / plenty good room in my Father's kingdom, / Plenty good room, plenty good room, / just choose your seat and sit down. Thus, spirituals are multifunctional: cultivating hope in hopelessness; fostering strength to endure; galvanizing a resolve to protest; engendering a desire that breathes unity with all peoples.

## **Methodology**

This study will draw upon an ethnographic and qualitative methodology, such as offered by Mary E. McGann in her liturgical ethnographic account of a Black Catholic faith community, illustrating worship as theology.<sup>8</sup> Utilizing an ethnographic methodology, one can evaluate the incorporation of singing more spirituals in the Mass. When singing the spirituals, what memories and associations will arise for the parishioners? Will the parishioners experience God differently? With qualitative research, I will gather the experiences of a small group of parishioners at Prince of Peace, focusing on the effect singing a spiritual may have. Singing spirituals can lead to complex and constructive conversations with a small group of the faithful: dialogue promoting racial reconciliation.<sup>9</sup> This group will model hospitality, becoming aware of the African American experience and the Black Catholic experience. Over time, this small group,

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<sup>8</sup> Mary E. McGann, *A Precious Fountain: Music in the Worship of an African American Catholic Community*, Virgil Michel Series (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2004).

<sup>9</sup> When application was made to engage the IRB process at Southern Methodist University, it was not deemed necessary for this thesis.



a guiding coalition, can help facilitate more conversations with the broader community. The enslaved envisioned the kingdom of God with enough room for everyone. Hopefully, we can model the church like the kingdom of God, where everyone can “choose a seat and sit down.”

## **Overview**

Chapter 1: “Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child,” delves into the connection between the institution of slavery and the development of the spiritual. It will address racism and the Catholic Church in the United States of America response to racism. It will explain the documents written by the American Catholic Bishops.

Chapter 2: “There is a Balm in Gilead” overviews Catholic thought on reconciliation, in particular, reviewing statements from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the *Rite of Penance*. The service of racial reconciliation held at Prince of Peace in June 2020 will be examined in detail. The chapter concludes with responses from the community about that service.

Chapter 3: “Lord, I Want to be a Christian in my Heart,” will examine Prince of Peace Parishioners’ views on race and review the spirituals sung during Mass at Prince of Peace. The chapter will conclude by analyzing the parishioners’ responses to singing spirituals during the Mass.

Chapter 4: “Plenty Good Room” explores whether singing spirituals promotes inclusivity. The focus will be on whether there was an ethical transformation of the parishioners at Prince of Peace to singing spirituals in the Mass.

## CHAPTER 1

### “Sometimes I Feel like a Motherless Child”

This chapter consists of two major divisions. The first section defines racism and describes the connection between spirituals and slavery. The second part will look at the four pastoral letters that the Catholic Bishops of the United States of America have issued on racism: detailing significant themes and the reception of those documents.

#### **What is Racism?**

Defining racism is difficult because most Americans do not understand this system’s complex and dynamic nature. Complicating the task further is that the terminology of race and racism is constantly evolving and emotionally charged.<sup>1</sup> “White” designates the dominant cultural group in the United States. More specifically, “White” refers to “a social group that has access to political, social, economic, or cultural advantages that people of color do not share.”<sup>2</sup> Theologian Katie Walker Grimes elaborates on “Whiteness”: “not everyone who qualifies as [W]hite in one time and place will qualify as [W]hite in another.”<sup>3</sup> “People of color” refers to all other racial and ethnic groups in the United States that do not have “easy access to the political, social, economic, or cultural advantages enjoyed by those designated as [W]hite.”<sup>4</sup> In this paper, the definitions of race will correspond to the designations from the U S. Census Bureau. “White” will refer to

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<sup>1</sup> Bryan N. Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2010), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church*, 2.

<sup>3</sup> Katie Walker Grimes, *Christ Divided: Antiblackness as Corporate Vice* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017), 1.

<sup>4</sup> Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church*, 2.

persons having origins in Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa. “Black or African American” will refer to persons having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa.

“Race” is a problematic term, as is the theory of dividing human beings into social groups based on race. However, according to the U.S. Census Bureau’s website, “race” is a “social definition of race recognized in this country and not an attempt to define race biologically, anthropologically, or genetically.”<sup>5</sup> Thus, race is more than a categorization based on lighter or darker skin tone.

Roman Catholic priest Brian Massingale promotes a definition of racism as a distinct culture in the United States. Drawing inspiration from anthropologist Clifford Geertz, Massingale defines racism as “a way of interpreting human color differences that pervades the collective convictions, conventions, and practices of American life.”<sup>6</sup> More importantly, Massingale goes beyond a definition of racism and explains how this social construct functions as an “animating spirit of U. S. society, which lives on despite observable changes and assumes various incarnations in different historical circumstances.”<sup>7</sup> In other words, racism does whatever it needs to do to perpetuate itself.

Katie Walker Grimes developed a theory of “anti[B]lackness supremacy.” For Grimes, slavery and its afterlife are the reasons why racism persists. “Anti[B]lackness supremacy” is “the fact that non[B]lack people, both as individuals and as groups, amass power due to this country’s [United States of America] pervasive anti[B]lackness. . . non[B]lack life comes at the expense of [B]lack life.”<sup>8</sup> Chattel slavery in the United States exclusively involved enslaved Africans. Out

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<sup>5</sup> “What is Race?” U. S. Census Bureau (last revision March 1, 2022), <https://www.census.gov/topics/population/race/about.html> (accessed July 11, 2023).

<sup>6</sup> Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church*, 14.

<sup>7</sup> Massingale, 15.

<sup>8</sup> Grimes, *Christ Divided*, loc 331 of 7575.

of that system is the outgrowth of “anti[B]lackness supremacy.” Enslaved Africans developed folk songs—spirituals—to cope with the vicissitudes of slavery.

## **Slavery and Spirituals**

Orlando Patterson characterizes slavery as “the permanent, violent domination of natively alienated and generally dishonored persons.”<sup>9</sup> The system of slavery persisted through a unique form of violence, employing mutilation and severe beatings. Violence makes the enslaved powerless. The enslaved lived only because the master willed it. In the view of the master, the enslaved was a criminal, and the master granted conditional mercy if the enslaved accepted a perpetual state of powerlessness. The enslaved are natively alienated, meaning they could not incorporate their ancestors’ memory into their lives or allow their ancestors’ experiences to anchor the present. The colonizers stole the enslaved from their motherland (Africa) and placed them against their will in the United States. Alienation since birth, violent beatings and dishonor marked the enslaved people’s existence.<sup>10</sup>

The birth of the spirituals takes place on the plantation. On the plantation, the terror of chattel slavery existed, where the enslaved lived a “death in life” existence.<sup>11</sup> Even though the enslaved lived in this state of powerlessness and constant fear of death, they refused to surrender their humanity. While living on the plantation, the enslaved retained their African roots, specifically language, music, and dance. Over time, the enslaved were exposed to European culture and the English language. When the enslaved gathered, they edified themselves by

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<sup>9</sup> Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 13; Grimes, 2.

<sup>10</sup> Grimes, *Christ Divided*, 6.

<sup>11</sup> Achille Mbembé, “Necropolitics,” trans. Libby Meintjes, *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (Winter 2003): 21; M. Shawn Copeland, *Knowing Christ Crucified: The Witness of African American Religious Experience* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2018), 115.

singing. First, with moans, chants, and shouts—known as slave utterances. Theologian, musician, and social activist Wyatt Tee Walker (1929–2018) charts the development of Black Sacred Music, beginning with slave utterances in the 1600s, followed by spirituals in the late 1700s.<sup>12</sup> The enslaved weaved a new fabric of civilization for themselves—the spiritual. “The spiritual constitutes a most outstanding example of the human capacity to wring transcendent beauty from hellish circumstances.”<sup>13</sup> The enslaved critique their encounter with Christianity through the poetry articulated in spirituals. Singing spirituals for the enslaved was healing and a religious practice to affirm Black life before God.<sup>14</sup>

It was illegal for the enslaved people to learn to read or write. The enslaved’s knowledge of the Bible and Christianity came from hearing public readings and sermons. On the plantation, the enslaved heard sermons from White preachers about “slaves obey your masters” (Col 3:22). White preachers did not proclaim salvation in their sermons. To legitimize and validate the system of chattel slavery, preaching “Slaves obey your masters” was necessary.<sup>15</sup>

On some plantations, the enslaved would “steal away to Jesus” in the night to the thickets and overgrown places known as the “hush arbors” to pray.<sup>16</sup> The enslaved could pray and recall biblical passages interpreted without malicious intent. As a result, the enslaved people developed an “oral Bible” that contained mostly the prophetic and apocalyptic texts of the Hebrew Scriptures and the crucified Jesus Christ.<sup>17</sup> Thus, spirituals are a part of the fabric woven from an

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<sup>12</sup> Wyatt Tee Walker, *“Somebody’s Calling My Name”*: *Black Sacred Music and Social Change* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1979), 146.

<sup>13</sup> Copeland, *Knowing Christ Crucified*, 116.

<sup>14</sup> Copeland, *Knowing Christ Crucified*, 31, 116.

<sup>15</sup> Copeland, 37.

<sup>16</sup> Copeland, *Knowing Christ Crucified*, 43; Kim R. Harris, “Welcome Table: A Mass of Spirituals. Conception, Composition, Dissemination, Reflection.” (Doctoral Dissertation, Union Theological Seminary, 2013), 163. A hush arbor is different from a brush arbor. A brush arbor is a wooden structure employed by some churches to protect congregants from the elements during a revival camp meeting.

<sup>17</sup> Copeland, *Knowing Christ Crucified*, 44.

oral and aural tradition. Over time, enslaved people forged imagery and symbols from their “oral Bible.” The spirituals also provide evidence of the enslaved people’s hopes, suffering, pains, and the transforming power of a crucified Jesus.

The enslaved Black persons identified with Jesus as one of their own. In Jesus’s ministry, he preached to the poor, the outcast, the afflicted, and the marginalized. Jesus worked miracles, witnessing to his transformative power. Most importantly, Jesus was condemned to die on trumped-up charges, was beaten, whipped, and finally murdered. The enslaved could identify with a crucified Jesus because they, too, were beaten, whipped, and murdered. Examples of this found in the genre of spirituals include “Were you there?” and “He never said a mumblin’ word.” Jesus is a friend, a savior, a companion, a healer, a fellow sufferer, and the all-encompassing “all-in-all” to the enslaved.<sup>18</sup> From the spirituals, it appears Jesus can do anything: “Fix me, Jesus, fix me.”

Psychologist and ethnomusicologist Arthur C. Jones offers insight into the transformative power of spirituals. When singing spirituals, “The transformation process that emerges from such musical and spiritual immersion produces an enduring confidence that present suffering does, in fact, have meaning, that life is ultimately ruled by divine forces and that those forces (not slaveholders, not slaves) will have the final word on issues of justice and freedom.”<sup>19</sup> The enslaved sing of a God whom they trust and believe will break the chains of slavery: “and before I’d be a slave / I’d be buried in my grave.”

M. Shawn Copeland demonstrates some of the wisdom we can learn from the enslaved people through the spirituals. The enslaved became new creatures in Jesus Christ. They kept their “lamps trimmed and burning” as they waited for the second coming of the Lord. Yet, even as

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<sup>18</sup> Copeland, *Knowing Christ Crucified*, 49.

<sup>19</sup> Jones, *Wade in the Water*, 34.

they waited, they sought Jesus out: “Steal away, steal away to Jesus / I ain’t got long to stay here.”<sup>20</sup>

The enslaved knew “the power of God in the cross was the power to live and to love—even when violence does its worst.”<sup>21</sup> Even though the enslaved wept bitterly while their master sold their family members away, they could still sing, “Lord, I want to be a Christian in my heart / Lord, I want to love everybody in my heart.” This Christian love is not like human love, based on reciprocity. But instead, a love of God: “Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God” (1 John 4:7; KJV). The enslaved knew how to live authentically, acknowledging their suffering, not avoiding it nor being defined by it: “Nobody knows the trouble I’ve seen / Glory Hallelujah / Sometimes I’m up sometimes I’m down / Oh yes Lord / Sometimes I’m almost to the ground.”

Spirituals display the beautiful folk song of oppressed people. Formed out of hellish circumstances, the enslaved people weaved a new life out of their prayers and tears. They knew Jesus was “the balm of Gilead” that could “heal the sin-sick soul.” The enslaved envisioned freedom long before The Emancipation Proclamation: “Deep river, my home is over Jordan” and “I’m gonna sit at the welcome table one of these days.” Despite finding respite from their struggles through prayer, the descendants of the enslaved would experience marginalization in the Catholic Church. Still, despite the hatred they experienced, they still sang of the “plenty good room in my Father’s Kingdom.” How did they know this?

### **Racism and the Catholic Church in The United States of America**

With the advent of the civil rights movement in the 1950s, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) issued four statements on racial justice: *Discrimination and the*

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<sup>20</sup> Copeland, *Knowing Christ Crucified*, 57.

<sup>21</sup> Copeland, *Knowing Christ Crucified*, 57.

*Christian Conscience* (1958);<sup>22</sup> *The National Race Crisis* (1968);<sup>23</sup> *Brothers and Sisters to Us* (1979);<sup>24</sup> and *Open Wide Our Hearts* (2018). In a broader context, the Church’s universal magisterium has issued one statement on racism, *The Church and Racism: Towards a More Fraternal Society* (1988, updated 2001).<sup>25</sup> Tragically, these statements do not offer a rich theological reflection and analysis.

*Discrimination and the Christian Conscience* was released after the historic Supreme Court decision in 1954, *Brown v. Board of Education*. The Supreme Court unanimously decided that segregation is unconstitutional in public education. Desegregation was challenging, and the American Bishops circulated their statement in this context.

The bishops stated that the march toward justice and equality involves moral issues that are obscure and forgotten. The quest for racial justice and the problem of compulsory segregation involve issues of law, history, economics, and sociology. Now is the time to come to the heart of the problem, they wrote, which is “moral and religious.”<sup>26</sup>

The bishops give four doctrinal bases for their moral judgment to address the ethical and religious aspects of segregation. First, the “universal love of God for all mankind.”<sup>27</sup> Second, when Jesus Christ walked on the earth, he taught the love of God and the love of neighbor—implying that we are all brothers and sisters to each other. Jesus offered his life as a sacrifice for

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<sup>22</sup> *Discrimination and the Christian Conscience* (Washington, DC, 1958): <https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/cultural-diversity/african-american/resources/upload/Discrimination-Christian-Conscience-Nov-14-1958.pdf> (accessed July 6, 2023).

<sup>23</sup> *The National Race Crisis* (1968): <https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/cultural-diversity/african-american/resources/upload/Statement-on-National-Race-Crisis-April-25-1968.pdf> (accessed July 6, 2023).

<sup>24</sup> *Brothers and Sisters to Us* (1979): <https://www.usccb.org/committees/african-american-affairs/brothers-and-sisters-us> (accessed July 6, 2023).

<sup>25</sup> *The Church and Racism: Towards a More Fraternal Society* (1988, updated 2001): [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/justpeace/documents/rc\\_pc\\_justpeace\\_doc\\_20010829\\_comunicato-razzismo\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20010829_comunicato-razzismo_en.html) (accessed July 6, 2023).

<sup>26</sup> USCCB, *Discrimination and the Christian Conscience*, 6.

<sup>27</sup> USCCB, *Discrimination and the Christian Conscience*, 7.



all. Third, the Christian faith is universal; it knows no “distinctions of race, color, or nationhood.”<sup>28</sup> Lastly, the natural moral law “that God has implanted in the souls of all men” teaches that each human being “has an equal right to life, to justice before the law, to marry and rear a family under human conditions, and to an equitable opportunity to use the goods of this earth for his needs and those of his family.”<sup>29</sup>

Given these four doctrinal claims, the bishops established two principles to govern the behavior and attitudes of Christians. First, all are equal in the sight of God. Equality means all are created by God and redeemed by Jesus Christ.<sup>30</sup> Second, the obligation to love all human beings. Christian love, the bishops stated, was not “a matter of emotional likes or dislikes. . . but a firm purpose to do good to all men, to the extent that ability and opportunity permit.”<sup>31</sup>

With these reasons presented above, the bishops reached the main conclusion of their statement. Compulsory or enforced segregation could not be reconciled with the Christian view of human beings.<sup>32</sup> The bishops give two fundamental reasons for their decision. First, legal segregation “by its very nature imposes a stigma of inferiority upon the segregated people.”<sup>33</sup> Second, segregation, as a historical fact, has “led to oppressive conditions and the denial of basic human rights for the Negro.”<sup>34</sup>

In this statement, the bishops made no specific recommendations or proposals for action. They called upon all to “act quietly, courageously, and prayerfully” and urged that any concrete plans for action be based on “prudence.”<sup>35</sup> The bishops lamented “gradualism” and the “rash

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<sup>28</sup> USCCB, *Discrimination and the Christian Conscience*, 8.

<sup>29</sup> USCCB, *Discrimination and the Christian Conscience*, 9.

<sup>30</sup> USCCB, *Discrimination and the Christian Conscience*, 10.

<sup>31</sup> USCCB, *Discrimination and the Christian Conscience*, 12.

<sup>32</sup> USCCB, *Discrimination and the Christian Conscience*, 14.

<sup>33</sup> USCCB, *Discrimination and the Christian Conscience*, 15.

<sup>34</sup> USCCB, *Discrimination and the Christian Conscience*, 16.

<sup>35</sup> USCCB, *Discrimination and the Christian Conscience*, 20.

impetuosity” that leads to “ill-timed and ill-considered ventures.”<sup>36</sup> A balanced and reasoned tone pervades the document. The statement is a cautious policy and position of the Catholic Church on racism and enforced segregation, thus, condemning racism in all its forms.

Unfortunately, the statement had no significance or influence. One reason is that the Catholic response comes more than four years after the Supreme Court’s decision. Other major American Christian denominations issued statements in 1957, some as early as 1954.<sup>37</sup> Another reason is the lack of specificity of the Catholic response compared to similar documents from Protestant denominations. The Protestant statements were more concrete, with some calling for support of the Supreme Court decision, the integration of church facilities, and Black people’s right to vote. Some Protestant denominations condemned the Ku Klux Klan, the White Citizens Councils, and attacks on integration efforts.<sup>38</sup> The Catholic statement did not condemn any organization or call for integrating Catholic facilities or fraternal organizations.

*The National Race Crisis* opens with this declaration: “Now—ten years later—it is evident that we did not do enough; we have much more to do. . . It became clear that we failed to change the attitudes of many believers.”<sup>39</sup> The Catholic bishops realized that their previous statement, *Discrimination and the Christian Conscience*, did not do what was intended.

Massingale offers three reasons why the bishops realized this. First was the summer of 1967, when race riots and civil disturbances occurred in many urban cities, including Newark, Detroit, and Washington, DC. These riots caused fears of a possible racial insurrection in the United States.<sup>40</sup> In light of these race riots and disturbances, the Presidential Advisory

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<sup>36</sup> USCCB, *Discrimination and the Christian Conscience*, 22.

<sup>37</sup> Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church*, 53.

<sup>38</sup> Ernest Queener Campbell and Thomas F. Pettigrew, *Christians in Racial Crisis; a Study of Little Rock’s Ministry* (Washington, DC: Public Affairs Press, 1959), 141, 137–170.

<sup>39</sup> USCCB, *The National Race Crisis* (Washington, DC, 1968), 4.

<sup>40</sup> Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church*, 55.

Commission on Civil Disorders (popularly known as the Kerner Commission) was formed to uncover and discover why the rioting took place and how to avoid these race riots in the future.

A second factor was the release of the Kerner Commission's report in March 1968.<sup>41</sup> This report assessed the explosive and volatile nature of the nation's racial climate. The Kerner Commission reached a "basic conclusion: Our Nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal."<sup>42</sup> The bishops directly referenced the Kerner Report four times throughout their statement.

The third factor was the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. on April 4, 1968.<sup>43</sup> With King dead, this indicated the deep racial tensions in America and the distance the country had yet to travel toward solving its racial problems. King's death ignited a wave of riots and civil disorders across the United States. Now that the nonviolent King was dead, others feared that more militant Black Power groups could take over the civil rights movement's leadership.

Given the civic factors presented above, there was also a significant development within the Catholic Church in America. In April 1968, the National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus (NBCCC) released a statement. This inaugural gathering approved a statement that shocked the Catholic community. The Black clergy described the Catholic Church as "a [W]hite racist institution."<sup>44</sup> The caucus asked the Catholic Church to recognize that there were "changing attitudes in the [B]lack community and [the Church] is not making the necessary realistic adjustments. The present attitude of the [B]lack community demands that [B]lack people control their own affairs and make decisions for themselves."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church*, 55.

<sup>42</sup> United States, ed., *The Kerner Report*, 2016 edition, James Madison Library in American Politics (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 1.

<sup>43</sup> Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church*, 56.

<sup>44</sup> Gayraud S. Wilmore and James H. Cone, eds., *Black Theology: A Documentary History* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1979), 322.

<sup>45</sup> Wilmore and Cone, *Black Theology*, 322–24.

When the bishops gathered in late April 1968, they faced societal and ecclesial issues that they could not ignore. Ten years later, the bishops issued a statement that was more than a cautious approach. The tone is one of the primary and most striking differences between *The National Race Crisis* and *Discrimination and the Christian Conscience*. The tenor of *The National Race Crisis* is urgent; there is a strong undercurrent of fear present and a fear of social upheaval and destruction:

When will we realize the degree of alienation and polarization that prevails in the nation today? When will we understand that civil protests could easily erupt into civil war? Must we rebuild on the scorched earth of our ruined and gutted cities, or will we begin to rebuild now with a heightened sense of justice and compassion for the suffering? There is no place for complacency and inertia. The hour is late and the need is critical. Let us act while there is still time for collaborative peaceful solutions.<sup>46</sup>

Another difference between the two documents is the meager doctrinal base or theological justification found in the 1968 document for its conclusions. The bishops in 1968 were not concerned with a reasoned articulation of their position as they made their flocks aware of the dire need to act decisively.<sup>47</sup> The doctrinal justification is found in paragraph 8: “We must also commit our full energies to the task of eradicating the effects of such racism on American society so that all men can live in the image and likeness of God.”<sup>48</sup>

*The National Race Crisis* advances positions taken in *Discrimination and the Christian Conscience*. There is an explicit acknowledgment of Catholic culpability in the current race crisis: “Catholics, like the rest of American society, must recognize their responsibility for allowing these conditions to persist. . . In varying degrees, we all share the guilt.”<sup>49</sup> The statement also presents a broader view of racism, stating that racist attitudes and behaviors

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<sup>46</sup> USCCB, *The National Race Crisis*, (Washington, DC, 1968), 27–28.

<sup>47</sup> Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church*, 58.

<sup>48</sup> USCCB, *The National Race Crisis*, 8.

<sup>49</sup> USCCB, *The National Race Crisis*, 6–7.

“exist, not only in the hearts of men but in the fabric of their institutions.”<sup>50</sup> The bishops acknowledge institutional racism as well as racial prejudice. Many of the recommendations the bishops would make involve institutional racism.

Massingale suggests that the bishops’ analysis of the race crisis is an endorsement of the findings in the Kerner Commission Report.<sup>51</sup> The statement accepts the Kerner Report’s conclusion that the nation “is moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal.”<sup>52</sup> Thus, the bishops conclude that the nation’s race crisis “is of a magnitude and peril far transcending any which the Church in America or the nation has previously confronted.”<sup>53</sup>

Unlike *Discrimination and the Christian Conscience*, *The National Race Crisis* presented several recommendations for action. The bishops called for the “total eradication of any elements of discrimination in our parishes, schools, hospitals, homes for the aged, and similar institutions.”<sup>54</sup> An Urban Task Force was established within the United States Catholic Conference to coordinate all Catholic efforts in this field, and dioceses were encouraged to develop similar programs on the local level.<sup>55</sup> Commenting on areas of society, the bishops stated that quality education for the poor was a moral imperative, called upon the private sector to employ Blacks and strongly urged the strict implementation of the letter and the spirit of the federal Open Housing Act to advance integrated and fair housing.<sup>56</sup>

*The National Race Crisis* advanced the position of *Discrimination and the Christian Conference*. The 1968 statement is a more comprehensive and timely response to the social and

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<sup>50</sup> USCCB, *The National Race Crisis*, 8.

<sup>51</sup> Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church*, 59.

<sup>52</sup> United States, *The Kerner Report*, 1.

<sup>53</sup> USCCB, *The National Race Crisis*, 22.

<sup>54</sup> USCCB, *The National Race Crisis*, 10.

<sup>55</sup> USCCB, *The National Race Crisis*, 13–14.

<sup>56</sup> USCCB, *The National Race Crisis*, 22–24.

historical context, evidenced by an understanding of the institutional aspects of racism and confronting racism within the Catholic Church.

During the 1960s, the Catholic Church saw the creation of several Black groups. In addition to the NBCCC, the National Black Sisters' Conference, the National Black Lay Caucus, and the National Black Seminarians' Association came into existence during this time. Also established at this time was the National Office for Black Catholics (NOBC). It is also in Washington, DC, where the USCCB is located. This office is a coordinating agency for the Black groups mentioned above and advocates for the Black Catholic experience.

*Brothers and Sisters to Us*, a pastoral letter on racism, was issued in 1979. The letter opens with these words: "Racism is an evil which endures in our society and in our church. Despite apparent advances and even significant changes in the last two decades, the reality of racism remains."<sup>57</sup> With these words, the Catholic bishops make their claim for issuing another pastoral letter on racism. Although laws have been passed, policies have been implemented, and voting rights have been granted, the bishops concluded that what has happened is only a "covering over, not a fundamental change."<sup>58</sup>

Massingale offers historical, social, and ecclesial reasons why the bishops issued a third pastoral letter on racism.<sup>59</sup> During the late 1970s, he said, the nation, having overcome the issue of enforced or legal segregation, had to come to terms with racism that resulted from the operations of social institutions and systems, especially in education, finance, and justice.<sup>60</sup> Segregation cannot end by passing laws, he said. There was a rise in school desegregation controversies. Affirmative action programs came into place to extend preferential treatment to

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<sup>57</sup> USCCB, *Brothers and Sisters to Us*, (Washington, DC, 1979), 1.

<sup>58</sup> USCCB, *Brothers and Sisters to Us*, 2.

<sup>59</sup> Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church*, 61–64.

<sup>60</sup> USCCB, *Brothers and Sisters to Us*, 10.

minorities to compensate for past racial discrimination. An economic recession happened in the late 1970s. Also, there was a rise of right-wing extremist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan and neo-Nazis that voiced opposition to desegregation and distributed hate literature throughout the South.<sup>61</sup>

As part of the Catholic contribution to the bicentennial of the United States, the bishops launched a nationwide consultation on issues of justice in the country. Regional hearings around the country gathered testimony presented at a national conference held in 1976 in Detroit, Michigan. Black Catholics were part of this nationwide campaign known as a Call to Action. At the conference, the delegates adopted a resolution on Ethnicity and Race. The resolution was formulated by Blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans, and Whites and presented by Eugene Marino, then the Black auxiliary bishop of Washington, DC. The resolution called for a new pastoral letter addressing the sin of racism in both its personal and social aspects within two years. The bishops of the United States accepted this recommendation.<sup>62</sup>

This pastoral letter presents six main themes. First is the continuing existence of racism despite legal and legislative changes.<sup>63</sup> The bishops disagreed with the popular opinion that racism was no longer a problem, declaring that racism still permeated social structures and individual attitudes.

Second, is the subtle nature of contemporary racism. The bishops pointed out that racism existed beneath the surface of American life. The letter provided statistics from 1979 portraying how Blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans have higher unemployment than Whites. The

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<sup>61</sup> Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church*, 62.

<sup>62</sup> Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church*, 64.

<sup>63</sup> USCCB, *Brothers and Sisters to Us*, 2, 12.

prison population consisted disproportionately of minorities and the attitudes and behavior of some law enforcement officials exhibited racism.<sup>64</sup>

Third, the correlation between racism and economic injustice. The letter stated, “Racism and economic oppression are distinct but interrelated forces which dehumanize our society.”<sup>65</sup> The economic structures of the United States are undergoing fundamental changes, which intensify social inequalities. The poor and racial minorities are asked to bear the heaviest burden of these new economic pressures.

Fourth, citing the institutional character of racism, this pastoral letter continued the approach of *The National Race Crisis* by mentioning personal and institutional or structural racism. The letter states: “The structures of our society are subtly racist, for these structures reflect the values which society upholds. They are geared to the success of the majority and the failure of the minority.”<sup>66</sup>

Fifth, the document addressed racism within the Catholic Church in the United States. The bishops acknowledged that the Church has a share in the mistakes and sins of the past and allowed conformity to social pressures to replace compliance with social justice. The bishops recalled the words of the NBCCC statement of 1968 when affirming that, for many, the Catholic Church in America is a racist institution.<sup>67</sup>

Lastly, is the theological justification for the Catholic viewpoint. The church is committed to evangelization, which was defined as bringing consciences, both individual and social, into conformity with the Gospel. The doctrine of creation proclaims that all men and women bear the image of the Creator and, as children of God, are brothers and sisters to each

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<sup>64</sup> USCCB, *Brothers and Sisters to Us*, 12, 14.

<sup>65</sup> USCCB, *Brothers and Sisters to Us*, 3.

<sup>66</sup> USCCB, *Brothers and Sisters to Us*, 11.

<sup>67</sup> USCCB, *Brothers and Sisters to Us*, 29.



other. The mystery of the incarnation reveals the dignity of each person. Scripture teaches that all people are accountable to and for each other (Matt 25:31–41).<sup>68</sup> Given these theological justifications, the bishops conclude that racism is a sin. The bishops declared that racism is a sin that divides the human family, violates the dignity of the children of God, and denies the new creation of a redeemed world.<sup>69</sup>

The letter concluded with specific guidelines for action. The bishops asked individuals to reject racial stereotypes, slurs, and jokes, and to learn how social structures inhibited the poor's economic, educational, and social advancement.<sup>70</sup> The Church was called to ensure that its parishes welcome and include people of all races, develop liturgies that incorporate the gifts of various races, recruit, train, and ordain people of color; continue to expand Catholic schools in the inner cities, and implement in every diocese and religious institution an effective affirmative action program.<sup>71</sup>

*Brothers and Sisters to Us* was a document that unequivocally condemned racism as an evil and a sin in its contemporary manifestations. After issuing this letter, more Black bishops were ordained, and many dioceses and religious communities increased their efforts to recruit Black women and men into the priesthood and religious life. The Church encouraged efforts to inculcate Black cultural heritage into the liturgy.

However, the title of this letter is of concern. Who are the “Us”? Is it the predominately White leadership of the Catholic Church in America? The title suggests this letter was written for White Catholics and addressed to White Catholics.

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<sup>68</sup> USCCB, *Brothers and Sisters to Us*, 5, 7, 23.

<sup>69</sup> USCCB, *Brothers and Sisters to Us*, 7, 8.

<sup>70</sup> USCCB, *Brothers and Sisters to Us*, 41, 42.

<sup>71</sup> USCCB, *Brothers and Sisters to Us*, 43–53.

*Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love—A Pastoral Letter Against Racism*,<sup>72</sup> issued in 2018, is the most recent statement on racism by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. It was published thirty-nine years after *Brothers and Sisters to Us*. As with the three previous letters, civil happenings led to a new pastoral letter. The “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, in August 2017 was the major event. Clashes over a show of White Nationalism turned deadly as a vehicle drove into a crowd of counter-protesters resulting in the death of thirty-two-year-old Heather Heyer.

In *Open Wide Our Hearts*, the bishops define racism: “Racism arises when—either consciously or unconsciously—a person holds that his or her own race or ethnicity is superior, and therefore judges persons of other races or ethnicities as inferior and unworthy of equal regard.”<sup>73</sup> This understanding of racism only addresses racism as a personal sin rather than the more complex social and cultural sin defined above. This pastoral letter illustrates the harmful effects of racism on Native Americans, African Americans, and Hispanics. Using the framework of Micah 6:8— “do justice, love goodness, walk humbly with God”—the Church admonishes its constituents to form relationships with members from different cultural ethnicities.<sup>74</sup>

The bishops issued a letter that addresses the harmful effects of racism that its body has experienced in the United States. However, this letter does not include the voices of people of color and articulates a White perspective to its primarily White body. Absent from this pastoral letter are steps the Church can take that lead to actual systemic changes. What is needed is a robust pastoral letter that encourages conversation about the reality of systemic racism and its long, complex, painful, and ongoing history.

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<sup>72</sup> USCCB, *Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love—A Pastoral Letter Against Racism* (Washington, DC, 2018): [https://www.usccb.org/resources/open-wide-our-hearts\\_0.pdf](https://www.usccb.org/resources/open-wide-our-hearts_0.pdf) (accessed July 6, 2023).

<sup>73</sup> USCCB, *Open Wide Our Hearts*, 3.

<sup>74</sup> USCCB, *Open Wide Our Hearts*, 23.

### **“Sometimes I feel like a motherless child”**

Sometimes I feel like a motherless child,  
Sometimes I feel like a motherless child,  
Sometimes I feel like a motherless child,  
A long ways from home. A long ways from home.

No one knows the names of the enslaved Africans who composed this spiritual. However, one can imagine what those enslaved Africans felt—unbearable pain, unspeakable grief, heartbreaking loneliness, and inconsolable sadness. The haunting melody of the tune helps preserve those feelings. Enslaved Africans experienced being taken from their homeland and brought to a foreign land invoking what it means to be a “motherless child.” “Motherless child” can carry another sentiment of literal meaning, a child without a mother. Children were often torn away from their parents and sold during the institution of slavery. The enslaved attempted to make their way through this hostile world, where their family, experience, opinion, and life did not matter.

What does this spiritual mean for Black Catholics today? Is the Black Catholic experience akin to a “motherless child?” Has the Catholic Church been a nourishing home for Black Catholics? Truthfully, Black Catholics can sometimes feel like a “motherless child.” The Church has not always been a supportive mother, with some believers feeling orphaned and abandoned. Despite these feelings of pain and abandonment, Black Catholics know “there is a balm in Gilead [that can] heal the sin-sick soul.”

## CHAPTER 2

### “There is a Balm in Gilead”

What is reconciliation? How does the Catholic Church define reconciliation?<sup>1</sup> What steps does the Church provide to achieve reconciliation? Is true reconciliation possible? This chapter will explore these questions. I will begin with an overview of reconciliation as defined by the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the *Order of Penance*. From there, I will illustrate a biblical example of reconciliation. Then, I will examine a service of reconciliation held at Prince of Peace Catholic Church in 2020 following the death of George Floyd. Finally, I will view “There is a balm in Gilead” from a Black Catholic perspective.

#### **Introduction**

The Father has shown forth his mercy by reconciling the world to himself in Christ and by making peace for all things on earth and in heaven by the blood of Christ on the cross. The Son of God made man lived among us in order to free us from the slavery of sin and to call us out of darkness into his wonderful light. He therefore began his work on earth by preaching repentance and saying: “Repent and believe the Gospel” (Mark 1:15).<sup>2</sup>

The words above appear in the Introduction to the *Rite of Penance* of the Roman Catholic Church. “Repent and believe the Gospel” are always challenging words for me to hear. The Gospel is the heart of the Christian message, but often we believe in the Gospel we “proclaim” or “profess” to ourselves. The Gospel of Jesus Christ, as found in Luke 4:18–19 (NRSV),

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<sup>1</sup> The capitalization of Church refers to the Roman Catholic Church. If church is not capitalized, it refers to the church universal.

<sup>2</sup> The English translation of the *Rite of Penance* © 1974, 1975, International Commission on English in the Liturgy, Inc (ICEL). All rights reserved. Paragraph 1.

announces, ““The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.”” “To let the oppressed go free” is the part that we as a church and society still need to purify!

The Church acknowledges its need for purification: “The members of the Church, however, are exposed to temptation and often fall into the wretchedness of sin. As a result, whereas Christ, holy, harmless, undefiled, knew no sin but came solely to seek pardon for the sins of his people, the Church, having sinners in its midst, is at the same time holy and in need of cleansing, and so is unceasingly intent on repentance and reform.”<sup>3</sup>

Penance and reconciliation are part of the Church’s life and liturgy. Reconciliation is needed to begin the process of healing to achieve racial justice at Prince of Peace. In the Mass, the community confesses its sins and asks God and their brothers and sisters for pardon. The Church labels this act as the Penitential Act, followed by the *Kyrie* (Lord, have mercy; Christ, have mercy; Lord, have mercy). The Church also hopes the community will “become a sign of conversion to God in the world.” Going deeper into the effects of sin, the Church states: “one person’s sin harms the rest even as one person’s goodness enriches them.” Sin can enslave society that “people frequently join together to commit injustice.”<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the Church admonishes its members to “help each other in doing penance; freed from sin by the grace of Christ, they become, with all persons of goodwill, agents of justice and peace in the world.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The English translation of the *Rite of Penance*, Par. 3.

<sup>4</sup> The English translation of the *Rite of Penance*, Par. 5.

<sup>5</sup> The English translation of the *Rite of Penance*, Par. 5.

## **What is Reconciliation?**

In the sacramental economy of the Catholic Church, the sacrament of reconciliation falls under “the sacraments of healing.” There are two sacraments of healing: the sacrament of Penance and the sacrament of The Anointing of the Sick. The Church writes in the Catechism: “The Lord Jesus Christ, physician of our souls and bodies, who forgave the sins of the paralytic and restored him to bodily health, has willed that his Church continues, in the power of the Holy Spirit, his work of healing and salvation even among her own members.”<sup>6</sup>

Penance and reconciliation are two of the names used; however, there are five names the Church uses to describe the characteristics and qualities of this sacrament: the *sacrament of conversion*, the *sacrament of penance*, the *sacrament of confession*, the *sacrament of forgiveness*, and the *sacrament of reconciliation*.<sup>7</sup> More specifically, I am using “reconciliation” because its meaning imparts to the sinner the love of God; furthermore, one who lives by God’s merciful love is ready to respond to the Lord’s call first to be reconciled to your brothers and sisters.<sup>8</sup> Reconciliation involves repairing our severed relationship with God and our brothers and sisters, because of sin. In this paper, I will use reconciliation to convey penance, forgiveness, and conversion. To help illustrate the power of reconciliation, I will look at reconciliation from a biblical perspective.

## **A Parable of Reconciliation**

“There was a man who had two sons; the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the wealth that will belong to me,’” says Jesus as he begins the story of the prodigal

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<sup>6</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, <https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/INDEX.HTM>, (accessed September 21, 2023), para.1421.

<sup>7</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1423, 1424.

<sup>8</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1424.

son.<sup>9</sup> The younger man departs from his father's house and sets out on an adventure of squandering all his wealth, living a loose and unfulfilling life, only to find himself in exile and famishment. Not only does he lose his dignity and self-worth, but he is also ashamed. Once he has reached this desolate place, he remembers that the swine at his father's home are fed better than he. The younger son finds the courage to go home. The father had not forgotten about his younger son; his affection towards him never changed. He waited eagerly for his younger son to return home. When the father spotted his younger son returning home from a far distance, he ordered his servants to prepare a banquet! For his son was dead and now is alive, he was lost, and now he is found.

All of us are prodigal children. We can become captivated by the temptation to separate ourselves from our father to lead an independent life, only to become disillusioned by the emptiness this world can offer us. We can chase power, greed, money, and prestige and build a world entirely for ourselves, only to sink into our misery. Ultimately, we desire a relationship with our father, a communion with our father. Like the father in the parable, God waits for our return to God. God embraces us like a child when we return and orders a banquet to be celebrated. God bestows on us his lavish gifts of a fine robe and signet ring. In this celebration, God shows us his mercy and love, reminding us God is always willing to forgive.

The older brother refuses to attend the banquet. He disapproves of the departure of his younger brother from the family and his dissolute wanderings. He also is astonished by his father's welcome given to his brother. The older brother is hard-working and faithful to his father and home; however, he has never been allowed to celebrate with his friends. The older brother was just as lost as his younger brother. The older brother does not understand his father's

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<sup>9</sup>Luke 15:11–12, NRSV

goodness to the extent that the older brother is too sure of himself and his qualities, jealous and arrogant, full of bitterness and anger, and he is not converted and is not reconciled with his father and brother. The banquet, therefore, is not entirely the celebration of communion and rediscovery.<sup>10</sup>

Every human is the older brother. Selfishness made him jealous, hardened his heart, blinded him, and shut him off from other people and God. The loving-kindness and mercy of the father irritate and enrage him; for him, the happiness of the brother who has been found again has a bitter taste. The older brother is also in need of conversion to be reconciled.

The parable of the prodigal son is, above all, the story of the inexpressible love of a Father-God who offers his son the gift of full reconciliation when he comes back to him. But the figure of the older son in the parable evokes the selfishness that divides the brothers; it also becomes the story of the human family: It describes our situation and shows the path to be followed. The prodigal son, in his anxiety for conversion, to return to the arms of his father and to be forgiven, represents those who are aware of the existence in their inmost hearts of longing for reconciliation at all levels and without reserve and who realize with an inner certainty that this reconciliation is possible only if it derives from a first and fundamental reconciliation, the one which brings a person back from distant separation to filial friendship with God, whose infinite mercy is known. But if the parable is read from the viewpoint of the other son, it portrays the situation of the human family, divided by forms of selfishness. It highlights the difficulty in satisfying the desire and longing for one reconciled and united family. It reminds us of the need for a profound transformation of hearts through the rediscovery of the Father's mercy and victory over misunderstanding and hostility among brothers and sisters.

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<sup>10</sup> Here, communion is referring to an act of sharing and rapport, not a reference to a Christian ritual of bread and wine.



## A Service of Reconciliation

This service occurred at Prince of Peace Catholic Church in Plano, Texas. Prince of Peace held its first Mass in February 1991. There are about 3,000 families registered as parishioners. Before COVID-19, the average weekly attendance at Mass was around 2400 persons a weekend over five Masses. A specific demographic breakdown of the ethnicities present in the community is not available. From observation, Prince of Peace is a primarily White Catholic Church with other ethnicities such as Hispanic, Asian, African, and Black represented. Broadly speaking, the congregation seems to represent the racial/ethnic distribution for the zip code [75093 in Plano](#).<sup>11</sup>

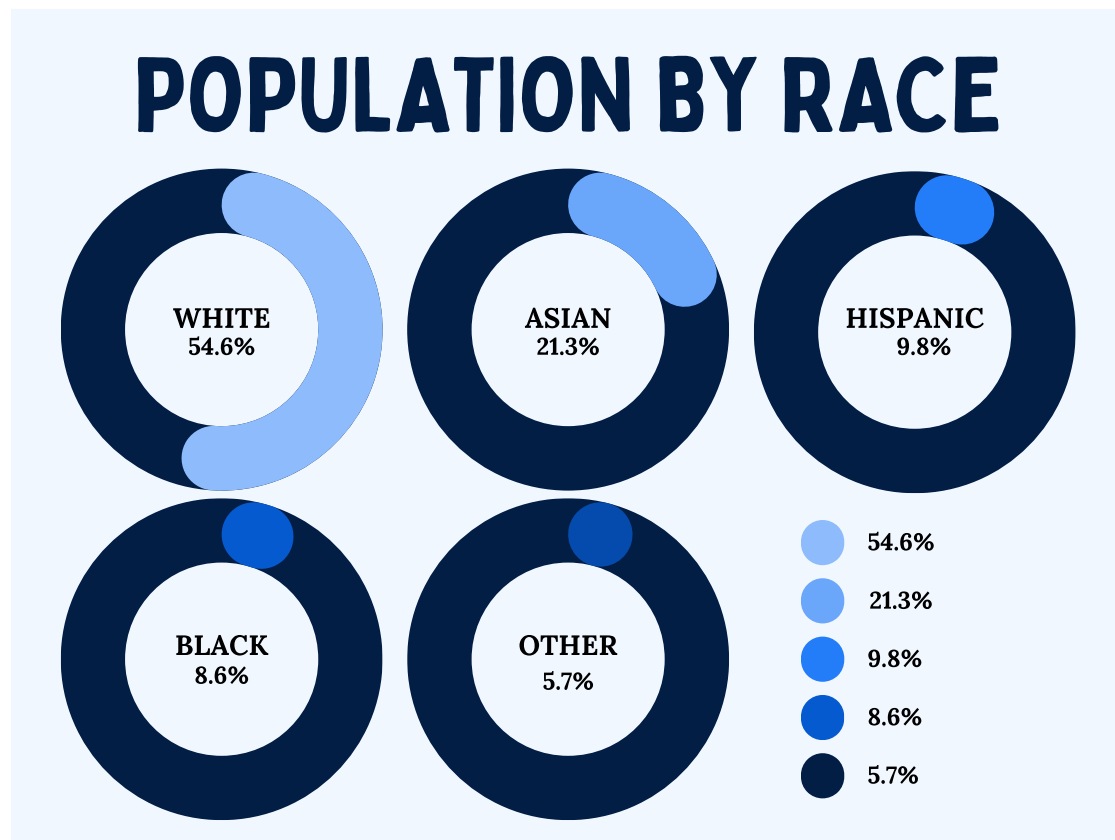


FIGURE 1. DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE ZIP CODE 75093 IN PLANO, TEXAS.

<sup>11</sup> “Maps and Demographics,” City of Plano, <https://censusreporter.org/profiles/14000US48085031649-census-tract-31649-collin-tx/> (accessed December 12, 2023).

As shown by the numbers, Plano does not look like the state of [Texas](#) regarding ethnic minorities represented. Also depicted above is the affluence concentrated in Plano, noting the median household income is \$119,263.

### *A Service for the Breath of Life*<sup>12</sup>

The service was titled: A Service for the Breath of Life. I used an outline for a Penitential Service for Several Penitents, found in the *Order of Penance*, as a model for this service. The Church offers this advice on the nature of these services:

That after the introductory rites (song, greeting, and opening prayer) one or more biblical readings be chosen with songs, psalms, or periods of silence inserted between them. In the homily these readings should be explained and applied to the congregation. Before or after the readings from Scripture, readings from the Fathers or other writers may also be selected that will help the community and each person to a true awareness of sin and heartfelt sorrow, in other words, to bring about conversion of life. After the homily and reflection on God's word, it is desirable that the congregation, united in voice and spirit, pray together in a litany or in some other way suited to general participation.<sup>13</sup>

Considering the above guidance, it was the Friday before Pentecost and the Friday after Mr. George Floyd was murdered. During the week, I had to deal with anger and hurt, joy and sadness, reconciliation, and peace. A former seminary professor encouraged me to design a service of reconciliation. At first, I resisted, but then the Spirit spoke, and I obeyed the nudging of the Paraclete.

I wanted to connect this current moment of racial oppression with another moment in history not too long ago: Slavery. The experience of enslaved Africans is documented in music, namely Negro spirituals. The service included three spirituals: "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child;" "I've Been 'Buked," and "Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen." The

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<sup>12</sup> To view the order of service, see [Appendix A](#).

<sup>13</sup> The English translation of the *Rite of Penance*. Paragraph 36.

spirituals are interwoven between three biblical readings: Exodus 20:1–21; Romans 12:1–2, 9–18; Matthew 25:31–46. To better understand how powerful this interweaving of the Word and spirituals are, I will offer my reflections on each spiritual and biblical reading.

“Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child”

Sometimes I feel like a motherless child,  
Sometimes I feel like a motherless child,  
Sometimes I feel like a motherless child,  
A long ways from home,  
A long ways from home.

Sometimes I feel like I’m almost gone,  
Sometimes I feel like I’m almost gone,  
Sometimes I feel like I’m almost gone,  
A long ways from home,  
A long ways from home.

*On one of these sale days, I saw a mother lead seven children to the auction block. She knew that some of them would be taken from her; but they took all. The children were sold to a slave-trader, and their mother was bought by a man in her own town. Before night her children were all far away. She begged the trader to tell her where he intended to take them; this he refused to do. How could he, when he knew he would sell them, one by one, wherever he could command the highest price? I met that mother in the street, and her wild haggard face lives today in my mind. She wrung her hands in anguish, and exclaimed, ‘Gone! all gone! Why don’t God kill me?’ I had no words wherewith to comfort her. Instances of this kind are of daily, yea, of hourly occurrence.*

Harriet Jacobs, a former enslaved African<sup>14</sup>

Solomon Northrup, author of *Twelve Years a Slave*, writes about an incident in 1841 that occurred at a Slave Auction in New Orleans:

*Eliza was crying aloud and wringing her hands. She besought the man not to buy him, unless he also bought herself and Emily. She promised, in that case, to be the most faithful slave that ever lived. The man answered that he could not afford it, and then Eliza burst into a paroxysm of grief weeping plaintively.<sup>15</sup>*

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<sup>14</sup> Arthur C. Jones, *Wade in the Water: The Wisdom of the Spirituals* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 18.

<sup>15</sup> Solomon Northrup, “Solomon Northrup Describes a New Orleans Slave Auction, 1841,” in *Let Nobody Turn Us Around: Voices of Resistance, Reform, and Renewal: An African American Anthology*, edited by Manning Marable and Leith Mullings, (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000), 50–51.

Harriet Jacobs and Solomon Northrup, former enslaved Africans, wrote about their experiences in captivity. Most enslaved Africans could not write about their daily life nor had the literary skills to do so. “Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child” is one of the most familiar songs passed down from generations of enslaved Africans. This song is a lament, revealing the anguish of a community constantly being separated and sold away from other family members. The nuclear family structure, vital in creating a culture and society, is ripped apart member by member, foreshadowing long-term consequences that the United States is still dealing with today.<sup>16</sup>

On May 25, 2020, when Floyd was losing his breath, he cried out: “Mama, Mama!” and “I can’t breathe.” The Spirit is breath, the Spirit is movement, the Spirit is fire, and the Spirit is life. George Floyd’s Spirit was taken from him, not by God, but by men. God’s ever-creating Spirit was slowly taken from him, causing Mr. Floyd to call out to his mother.

I began the Service singing: “Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child / A long ways from home / A long ways from home.”<sup>17</sup> Mr. Floyd called out to his deceased Mother. His Mother was already preparing a place for him in the Kingdom, where all Christians hope to spend eternity. Thinking about a Motherless child getting closer to home.

In a Catholic context, Mary, the mother of Jesus, is our mother (see John 19:27). Mary’s Son, Jesus, was also given over to the law enforcement agency of his day, and slowly, Jesus’

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<sup>16</sup> Ta-Neishi Coates, “The Black Family in the Age of Mass Incarceration,” in *The Atlantic* (October 2015): <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/10/the-black-family-in-the-age-of-mass-incarceration/403246/> (accessed October 5, 2023).

<sup>17</sup> The Fisk Jubilee Singes recorded this spiritual in the 1870s. It was also used during the Civil rights movement in the United States. Sister Thea Bowman, a Black Catholic nun, recorded the song in 1988, for her collection, *Songs of My People*. When meeting with the USCCB, she sang this spiritual, while giving a speech on the Black Catholic experience in the United States. Bowman sings this spiritual at the beginning of her speech. To watch Bowman’s speech, click [here](#). Paul Robeson recorded it in 1926; to listen click [here](#). Rosephanye Powell arranged this spiritual for concert use, to view, click [here](#). Powell’s arrangement is an example of a concertized spiritual.

breath escaped from him. Jesus and George died ignominiously, causing a movement to take hold of the world. The Spirit will reveal all things in truth.

As we struggle with the Enslavement of Africans, Systemic Racism, and “Race, the child of Racism,”<sup>18</sup> Mr. Floyd was living and dying in a country not his own. As a Black man in America, Floyd endured the afterlife of enslavement. The United States has not fully accepted the life of a Black body. He was indeed a motherless child, both biologically and physically. He was slowly leaving slavery for freedom—for home, where his mother is: where there is no more mortality, no more police brutality, no more racism, no more terrorism, no more double consciousness, no more lies, no more residue of the slavery to sin, and no more knees on his neck. He is no longer motherless and no longer a long way from home! In this context, I asked the parishioners of the Prince of Peace Catholic Church to acknowledge their part and silence in the sin of racism.

The first reading is Exodus 20:1–22. God speaks to the Israelite people, giving them the Ten Commandments. Exodus 20:2–3 (NRSV) states: “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me.” This passage indicates that God is affirming an existing relationship with Israel’s people. I like this translation because of the use of “slavery.” Other translations use “bondage” instead of “slavery,” both are valid. Slavery is bondage and captivity. God also acknowledges that he was God before, during, and after this period of slavery. If God delivered God’s people back from the “house of slavery,” God can continue to deliver God’s people from this bondage. The commandments that follow “are not so much conditions upon which the covenant is established

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<sup>18</sup>Ta-Nehisi Coats, *Between the World and Me* (New York: One World, 2015), 7.

as the guide by which Israel is to live more deeply into the covenant relationship that already exists due to the initiative and mercy of God.”<sup>19</sup>

Interestingly, God initiates a more profound renewal of God’s covenant relationship with Israel, most notably a covenant made with a God whose property is always to have mercy. Covenantal relationships are not conditional, that is a contract.<sup>20</sup> In a covenant, there is no exit clause. Covenants place our “promises in the context of a larger narrative and mutual accountability.”<sup>21</sup> In other words, God does not give up on us, and God’s mercy endures forever.

### “I’ve Been ’Buked”

I’ve been ’buked an’ I’ve been scorned,  
I’ve been ’buked an’ I’ve been scorned, children;  
I’ve been ’buked an’ I’ve been scorned,  
I’ve been talked about sho’s you’ born.

Dere is trouble all over dis worl’,  
Dere is trouble all over dis worl’, children;  
Dere is trouble all over dis worl’,  
Dere is trouble all over dis worl’.

Ain’ gwine lay my ’ligion down,  
Ain’ gwine lay my ’ligion down, children;  
Ain’ gwine lay my ’ligion down,  
Ain’ gwine lay my ’ligion down.

*I can testify, from my own experience and observation, that slavery is a curse to the [W]hites as well as to the [B]lack. It makes the [W]hite fathers cruel and sensual, the sons violent and licentious; it contaminates the daughters, and makes the wives wretched. And as for the colored race, it needs an abler pen than mine to describe the extremity of their sufferings, the depth of their degradation. Yet few slaveholders seem to be aware of the wide-spread moral ruin occasioned by this wicked system.*<sup>22</sup> Harriet Jacobs, a former enslaved African.

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<sup>19</sup> Theodore Hiebert. “Genesis.” in *Theological Bible Commentary*, edited by Gail R. O’Day and David L. Petersen (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 34

<sup>20</sup> Christine D. Pohl, *Living in Community: Cultivating Practices that Sustain Us* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2012), chap. 6, Kindle.

<sup>21</sup> Pohl, *Living in Community*, chap. 6, Kindle.

<sup>22</sup> Jones, *Wade in the Water*, 20.

Scholars, such as Arthur Jones and Eileen Guenther, place “I’ve Been Buked” and “Sometimes I Feel like a Motherless Child” in the same category of spirituals called “Motherless Child.” Jones suggests that the “the African oral tradition seemed made to order for a people in bondage, offering a channel for emotional expression as a first step in the healing of deep psychological and spiritual wound.”<sup>23</sup>

“Buked” is a corruption of rebuke.<sup>24</sup> The etymology of rebuke comes from Old French, meaning to strike, hack down, chop; this is about wood (“busche” meaning wood). This spiritual talks about being whipped, hated, and despised by the “Master.” Mr. Floyd was certainly buked and hacked down by Officer Chauvin. Expressions of the extreme limits of pain, anguish, and despair that enslaved Africans had to endure are found in this song of lament. It is difficult for me to find hope and redemption in this spiritual.

Psalms 51 was used for the responsorial psalm. The psalm’s refrain is, “Create in me a clean heart, O God.” When thinking about what psalm to use, there are several penitential psalms; however, Psalm 51 is both a prayer of an individual for mercy and forgiveness of sin and a text that has become a meditation on the nature of sin and guilt. Psalm 51:10 is the framework for the refrain: “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.” “Create” is a term used only with God as the subject in Hebrew. It suggests that the poet is asking God for a re-creation of mind, will, inner disposition, and energy. The overall division of the psalm is verses 1–5, confession of sin and plea for forgiveness; verses 6–9, prayer for healing; verses 10–12, prayer for the restoration of relationship with God; verses 13–14, a vow to

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<sup>23</sup> Jones, *Wade in the Water*, 21.

<sup>24</sup> “I’ve been ’buked” was first recorded by the Tuskegee Institute Singers in 1916. The spiritual became more influential in the middle part of the twentieth century. Most famously, “I’ve been ’buked” was sung by Mahalia Jackson right before Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his “I have a dream” speech in Washington D. C. in 1963 as shown in this video: <https://www.cbsnews.com/video/mahalia-jackson-wows-crowd-at-march-on-washington/> (accessed March 1, 2024).

tell of God’s mercy; verses 15–17, reflection on what God desires of sinners; verses 18–19, prayer for the restoration of Zion. The musical setting of the psalm was composed by Kenneth W. Louis (1956–2020).<sup>25</sup>

The second reading comes from Romans 12:1–2, 9–18. I chose this reading for the inclusion of verse 2: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what the will of God is—what is good and acceptable and perfect.” (NRSV) Verse 1, establishes that we live both spiritual and physical lives, connecting body and mind together as crucial to a new life in Christ.

Beginning in verse 9, Paul exhorts the community in Rome that if one practices love, one must hate evil; it is not enough to avoid doing evil simply; one must take a stand against evil! This view is like that of Martin Luther King Jr., who wrote in his 1963 “Letter from Birmingham Jail:” “We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people.”<sup>26</sup>

Enslaved Africans knew that creating and singing spirituals could help the transformation needed to renew their minds and establish a new life in Christ. What is also present in this text is that many in a community are often silent when speaking out against injustices. “Nobody Knows the Trouble I’ve Seen” is a spiritual that allows enslaved Africans to express the injustices of an abusive and oppressive system, namely slavery and its successor: systemic racism.

#### “Nobody Knows the Trouble I See”

Nobody knows the trouble I’ve seen;  
Nobody knows my sorrow.  
Nobody knows the trouble I’ve seen;  
Glory, Hallelujah!

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<sup>25</sup> Darrell Anthony St. Romain and Darnell Allen St. Romain, “Black Catholic Hymnody: Kenneth W. Louis,” *The Hymn* 73, no. 2 (Spring 2022): 49–50.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas L. Hoyt Jr., “Romans” in *True to Our Native Land: An African American New Testament Commentary*, edited by Brian K. Blount, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 268–269.



Sometimes I'm up, sometimes I'm down;  
Oh, yes, Lord.  
Sometimes I'm almost to the groun',  
Oh, yes, Lord.

*Dear husband,  
I want you to buy me as soon as possible, for if you do not get me somebody else  
will. . . Dear husband, you [know] not the trouble I see. . . It is said Master is in  
want of monney. If so, I know not what time he may sell me, and then all my  
bright hops of the futer are blasted, for there has ben on bright hope to cheer me  
in all my troubles, that is to be with you—for if I thought I shoul never see you  
this earth would have no charms for me. Do all you can for me, witch I have no  
doubt you will. Your affectionate wife, Harriet Newby.<sup>27</sup>*

“Nobody Knows the Trouble I See”<sup>28</sup> is found in a collection of spirituals edited by abolitionists William Francis Allen, Charles Pickard Ware, and Lucy McKim Garrison entitled *Slave Songs of the United States* (1867). One moves from lament, sorrow, and anguish to hope in four lines. One can even claim that heaven and earth intersect in this song. “Glory, Hallelujah” is an expectation of salvation and eternal life. Amid trials and tribulations, enslaved Africans could teleport spiritually to that place of final rest. Mrs. Harriet Newby knew the temporal troubles of this life. She knew of the trauma of being sold for a profit as if she were cattle. Even though she knew of those troubles, she still holds on to the “bright [hope for the future].” I chose this song to move, precisely and succinctly, from grief to hope, from sorrow to everlasting joy. After one has been lifted from earth to heaven, one can be prepared to hear from the final discourse in Matthew’s Gospel.

Matthew 25: 31–46 is the Gospel reading “The Judgment of the Nations.” The fact that I work in the Church does not “secure” my Salvation. Jesus says: “Truly I tell you, just as you did

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<sup>27</sup> Eileen Guenther, *In Their Own Words: Slave Life and the Power of Spirituals* (St. Louis, Missouri: MorningStar Music Publishers, 2016), 116.

<sup>28</sup> John Richard Watson, Carlton Young, and Eileen Guenther, “Nobody knows the trouble I see,” *The Canterbury Dictionary of Hymnology*. Canterbury Press, <http://www.hymnology.co.uk/n/nobody-knows-the-trouble-i-see>. (accessed October 7, 2023).

not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.” (Matt 25:45) Above, I reference these words found in the “Introduction” to the *Rite of Penance*: “The Son of God made man lived among us in order to free us from the slavery of sin and to call us out of darkness into his wonderful light. He therefore began his work on earth by preaching repentance and saying: ‘Repent and believe the Gospel.’” Jesus initiates a ministry expressed in deeds of mercy. Those who follow or imitate Jesus’ ministry will manifest God’s reign in a sinful world. The complicated truth about this passage is that to serve Jesus; one must live in and among marginal bodies. Jesus identifies with the poor and the desperate in our society. The servants of Jesus stand up and live in opposition to the hedonism, narcissism, and self-aggrandizement this world offers. Systemic racism marginalizes an entire race and stifles access to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” This passage indicates God’s inclusive mercy and shows God’s deep commitment and faithfulness to the covenant God established with Israel (see the reading from the [Old Testament](#)).

After the Scriptures are proclaimed, the poem “Strange Fruit” (1937) by Abel Meeropol (1903–1986) is read. Meeropol was a native of the Bronx, New York, who was also known by the pseudonym Lewis Allan.

Southern trees bear a strange fruit  
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root  
Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze  
Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees.

Abel Meeropol wrote it as a poem, then later as a song, after seeing a 1930 photo of the lynching of two Black men in Indiana. This grotesque image tormented him for days until he finally transcribed his thoughts in stanza 2:

Pastoral scene from the valiant South:  
The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth,

A scent of sweet and fresh magnolia,  
Then the sudden smell of burning flesh.

“Strange Fruit” is not a typical reading voiced in the liturgy. However, it was necessary to read a poem from one civil rights movement at the genesis of another civil rights movement. Billie Holiday, a Black Jazz singer, popularized “Strange Fruit” as a song she would sing to close her sets as a lounge performer. Viewing a performance of Billie Holiday singing “Strange Fruit” is a thrilling experience, which you can see [here](#).<sup>29</sup>

After hearing “Strange Fruit,” Fr. Tom, the former pastor of Prince of Peace Catholic Church, delivered a moving Word designed to address the moral implications of silence. Explicitly stating how the silence of the community perpetuates and endorses the systemic racism in our country. Fr. Tom offered these implicating words:

In the recitation of the Confiteor, we pray “for what I have done and for what I have failed to do.” In other words, we are asked to reflect on our sins of commission and, just as importantly, our sins of omission. Perhaps, just perhaps, we have never uttered a racist word or committed a racist action, but how many times have we failed to speak up and speak out when we have witnessed others doing such? There is an axiom that says silences seem to give consent. . . it may be an old saying, but that does not make it any less true.<sup>30</sup>

In addition, Fr. Tom laid out steps the community can take to help build up the Kingdom of God.

After the homily, the community expresses sorrow for their sins by offering Penitential Intercessions. In this litany, the community responds: “Lord, help us to breathe the breath of Christ.” This is built from Mr. Floyd’s last words and the creation story in Genesis, where God breathed life into creation (Gen 2:7). In this litany, the community acknowledges its part in the sin of racism. The litany moves from confession of sin to asking God’s redeeming love to help

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<sup>29</sup> Billie Holiday performs “Strange Fruit” live in 1959, it is from the archives of Reelin’ In the Years Productions: <http://reelinintheyears.com/> (accessed March 1, 2024).

<sup>30</sup> Thomas Cloherty, Homily, June 18, 2020. Fr. Tom edited his text from the homily and shared it with me in an email. The text of the homily can be viewed in [Appendix B](#).

the community overcome its sinfulness and the harm it has brought on God's community. Now that the community has acknowledged its sinfulness, it can move forward to make progress on dismantling this oppressive system.

Above, I have demonstrated my attempt to situate and interweave the Word and spirituals together to create an atmosphere conducive to reconciliation. I chose spirituals that moved from lament to joy and hope of eternal life. The testimonies of enslaved Africans bring to life the people who existed in marginalized bodies. Mr. Floyd was no different than his ancestors. Mr. Floyd, too, longed for the day when there would be no more weeping and crying out: "I Can't Breathe!"

When I designed this liturgy, I was acting on the prompting of the Holy Spirit. I was surprised to learn how it would be received in the community. The day after designing the liturgy, I met with Fr. Tom who encouraged me to do the service right away. The service was on Thursday, June 18, 2020, the eve of JUNETEENTH. The restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic only allowed us to have a small number present in the sanctuary. Around forty people attended the service live, and many more watched the Livestream on Facebook or YouTube.

When I interviewed Fr. Tom about the service on July 7, 2020, I asked: "How did you feel the service went, and how could it have been better?" Fr. Tom responded: "It would have been better perhaps if we had had some history of those spirituals." I agree, it would have been helpful for me to provide a historical background on each spiritual sung during the service.

I designed a liturgical prayer service to help situate the sin of racism in our local context. One of the most profound responses I received was an email from a parishioner saying:

Thank you all for the beautiful prayer service this evening. The music, readings, prayers, and homily were masterfully interwoven to convey the timely message we need to be reminded of. Even if we do nothing explicitly to contribute to racism, we do not think about it unless there is a blatant incident. For so long we

have not done anything to acknowledge it or challenge ourselves to do something about it. Thank you for bringing a prayerful focus that inspires us to move beyond our blindness and inaction.<sup>31</sup>

To view the Service of Reconciliation at Price of Peace, click [here](#). (See order of service in [Appendix A](#).)

I did not address one song used during the racial reconciliation service. When designing a liturgy, giving the community something to anchor them is essential. In consultation with Fr. Tom, we decided that the final song would be the familiar “Amazing Grace.”<sup>32</sup> It is also the song President Barack Obama decided to sing at the funeral of the Rev. Clementa Pinckney on June 26, 2015. Rev. Pinckney was murdered in his church, Mother Emmanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina, along with eight other parishioners. Grace is something we need right now. God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit can offer us this grace if we submit to a plan of mutual understanding and forgiveness. To watch that moving moment, click [here](#).

### **“There is a Balm in Gilead”**

A more familiar spiritual that takes its name from the Old Testament but applies it to the concept of Salvation through Jesus Christ as found in the New Testament. The “balm in Gilead” refers to Jeremiah 8:22: “Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why, then, is there no

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<sup>31</sup> Madeline Zechman, Email correspondence, June 18, 2020.

<sup>32</sup> The text first published in *Olney Hymns* (1779) Book I, “On select Passages of Scripture.” It had six Common Meter stanzas. The hymn is popular in the United States especially in the Appalachian valleys and first published in the US in *Columbian Harmony, or Pilgrim’s Musical Companion* (Cincinnati, 1829), and in *Virginia Harmony* (Winchester, Virginia, 1831); Elizabeth Cosnett. “Amazing grace! (how sweet the sound),” *The Canterbury Dictionary of Hymnology*. Canterbury Press, [http://www.hymnology.co.uk/a/amazing-grace!-\(how-sweet-the-sound\)](http://www.hymnology.co.uk/a/amazing-grace!-(how-sweet-the-sound)) (accessed October 7, 2023).

healing for the wounds of my [God's] people? The balm of Gilead is a spiritual medicine that can heal sinners.<sup>33</sup>

There is a balm in Gilead,  
To make the wounded whole;  
There is a balm in Gilead,  
To heal the sin-sick soul.<sup>34</sup>

Sometimes I feel discouraged,  
And think my work's in vain.  
But then the Holy Spirit,  
Revives my soul again.

It is not surprising that enslaved Africans resonated with the Israelite people. Like the enslaved Africans, the Israelites were also in a strange and foreign land. Both groups knew slavery, bondage, and living life in exile. Oddly enough, the spiritual does not mention the physical brutality enslaved Africans faced during slavery. Instead, it focuses on the power of God to heal our sins and divisions through Jesus Christ—the divine physician.

As I have lived out my vocation in the Church, there is a cosmic need for the balm of Gilead. Humans cannot solve the issues we experience without weathering life, experiencing cuts and bruises, not by physical lashes, but by spiritual lashes. As a Black Catholic, we have needed this balm to help cover the wounds of state-sponsored terrorism backed by and supported by the church and its auxiliary institutions; while looking to find a home in God's kingdom, only to experience liturgical rites and services through a Eurocentric cultural matrix. Only Jesus can heal our sin-sick divisions. Only we get discouraged when the work is too demanding.

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<sup>33</sup> [Click](#) here to view a concertized arrangement of “There is a balm in Gilead” performed by the all-male vocal ensemble. Recently, the spiritual has been treated as a Black gospel power anthem. Karen Clark-Sheard, of the famous Clark Singers, offers her gospel-centric interpretation of “[There is a balm in Gilead](#).” Jesus is the balm in Gilead, is a declaration. Jesus is the only one that can heal your entire body.

<sup>34</sup> The first printed version of this spiritual is found in *Folk Song of the American Negro* (Nashville, Tennessee, 1915) edited by John Wesley Work, II. The text of the refrain is a variant of a chorus sung to a melody appended to John Newton's “How lost was my condition.” Newton is the author of “Amazing Grace;” Carlton Young and John Richard Watson. “There is a Balm in Gilead,” *The Canterbury Dictionary of Hymnology*. Canterbury Press, <http://www.hymnology.co.uk/t/there-is-a-balm-in-gilead> (accessed October 7, 2023).

Today, we know that there is a balm in Gilead; there is no more question! I ask today: Do we allow ourselves as a community of believers to rub the balm deep enough into our wounds? If we allow that to happen, we will all experience the healing power of the Holy Spirit at work in our lives and our community.

## CHAPTER 3

“Lord, I want to be a Christian in My Heart.”

*Lord, I want to be a Christian  
in my heart, in my heart.  
Lord, I want to be a Christian in my heart.  
In my heart, in my heart,  
Lord, I want to be a Christian in my heart.*

### Introduction

And so by fateful chance the Negro folk-song—the rhythmic cry of the [enslaved African]—stands today not simply as the sole American music, but as the most beautiful expression of human experience born this side of the seas. It has been neglected, it has been, and is, half despised, and above all, it has been persistently mistaken and misunderstood; but notwithstanding, it still remains as the singular spiritual heritage of the nation and the greatest gift of the Negro people.<sup>1</sup>

W. E. B. Dubois penned the words above in 1903. These prophetic words still ring true. Dubois seminal work is the foundation for analyzing spirituals to this day. He passionately asserts that the common thread through “Sorrow Songs,” Dubois’ term for spiritual, “breathes hope—a faith in the ultimate justice of things.”<sup>2</sup> This chapter will narrate the views of nine parishioners at Prince of Peace. These parishioners agreed to be my conversation partners, discussing race, the institution of slavery, spirituals, and race relations at Prince of Peace.

Approaching discussions on race is a complex and daring endeavor. As a Black man, I try to avoid discussions on race. I work and move in mostly White spaces. I lived an anonymous life in these White spaces until the murder of George Floyd. After George Floyd, I could no longer ignore my existence as a Black Man. I was confronted with my Blackness because White people constantly asked me: “Are you okay?” I honestly was “okay.” However, I noticed that the people

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<sup>1</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Seattle: Amazon Classics, [1903] 2000), 233.

<sup>2</sup> Du Bois, 242.



asking this question were not “okay.” Some of the responses I heard throughout June and July 2020 were: “I cannot believe this happened in our country,” “He was an unarmed Black man in handcuffs, and he didn’t deserve to die that way,” “Why is this still happening all these years later?”

As the only Black person on the staff at Prince of Peace Catholic Church then, I felt called to venture into unknown waters, the murky waters of racial reconciliation. This led to the service of racial reconciliation described in Chapter 2. Afterward, I met with the Business Manager at Prince of Peace, a White Male in his seventies, bi-weekly for about six months to discuss matters of race in society and the racial divide at Prince of Peace. I began playing spirituals during the Mass. Since we were in the pandemic, worship at Prince of Peace involved instrumental music during the offering and communion. Lastly, I formed a group of nine parishioners. This group met over 4 months, engaging in challenging conversations and exchanging emails regarding the racial divide at Prince of Peace. What follows is a theology of accompaniment.

### **What is accompaniment?**

“Accompaniment” in the Catholic Church is evangelization. It is a relationship that allows one person to help another person fully share the gifts God has given to them. More importantly, it is the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has the power to revitalize relationships and transform institutions. In the case of the parishioners at Prince of Peace, it can help develop a relationship that crosses the racial divide, in a word—solidarity.

The idea of accompaniment does not appear in papal encyclicals that address Catholic Social Teaching. The characteristics of accompaniment are love, justice, mercy, and solidarity. A

nascent form of accompaniment is found in *Rerum Novarum*, a papal encyclical published by Pope Leo XIII in 1891.<sup>3</sup> Although this encyclical focuses on the role of the labor movement brought about by the Industrial Revolution, it sets forth a new path; the Catholic Church will walk alongside the suffering in their pursuits of changing their economic and social conditions.

In 1967, Pope Paul VI wrote in *Populorum Progressio*, “An ever more effective world solidarity should allow all peoples to become the artisans of their destiny.”<sup>4</sup> He introduces solidarity as accompanying the poor or those afflicted in any way. Finally, Pope Francis sums up solidarity in *Fratelli Tutti* writing: “Solidarity means much more than engaging in sporadic acts of generosity. . . It also means combatting the structural causes of poverty, inequality, the lack of work, land and housing, the denial of social and [labor] rights. It means confronting the destructive effects of the empire of money.”<sup>5</sup> *Fratelli Tutti*, I suggest, can include breaking down systemic racism in American Society.<sup>6</sup> Involved in accompaniment is an encounter, mutual listening, and mutual transformation through the encounter.

### **Conversations on Race and Spirituals**

To engage in conversations about race and spirituals, I sought the wisdom of nine parishioners at Prince of Peace (known as conversation partners); the group consisted of seven White people and two Black people, six women and three men, the age of participants ranged from people in their forties through seventies, with me as the group facilitator. Parishioners for this group were

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<sup>3</sup> Leo XIII, “Rerum Novarum,” The Holy See (May 15, 1891), [https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_l-xiii\\_enc\\_15051891\\_rerum-novarum.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_15051891_rerum-novarum.html) (accessed January 16, 2024).

<sup>4</sup> Paul VI, “Populorum Progressio,” The Holy See (March 26, 1967), [https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_enc\\_26031967\\_populorum.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_26031967_populorum.html) (accessed January 16, 2024), para. 65.

<sup>5</sup> Francis, “Fratelli Tutti,” The Holy See (October 3, 2020), [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20201003\\_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html) (accessed January 16, 2024) para. 116.

<sup>6</sup> Francis, para. 24, 86.

selected based on the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and the willingness of the parishioners to have open and candid conversations about race. There was one unifying factor: all the parishioners in this group had frank and vulnerable conversations about race with me prior.

To begin anew is the first step in discussing race with friends. To achieve that, all the conversation partners gathered and introduced themselves to each other. I started the introductions by telling my story. After telling my story, I invited a conversation partner to tell their story to the group. This continued until all gathered told their story to the group. This story included naming their parents, grandparents, spouses, and children. Then, they recounted certain memorable events from their childhood and how they met their spouses—followed by a time when they encountered prejudice or bias, either at Prince of Peace or at their jobs. This was to establish that all have similar backgrounds but slight differences.

During the introduction, two families disclosed painful incidents that illustrate the racial divide at Prince of Peace. A White woman in her forties shared with the conversation partners that her family has been members of the Prince of Peace [POP] community for almost ten years and both of their kids attended the school. The experience at POP was much different for their son than for their daughter. Their son has darker skin; he is Latino, a person with brown skin. There were situations where other kids made fun of him. The most egregious incident occurred when two other boys (both White) sang a song to him to the tune of “Row, row, row your boat” but changed the words to “mow, mow, mow my lawn.” When they addressed this situation with the school, very little was done. They “requested” the two boys write an apology, but there were no true ramifications. Furthermore, the President, at that time, stated that the other families were “very good people” and “very supportive of the school,” so he didn’t want to upset them. The notion of “white privilege” was alive and well at POP. It was very clear to them that their child’s

education and well-being were not as important as that of wealthy White boys. However, their daughter has lighter skin, blondish hair, and blue eyes. She has never experienced any issues at POP with other students. No one questions her heritage or makes fun of her for being White.

The second incident came from a Black family in their fifties. They shared the following with the group. Since school age, she attended a predominately White Catholic school, and on Sundays, her family worshipped at a predominately Black Catholic church. When she married, she and her husband were of equal mindsets that their children would attend Catholic schools, as it was their intent for them to have religion as a major component of their school upbringing.

Before having children, they became members of the Prince of Peace Catholic Church. Even though they were in the minority, it quickly became their “Church Home.” Luckily, Prince of Peace also had a school, and upon having their first child, she was enrolled in Pre-Kindergarten. Although their child’s experience differed from her mother’s upbringing, specifically, she was the minority race in both her Catholic school and church, she flourished at the school and never had a desire to leave.

However, as parents, the thought of seeking another school for their child arose when she encountered a distressing situation in her fourth-grade year involving one of her friends, whom she thought was genuine. This “friend” wrote on a group text chat with several friends—both boys and girls—that their daughter could not wear certain makeup due to her darker skin hue. This incident deeply hurt and affected their daughter, leading to feelings of distrust and sadness. And, because it was on a group chat, several of the other friends were deeply hurt by the insensitivity and meanness of the child who wrote such disheartening words. Several parents contacted us immediately to express their concerns and even apologize. However, the girl’s parents, who wrote such mean words, never called anyone.

In their efforts to address this issue, they, as parents, attempted to contact the parents of the young girl in particular who made the statement. She contacted the mother, who offered no apology for her daughter or herself. She found this extremely disheartening. After several attempts, her husband was finally able to reach the father. After stating his family had not been around “Black People,” he assured us that his daughter would offer an apology for the incident. While they appreciate the intention behind the apology, which was never given to their daughter, the damage caused to their daughter's friendship remained irreparable.

Their daughter graduated from Prince of Peace Catholic School and attended a Catholic high school. She is a graduating senior who hopes to attend a Catholic or faith-based college. They are blessed that she is solid in her faith, Catholicism, and identity as a young Black woman. Although this incident happened at a young age, and they, as parents, try to shelter their children, looking back, it did help her to be knowledgeable of racial ignorance and to look for genuine people. The anecdotes presented above portray how racism is a part of the community at Prince of Peace. The children engage in racial humor not knowing that these jokes are one tool used to perpetuate racism.

Pope Francis emphasizes the importance of dialogue. Dialogue involves “approaching, speaking, listening, looking at, coming to know and understand one another, and finding common ground.”<sup>77</sup> It is not beneficial to dialogue with someone if you first do not comprehend where that person grew up and some of the trials a person has encountered. There was not one conversation partner who grew up in Plano. All came to Plano because of job relocation; thus, each partner brought their culture from other locations in the United States. Furthermore, this introduction allowed all to enter a true spirit of dialogue where “it becomes possible to be frank

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Francis, “Fratelli Tutti,” 198.

and open about our beliefs, while continuing to discuss, to seek points of contact, and above all, to work and struggle together.”<sup>8</sup>

The second step is to understand the definitions of race and racism and how the institution of slavery shaped those definitions. Moreover, those definitions of race and racism are dynamic. To that end, each member defined race and racism. Only one individual made the connection between race and power or defined racism as a system that was created and maintained based on manufacturing groups and classes of people. Formulating these definitions of race and racism involved education, an education that was not formal but involved dialogue and evaluating their lived experiences.

Learning about the institution of slavery in a community involves the expansion of one’s beliefs, morals, and values. When I presented information to the conversation partners that in 1510, a Portuguese Priest, Bartolomé de Las Casas, was responsible for the idea of importing enslaved Africans to the Americas, thus beginning the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the conversation partners were silent.<sup>9</sup> It is shocking to learn that a Roman Catholic Priest birthed the idea of transporting enslaved Africans across the Atlantic Ocean to the Americas to work on a plantation to harvest crops, especially when all the conversation partners, including me, are Catholic. Identifying the truth and acknowledging the truth is essential to dialogue.

A theology of accompaniment is an encounter. Hopefully, this encounter can transcend our differences and divisions. Pope Francis employs the image of a many-faceted polyhedron that “represents a society where differences coexist, complementing, enriching and reciprocally illuminating one another, even amid disagreements and reservations.”<sup>10</sup> Going further, Francis

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<sup>8</sup> Francis, “Fratelli Tutti,” para. 203.

<sup>9</sup> Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* (New York: Nation Books, 2016), 26–27.

<sup>10</sup> Francis, “Fratelli Tutti,” para. 215.

states, “Each of us can learn something from others; no one is useless, and no one is expendable.”<sup>11</sup>

After an introduction and education, the conversation partners are now open to receiving the wisdom spirituals can teach us. The conversation partners studied and examined four spirituals together: “Sometimes I feel Like a motherless child,” “There is a balm in Gilead,” “Lord, I want to be a Christian in my heart,” and “Plenty Good Room.” Below are some of the conversation partner’s analyses of the spirituals. These responses came from email correspondence with me.

#### **“Sometimes I feel like a motherless child”**

*This song fills me with sadness. When pondering the lyrics of this spiritual, my heart feels pain and despair. . . and then my mind fills with anger thinking of the slaves being forcibly separated from their loved ones. The hopelessness abounds, just like when a child is taken from its parents; and the despair is overwhelming when I think about slaves that were taken from their homeland—and then their situation became tragically worse when families were ripped apart, and children were left without a loving parent.*

A White woman in her forties

*The words and phrases that the spiritual evokes are disconnected, alone, vulnerable, no one to care about me, no one to protect me, no one to teach me. The second stanza evokes images of being erased, unimportant, inconsequential, feelings do not matter, not one even notices I am motherless.*

A White woman in her sixties

*Hearing this song brings about emotional feelings of sadness, sympathy, anguish, and despair. One often equates comfort in any situation with having one’s “Mother” around to offer comfort and security. And as a mother, it makes me feel emotional. It would be devastating to know my children felt this way, and I would be unable to help them during a time of hardship and difficulty, especially being “a long ways from home.” The line for “I’m almost gone” make me wonder if these lyrics were a pinnacle point referencing a feeling of doom and death.*

A Black woman in her fifties

*This spiritual hymn reminds me of how many slaves must have felt by being brought to an unknown land/world. This spiritual emphasizes the anguish the slaves must have felt as*

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<sup>11</sup> Francis, “Fratelli Tutti,” para. 215.

*they reflected on the realization of being disconnected from their family and roots to become subjects within a lost and unknown world.*

A Black man in his fifties

*As I read this spiritual, I'm filled with a sense of hopelessness. As if the final ties to my family are broken and there is no hope of return. There is fear and despair in the singer.*

A White man in his fifties

*Being without a parent, especially at a young age, creates a sense of loss and abandonment. This song portrays that sense of hopelessness experienced by enslaved people who were often pulled away as children from their parents and sold into slavery. Imagine never seeing your parents again as a child and forced into hard labor and abused.*

*When I was a young girl, I remember getting separated from my mother and father at an amusement park. I was scared. Although I was surrounded by a sea of people, I still felt lonely. The music and their voices became muffled, closing in around me as hope of ever being found diminished. I felt lost, as the song says, "a long ways from home." Alas, I was being filled with joy when my parents found me. But I will always remember that feeling of being lost and no one knowing who I was.*

*Then there was a time when there was not a resolution. My father died in his sleep one morning when I was in college. I kept looking for him to return. I couldn't understand how the world could continue on, while mine had felt like it had stopped. Like the song's second stanza says, "Sometimes I feel like I'm almost gone."*

*The song was often sung during the Civil Rights Movement in the United States to express how Black Americans felt in a society where they were not "seen," or "almost gone" as an equal human being when it came to voting rights, housing rights, education, social interactions and more. Even their own mother nation had abandoned them as full citizens. I do wonder about the word "sometimes." Does that mean they were still hanging on to a glimmer of hope? Sung as a spiritual, this song calls out to God to be their place of comfort, their new home.*

A White woman in her sixties

Despair, hopelessness, and anguish are some of the adjectives the conversation partners chose to

elucidate: "Sometimes, I feel like a motherless child." One participant does point out the glimmer of hope that is present and acknowledges that God is now their place of refuge.

Interestingly, the women or mothers among the conversation partners reacted more strongly to this spiritual than the men or fathers.



## “There is a balm in Gilead”

*With the gift of the Holy Spirit, we can all share the love of Jesus and regain hope when we feel lost.*

A White Man in his seventies

*There is so much grief in the world (sin-sick soul!), but this song sings of how the Holy Spirit “revives” and is there for us, even when we feel discouraged. This is a song for all Christians. We all feel discouraged at times—we feel like we work in vain to be like Jesus. But this song is a reminder to us that Jesus dies for all. The melody and words lend itself to any congregation.*

A White woman in her seventies

*This spiritual hymn conveys a song of encouragement to be uplifted by the comfort of knowing of a higher being that will become our savior to deliver us (the “slaves”) from the imperfect suffering and bondage.*

A Black man in his fifties

*We have all been wounded in some fashion. This song speaks to us and tells us we can always be healed by Jesus, no matter what status or what we may have done or not done. There is always hope. Jesus is our spiritual medicine.*

*This woundedness might come from what wrong has been done to us (in this case being enslaved) but it can also come from the wrongs we create to separate our “sin-sick soul” from Jesus.*

*I find it deeply humbling that the songwriter, after everything he goes through in slavery, feels like he has to work so hard to be redeemed, in writing, “I think my works in vain.” This song is his prayer, and he finds hope when the Holy Spirit revives his soul.*

*The third stanza seems to display some personal growth by the songwriter who now begins to express an understanding of the inclusiveness of Jesus. We may not be as articulate as Paul in our prayers or as bold as Peter in preaching our faith, but the songwriter understands that Jesus “died for all,” even the lowliest of slaves, even us as sinners.*

A White woman in her sixties

*I particularly love this song because it involves feelings of “hope.” As I try to live a positive, hopeful outlook through life, this song makes me think it brings some hope to know that a “Balm in Gilead” can relieve everyone, independent of one’s needs. I especially love that the song states to call on the “Holy Spirit” whenever one is in need or feeling discouraged for one’s soul to be continually revived, refreshed, and encouraged.*

A Black woman in her fifties

*Impressions from this spiritual are hope for healing body and soul. “Sin-sick” refers to the depth of sickness. Use of “feel” and “think” mean your work is not in vain, acknowledges discouragement is a normal feeling. Holy Spirit is the source of healing—not self or other humans. Everyone regardless of status in life can spread love of Jesus.*

A White woman in her sixties.

*This song fills me with hope, and the lyrics bring to life the ultimate hope which is salvation through Jesus. The balm is the spiritual medicine to save the slaves from their suffering, and it still resonates with us today—whatever a suffering soul needs, Jesus is still the saving balm. As a Christian and an optimist, I love focusing on the hopefulness from our Savior.*

A White woman in her forties

It is easier for the conversation partners to find a more positive outlook in “There is a balm in Gilead.” Comfort, healing, and uplifting are the adjectives used to describe the emotional tenor of this spiritual. Jesus is the balm in Gilead, and it is Jesus and the Holy Spirit who work together to heal our sin-sick souls. One conversation partner extracts the inclusiveness of the spiritual: that Jesus died for all.

### **“Lord, I want to be a Christian in my heart”**

*Lord, I want to be a Christian is the song of every Christian who desires to be like Jesus. I listened to a version of children singing it—powerful for all ages. I would definitely have used it when I was teaching religion at POP School. This song has a simple message that’s put to a melody that’s easy to sing.*

A White woman in her seventies

*This spiritual seems to be upbeat and brings to mind a commitment to change and becoming more Christ-like. There is a general sense of hope for a change of heart. There is a general sense of openness and longing in the words. Lord, please help me to change.*

A White man in his fifties.

*This spiritual hymn was one I enjoyed signing and reflecting on, as it echoes my desire to be a better person and to be like our savior, Christ.*

A Black man in his fifties

*This song makes me reflect on how I would like to be—Lord, I want to be more “loving, holy, and like Jesus” in my heart. There may be times when you are conflicted on how to behave, think, and feel; however, as Christians, this song reflects that we must always strive to keep our hearts clean, pure, and like Jesus. This song brings to mind Proverbs 4:23: “Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.”*

A Black woman in her fifties

*I believe this Spiritual speaks against the hypocrisy of many slave-owners who called themselves Christian, all the while abusing fellow humans. We see this so much in our society today where people who hold themselves out to being Christian and quoting Scripture are still prejudiced and treat others unkindly.*

*The songwriter most likely experienced painful and humiliating discrimination but still was able to rise above it to know that he wants to be more loving, more holy, like Jesus in his heart. He has seen the hypocrisy and instead of being vengeful, he rises above it.*

A White woman in her sixties

*This is the song of someone who is struggling, who sees the world as a place that does not reflect the spiritual goals taught by Jesus. They want to emulate Christian ideals, but how can they in the face of how they are being treated, of the life they lead. Yet, despite it all, the longing remains.*

A White woman in her sixties

*This spiritual has a straightforward message that we should be like Jesus. When I just attempt to think of these lyrics from the perspective of an enslaved person, it is astonishing to understand this conviction of wanting to be a Christian. For me, this is inspiring, and like the other spirituals, these words can move us today. . . we can allow this world to conquer us, or we can live every day as Jesus would want us to live; and with His strength, we can battle the bigotry and hypocrisy that is still present in our world.*

A White woman in her forties

Jesus is who we should be like if we are a Christian. The conversation partners realize that this spiritual does offer some critique of the enslavers while also entertaining the idea that the enslaved did not want to be hypocrites as well. If I am a Christian, then I will love my neighbor and not abuse and dehumanize any person.

### **“Plenty Good Room”**

*This spiritual intrigued me. The refrain reassures that everyone (slave or free, man or woman, Jew or Gentile) has a place in heaven. . . that earthly confines are overthrown in*

heaven. The verses perplex, however: Is the person saying that he or she wouldn't do these things (sin, lie, backslide) because they want to be ready whenever God calls them home? Or because they don't want to be like their master?

A White woman in her seventies

*This song is uplifting. The lyrics reaffirm that God is a loving, forgiving God—and when He calls us, we should all be ready because He has room for all. There are no divisions in Heaven—no racial divides, no socioeconomic distinction—and the hope of salvation is for all people who are willing to follow Jesus.*

A White woman in her forties

*This Spiritual speaks of the all-inclusive and forgiving God. While on earth, the enslaved were often left out and forgotten in society. The color of their skin often forbade Blacks to drink from the same water fountain or even belong to the same country club as [W]hites. Heaven may be the only place where there is “plenty good room” for everyone.*

*I find it perplexing that even the slave who has already gone through so much pain and despair still “wouldn't be ready to die.” It seems he has already gone through hell on earth. I wish he didn't have to feel like he had to earn entry into the Kingdom of God, because God loves us all. Despite his suffering, he is singing about needing to walk the straight path: “I would not be a sinner.” “I would not be a liar.” “I would not be a backslider.”*

*God often draws close to the downtrodden. These spirituals were a way for the enslaved, who had every reason to lose hope, express their emotional understanding of God as they drew closer in deeper relationship with their Savior.*

A White woman in her sixties

*This spiritual is an invitation to join God in heaven by choosing to live a life free of sin. The singer wants to remain ready to join the Lord at any moment should they be called. A sense of hope and confidence permeates throughout the song as the singer is ready for what comes next.*

A White man in his fifties

*This song also makes me feel HOPEFUL, yet MINDFUL. I'm hopeful that even as a sinner God still wants me in heaven when I die. And when I mess up, I need to confess and ask forgiveness. It reminds me to be. . . ‘a little more like Jesus, a little less like me’ to enter the Kingdom of God (song lyric by Zach Williams).*

A White woman in her forties

*During times of divisiveness, this song brings the feeling that all can come together in our Father's house in Heaven because there is “plenty of good room.” The lyrics allow reflections of inclusivity versus exclusivity. While reflecting on this song, it is my concluding belief that if “Sometimes you feel like a Motherless Child” in anguish and despair, “There is a balm in Gilead,” that can heal your soul as long as you continue to pray “Lord, I want to be a Christian” and follow the Bible, there will be “Plenty Good Room” in heaven for everyone.*

A Black woman in her fifties

The reflection immediately above is from a Black mother who internalized the scope of this thesis—the power of Spirituals to inspire an ethical-moral change in one’s heart. Even though she faces suffering, hard trials, distress, and trauma, she can depend on Jesus and the Holy Spirit to guide her throughout life. The power or inspiration of the Holy Spirit present in the singing of spirituals animates one’s life here and in heaven, where all are gathered around the banquet table of the Lord.

The conversation partners illuminated the wisdom found in those four spirituals. I offer some general thoughts about the analyses of the conversation partners. Spirituals are songs of life—in all its stages. When one dialogues with spirituals, one can find touchpoints to one’s lived experience. You do not need to be Black or an enslaved African to sing or find resonance with spirituals. Spirituals are universal in their application and inclusive of all races. Spirituals are timeless—they can be used in any generation to help speak life to the hopeless, faith to the faithless, and liberty to those in captivity.

To accompany someone along their journey, the enslaved Africans can accompany us throughout life through spirituals. This American folk song embodies a theology of accompaniment. The conversation partners prayed the spirituals, leading to a transformation in their lives. Pope Francis offers the following: “Let us dream, then, as a single human family, as fellow travelers sharing the same flesh, as children of the same earth which is our common home, each of us bringing the richness of his or her beliefs and convictions, each of us with his or her own voice, brothers and sisters all.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Francis, “Fratelli Tutti,” para. 8.

## Conclusion

“Lord, I want to be a Christian in my heart” is a spiritual that illustrates a theology of accompaniment—dialogue leading to an encounter that results in mutual transformation. Metanoia is the goal of this spiritual. Metanoia is a turning away from sin—in this case, racism—and back to God. One orients themselves back to God: “Lord, I want to be a Christian.” In this reorientation with God, one cannot be as one once was. For this transformation to be complete, one becomes more holy, loving, and ultimately like Jesus. [Here is](#) the Westminster Presbyterian Church Choir in Buffalo, New York, performing “Lord, I want to be a Christian in my heart,” arranged by Moses Hogan (1957–2003).

## CHAPTER 4

### “Plenty Good Room”

The journey to bridge the racial divide at Prince of Peace by singing spirituals in the Mass begins with one word: solidarity. The connection between one race and another is based on mutual respect. This relationship grows from a mutuality of liberation and reconciliation.<sup>1</sup> “Plenty good room” can help explore, explain, and expand an ethical and moral response of parishioners at Prince of Peace on the journey across this arduous bridge.

#### **Racial Reconciliation**

What is racial reconciliation? Can a racially just society exist? How do Black Catholics work within a system that is not always hospitable to them? How do we move from reconciliation to justice? These are some of the questions for which I want to provide strategies. Engaging in racial reconciliation at Prince of Peace is to embark on a fresh theological-ethical framework for the parishioners at Prince of Peace.

Black Catholic theologian Brian Massingale and Black Catholic bishop Edward Braxton, bishop emeritus of the Catholic Diocese of Bellville, Illinois, offer their experience as a college professor and bishop, respectively, to this essential theological-ethical framework. Massingale argues that scholarship in the United States regarding Catholic racial discourse views racism as individual bias or personal prejudice. This viewpoint is woefully inadequate because the core

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<sup>1</sup> J. Deotis Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation: A Black Theology*, 2nd ed. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, [1971], 2005), 80–81.

problem is not particular bias but rather oppressive or oppressing institutions and systems in White society.

For this core definition of racism to work, parishioners at Prince of Peace will need a shared experience and community. To commence this shared community, I organized a group of nine parishioners who formed a guiding coalition at Prince of Peace to help facilitate conversations around race and racial justice.

What is Racial Reconciliation? In American culture, racism links skin color to power. Skin color is not the problem in and of itself; it is the assigned value given to “made-up people” or race. Race determines the life opportunities of human groups, including access or denial of possibilities. Thus, racial reconciliation is a process involving the healing of division between racial groups by dissolving the link between race and power. This process will continue until there is no longer a link between race and power, between White dominance and Black subordination.

#### **Four-Part Strategy for Racial Justice**

To cross the bridge of the racial divide, the guiding coalition will work for justice. Massingale suggests Eric Yamamoto’s four-part strategy for racial justice.<sup>2</sup> First, *recognition*: an acknowledgment of the humanity of the other and the historical roots of racial grievances and conflicts; second, *responsibility*: an assessment of group agency inflicting harm on the other and accepting responsibility for the attending racial wounds; third, *reconstruction*: active steps of healing the psychological and social wounds; and fourth, *reparation*: the process of rectifying the

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<sup>2</sup> Eric Yamamoto, *Interracial Justice: Conflict and Reconciliation in Post-Civil Rights America* (New York: New York University Press, 1999) 9–10.



harms caused by racial injustice and White systemic advantage. How can spirituals help facilitate this strategy of racial justice? Woven into the lyrics of the spirituals, one can find joy, hope, love, oppression, sorrow, and grief. I will now analyze four spirituals, corresponding to the stages of racial justice, that can help illuminate each stage of racial justice.

**“Lord, how come me here?”** is a seminal spiritual that can illuminate the horrors of the institution of enslavement that still linger today and provides a foundation to begin the first step of racial justice: recognition.

Lord, how come me here?  
Lord, how come me here?  
Lord, how come me here?  
I wish I never was born

There ain't no freedom here, Lord  
There ain't no freedom here, Lord  
There ain't no freedom here, Lord  
I wish I never was born

They treat me so mean here, Lord  
They treat me so mean here, Lord  
They treat me so mean here, Lord  
I wish I never was born

They sold my chillen away, Lord  
They sold my chillen away, Lord  
They sold my chillen away, Lord  
I wish I never was born

If one is going to recognize the horrors of the institution of enslavement—a death-in-life experience—this spiritual, with its candid expression of pain, helps illuminate what the enslaved Africans experienced on the plantation. I can imagine the enslaved at the end of the day, gathered around each other, and one woman spontaneously asks: Lord, how come me here? There is no freedom; they sold my children away, and I am mistreated, beaten, and bruised. This question

goes unanswered. Below, the sadness and trauma of being sold away from one's family and children are presented by an unknown enslaved African.

*Serena was sold to a man named Yates, who lived up in Savannah. He bought her husband too. Mr. Yates kept her about seven years. None of us knew where she was all the time. She had two or three children. Then he sold her, but kept her children. She has been sold twice since; each time with her husband, but each time away from her children. (Unknown enslaved African)*<sup>3</sup>

The real tragedy here is the singer/community wishes she/they were never born. "I wish I never was born" can suggest suicide. Many enslaved Africans jumped overboard the ships into the Atlantic Ocean to their deaths during the middle passage rather than face the horrors that awaited them in the New World. The oppressive system of chattel slavery moves one to contemplate the unthinkable. How many horrific events can this community endure? "Lord, how come me here?" acknowledges that the enslavement of Africans in the United States of America, beginning in 1619, still affects American society to this day.

To illustrate further, Ta-Nehisi Coates, writing to his fifteen-year-old son, states:

it must be said that the process of washing the disparate tribes White, the elevation of the belief in being White, was not achieved through wine tastings and ice cream socials, but rather through the pillaging of life, liberty, labor, and land; through the flaying of backs; the chaining of limbs; the strangling of dissidents; the destruction of families; the rape of mothers; the salve of children; and various acts meant, first and foremost, to deny you and me the right to secure and govern our own bodies.<sup>4</sup>

To listen to Kathleen Battle sing an arrangement of "Lord, how come me here?" click [here](#).

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<sup>3</sup> James Redpath, *The Roving Editor: Talks With Slaves in the Southern States* (New York: A. B. Burdick, Publisher), 1859, 316; in Eileen Guenther, *In Their Own Words: Slave Life and the Power of Spirituals* (St. Louis: Morning Star Music Publishers, Inc.), 2016, 385.

<sup>4</sup> Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (New York, NY: One World, 2015), 7.

**“Oh, Mary, don’t you weep”** is a spiritual that has survived to this day but took on a new form in the civil rights era of the 1950s. This spiritual can help acknowledge and take responsibility for the era of enslavement in The United States.

O, Mary, don’t you weep, don’t you moan,  
O Mary, don’t you weep, don’t you moan;  
Pharaoh’s army already got drowned,  
O, Mary, don’t you weep.

One of these mornings bright and fair,  
Gonna take my wings and cleave the air;  
Pharaoh’s army already got drowned,  
O, Mary, don’t you weep.

Mary of Bethany is the central figure in this spiritual based on John 11:1–44. Mary is distraught that her brother Lazarus has died. Jesus assures her that her brother will rise again. Mary leads Jesus to the tomb of Lazarus. Jesus asked for the stone to be rolled away from in front of the tomb. Then Jesus called out: “Lazarus, come forth.” Lazarus came forth bound hand and foot with burial cloths. This story is coupled with the children of Israel crossing the Red Sea found in Exodus 14:19–31. The Israelites cross over the Red Sea on dry land. However, when Pharaoh’s army pursued them, the Lord God drowned the army in the Red Sea.

When the enslaved sang this spiritual, they could have been reminded that God favors his believers; in this case, the reward is eternal life. The spiritual also describes what can happen to people who enslave God’s children, which is death, “Pharaoh’s army got drowned.” I want to postulate a liturgical response for this spiritual. The Catholic Church uses the passage from Exodus 19 in its liturgy for the Easter Vigil.<sup>5</sup> The crossing of the Red Sea is an archetype for baptism. In reading this spiritual, two people are crossing the Red Sea (baptism); one will die and receive salvation or a new life (freedom from captivity); the other will die with no reward.

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<sup>5</sup> For a listing of the readings used at the Easter Vigil click [here](#).

Therefore, even though one dies in a liquid grave, there is no need to weep or moan because freedom awaits on the other side. To employ a universal application, all people need a social baptism, where all die to racism and racial injustice and rise to new life promoting unity and racial justice.

Freedom, heaven, and salvation are closely related themes found in spirituals. Spirituals are songs of protest and social justice. Freedom was the goal of enslaved Africans, who believed that they were children of a God who wanted to liberate them. James Cone (1938–2018), a Black American theologian, speaks extensively about the meaning of heaven in spirituals. Cone states: “For black slaves [enslaved Africans], who were condemned to carve out their existence in captivity, heaven meant that the eternal God had made a decision about their humanity that could not be destroyed by [W]hite masters.”<sup>6</sup> Cone goes on to say: “Whites may suppress [B]lack history and define Africans as savages, but the words of [enslavers] do not have to be taken seriously when the oppressed know that they have a *somebodiness* that is guaranteed by God who alone is the ultimate sovereign of the universe. This is what heaven meant for [enslaved Africans.]”<sup>7</sup>

*Freedom—for herself and for her offspring, for many years had been her cloud by day, her pillar of fire by night. In her pilgrimage through the wilderness of bondage, with eyes fixed upon that hope—inspiring beacon, she had at length ascended to ‘the top of Pisgah’ and beheld ‘the land of promise.’* (Solomon Northup)<sup>8</sup>

Above, Solomon Northup speaks passionately about freedom being connected with the promised land. Maybe if we as Americans can acknowledge our responsibility in the institution

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<sup>6</sup> James H. Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues: An Interpretation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991), 82.

<sup>7</sup> Cone, *The Spirituals and the Blues*, 82.

<sup>8</sup> Guenther, *In Their Own Words: Slave Life and the Power of Spirituals* (Saint Louis, Missouri: MorningStar Music Publishers, 2016), 370; taken from Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave, Narrative of Solomon Northup, A citizen of New-York, kidnapped in Washington City in 1841 and rescued in 1853, from a cotton plantation near the red river in Louisiana* (Auburn: Derby and Miller, 1853), 88.

of Slavery, we can experience a realized eschatology—where heaven is a reality in our present moment. To listen to this spiritual performed by Georgia Field Hands, click [here](#). For the version made famous by the Caravans, who recorded their arrangement in 1958, click [here](#).

“**Fix Me, Jesus**”<sup>9</sup> is a spiritual that can help illustrate the third step in racial justice: reconstruction.

*Oh, fix me,  
Oh, fix me,  
Oh, fix me;  
Fix me, Jesus, fix me.*

*Fix me for my long white robe,  
Fix me, Jesus, fix me.  
Fix me for my starry crown,  
Fix me, Jesus, fix me.*

Carlton Young cites William B. McClain's commentary on this spiritual: “Black folks have always had a sense of being chosen people of God; and have always been confident that they would, individually and collectively, spend eternity in heaven. . . . “Fix Me, Jesus” expresses the earnest desire of [enslaved Africans] to be fit for their ultimate destination.”<sup>10</sup>

This spiritual is composed with the refrain appearing first, followed by two stanzas. The stanzas are in a call-and-response pattern typical of most spirituals. The congregational response is, “fix me, Jesus, fix me.” The refrain is a plea for Jesus to repair one’s soul: “Oh, fix me.” A biblical narrative that undergirds this spiritual is found in Mark 1:40–45. A leper asks Jesus to heal him: “If you choose, you can make me clean.” Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him, and said to him, “I do choose. Be made clean!” Immediately, leprosy left

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<sup>9</sup> Darnell St. Romain, “Fix Me, Jesus,” *History of Hymns* (posted February 9, 2017), <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-fix-me-jesus> (accessed March 1, 2024). Part of my analysis, already in print, appears here. I have used it as a basis for this analysis.

<sup>10</sup> Carlton R. Young, *Companion to the United Methodist Hymnal* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 336.

him, and he was made clean. With this image of physical healing, one can also look to Jesus to help heal the psychological and social wounds still found in our American society that result from the institution of enslavement.

Richard Newman provides this variant refrain:

*O, fix me, Jesus, fix me right.  
Fix me right, fix me right;  
O, fix me, Jesus, fix me right,  
Fix me so I can stand.*<sup>11</sup>

Newman offers this insight: “‘Fix Me, Jesus,’ is a powerful African American image, both poetically and religiously. However oppressed and cast down, the [enslaved Africans] sang songs of faith, confident that Jesus could ‘fix me so I can stand.’”<sup>12</sup> In both stanzas, the tenor is eschatological. Stanza one references the narrative of the multitude from every nation found in Revelation 7:9–14. William Farley Smith notes: “[enslaved poets] long for elevation to saintly status replete with ‘white’ tribulation robes that have been ‘washed in the blood of the lamb.’”<sup>13</sup> Stanza two is eschatological, employing the language of the “journey home” and “my dying bed.” Even in death, one must have faith in Jesus. The theology embodied in this spiritual is probably derived from personal experiences of religion that were common to the enslaved Africans. Jesus is a personal deliverer, both physically and spiritually, who understands the struggle of the enslaved. Jesus can offer the final triumph over adversity: eternal life in Heaven. To listen to an arrangement of this spiritual, click [here](#).

“**Plenty Good Room**” is a spiritual that speaks about reparation: rectifying the harms caused by racial injustice and White systemic advantage.

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<sup>11</sup> Richard Newman, *Go Down Moses: A Celebration of the African-American Spiritual* (New York: Clarkson Potter, 1998), 41.

<sup>12</sup> Newman, 41.

<sup>13</sup> Young, *Companion to the United Methodist Hymnal*, 335–36.

*Plenty good room, plenty good room,  
plenty good room in my Father's kingdom,  
Plenty good room, plenty good room,  
Just choose your seat and sit down.*

*I would not be a sinner,  
I'll tell you the reason why;  
cause if my Lord should call on me  
I wouldn't be ready to die.*

*I would not be a liar,  
I'll tell you the reason why;  
cause if my Lord should call on me  
I wouldn't be ready to die.*

*I would not be a backslider,  
I'll tell you the reason why;  
cause if my Lord should call on me  
I wouldn't be ready to die.*

The biblical reference is to John 14:2 NRSV: “In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?” God has a place prepared for us, and the enslaved knew and longed for heaven. The verses prescribe identities we should not take on: “sinner, liar, backslider.” If one is a sinner, liar, or backslider, one cannot enter the kingdom of God. This presents that the goal of this life was to make it to heaven, and it offers a guide on what not to be to enter heaven. Moses Hogan arranged this spiritual, performed by [Men of Song](#).

This spiritual has a personal meaning for me. My grandparents, Tillie (b. 1938) and Elie (b. 1935) Jackson, speak about living in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and attending Mass at Sacred Heart of Jesus Catholic Church. Sacred Heart was established in 1924. My grandparents attended Sacred Heart in the late 1950s and early 1960s until a new Black Catholic parish was established in the 1960s, St. Paul the Apostle Catholic Church. My mother, Darlene St. Romain (b. 1960), attended the Catholic School at Sacred Heart from kindergarten to eighth grade. When my

grandparents attended Mass at Sacred Heart, there was a designated seating area for the Black parishioners. The Black people could only sit in the first three or four pews in the right transept. If there was no seating available, then the Black people had to sit upstairs in the gallery, even if there was seating in the nave of the church.<sup>14</sup> When I sing “Plenty Good Room,” I think about my grandparent’s inability to choose a seat of their own volition. The enslaved sing of being able to choose their seat without the possibility of someone turning them out of the church. For my grandparents, to walk into a church, with their Black bodies and presence, without being told what to do, how to act, or where to sit, was an experience available only in Black spaces, thus the creation of a Black Catholic Church. Heaven is a reality where all are respected for who and what they are—a child of God.

**Listen! Learn! Think! Pray! Act!**<sup>15</sup>

Bishop Braxton is a retired Black Bishop of the Catholic Church in the United States. He has written extensively about the racial divide in the Catholic Church in America. Braxton suggests that Black theology, being concerned with narratives about “exclusion, oppression, and disenfranchisement with the results of promoting change and improvement in the everyday lives of marginalized people,” is equipped to address the racial divide in the United States “with the urgency it deserves.”<sup>16</sup>

Braxton uses the phrase: listen, learn, think, pray, and act, in his pastoral writings. This phrase is helpful for individuals and parishes to use to begin the process of utilizing the four-part

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<sup>14</sup> Elie and Tillie Jackson, telephone call, January 3, 2024; Fr. Joshua Johnson, pastor of Sacred Heart of Jesus Catholic, telephone call, January 4, 2024.

<sup>15</sup> Edward K. Braxton, *The Church and the Racial Divide: Reflections of an African American Catholic Bishop* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2021), 49.

<sup>16</sup> Braxton, *The Church and the Racial Divide*, 43.



strategy described above. Braxton invites us to enter dialogue and prayer about the complex and challenging issues surrounding race, including police brutality and the numerous murders of unarmed Black men and boys. Along with dialogue, Braxton encourages everyone to attend one weekday Mass a week other than Sunday, to pray, especially for the racial divide in the United States. Included under this umbrella of prayer is reading the sacred scriptures, focusing on the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, and the Epistles of St. Paul; praying the rosary once a week with our family to end racial conflict and prejudice; and examining our conscience once a month acknowledging any thoughts or deeds or omissions that reinforce the racial disputes and receive the sacrament of reconciliation.

To learn, Braxton encourages all to read *Brothers and Sisters to Us* (1979), a pastoral letter on racism prepared by U.S. Catholic bishops, and *What We Have Seen and Heard* (1984) authored by the active Black Catholic Bishops in the United States. After reading these key documents published by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, he suggests visiting a Black Catholic parish in your locale and creating opportunities to make new friends in ministry.

To further the learning and acting process, Braxton suggests getting to know the police who live and work in your community and parish boundaries. He states: “Help the young people in the community to appreciate the role of the police, to get to know and respect them. Help the police to get to know and respect the young people.”<sup>17</sup> Work with your community to have constructive activities for young people, either at community centers or at your parish facilities. Going deeper, create initiatives to strengthen the families in your community and parishes. Finally, Braxton wants all to work within their parish and neighborhoods to cultivate a culture where this process becomes iterative. Braxton’s body of work reinforces that racism is a sin “that

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<sup>17</sup> Braxton, *The Church and the Racial Divide*, 81.

divides the human family, blots out the image of God among specific members of that family, and violates the fundamental human dignity of those called to be children of the same Father.”<sup>18</sup>

Massingale and Braxton provide the church with strategies to help promulgate an anti-racist Catholic Church in the United States. I have used an amalgamation of the methods above to help foster a community at Prince of Peace that will work to dismantle the anti-Black structure, using the Negro Spirituals as an origin and return cycle to structure and provide a foundation for this theological-ethical movement.

I am offering some suggestions for proceeding at Prince of Peace.

1. Education—I will lead a series of book studies, beginning with the staff and then with several small groups in the community. *White Fragility* by Robin DeAngelo<sup>19</sup> and *How to be an Antiracist* by Ibram Kendi<sup>20</sup> are the books I have selected.
2. Sister Parish Relationship—after the education part has built a guiding coalition; we can work with a parish in South Dallas (Holy Cross or St. Cecilia) to establish an ongoing covenantal relationship.
3. Liturgy and Prayer—Offer a monthly Vesper service during the week. I will invite different speakers to share their life experiences and how the community can continue building relationships. Provide general intercessions at all Masses that pray for the end of systemic racism.

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<sup>18</sup> Braxton, *The Church and the Racial Divide*, 82.

<sup>19</sup> Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility: Why It's so Hard for White People to Talk about Racism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018).

<sup>20</sup> Ibram X, Kendi, *How to Be an Antiracist* (New York: One World, 2019).

4. Faith Formation—provide the community with a list of resources that families can use to educate their children at home, including children’s books and talking points on addressing discrimination.
5. Strategic Outlook—empower a leadership team with the ability to assess and reevaluate all the ideas above. This committee will be selected after a year of observations. Participants should be actively engaged in the ideas of anti-racism.

Ron Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Marty Linsky, the authors of *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World*<sup>21</sup>, offer a leadership model to help assess the impact of these ideas at Prince of Peace. I want to provide a few assumptions.

1. This process is not linear. The five steps listed above may progress in that order, but it doesn’t necessarily need to proceed that way.
2. Observations, Interpretations, and Interventions (taken from Adaptive Leadership Theory) need constant revisions and supervision.
3. Empower the community to do this work on their own.

Adaptive leadership theory is based on the iterative process of Observations, Interpretations, and Interventions.<sup>22</sup> I want to adapt the observations to include education and building relationships. I propose adapting John Kotter’s leadership style to strengthen the iterative process. Kotter’s books, *Leading Change*<sup>23</sup> and *Accelerate*,<sup>24</sup> provide an eight-step process for creating change that can be useful in all stages of the adaptive leadership model suggested by Heifetz, et al. If a

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<sup>21</sup> Ronald A. Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Martin Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World* (Boston, Mass: Harvard Business Press, 2009).

<sup>22</sup> Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, chap. 2, Kindle.

<sup>23</sup> John P. Kotter, *Leading Change* (Boston, Mass: Harvard Business Review Press, 2012).

<sup>24</sup> John P. Kotter, *Accelerate: Building Strategic Agility for a Faster Moving World* (Boston, Massachusetts: Harvard Business Review Press, 2014).

guiding coalition can be formed, it can guide, coordinate, and communicate the activities of anti-racist work the group is doing.

After a guiding coalition(s) is formed, forming a strategic vision and initiatives will help create a future different from the past and link the future to the group's vision. Then, we can unleash this work to the greater parish community by forming a volunteer army. Dismantling systemic racism will require many parishioners committed to the cause to drive this change forward. I am explicitly thinking of dismantling systemic racism at Prince of Peace. For example, this would apply to hiring practices for the church and school, seeking out leaders for volunteer ministries, and leadership teams such as the School Advisory Council, the Parish Council, and the Finance Council.

### **Singing Spirituals at Prince of Peace Catholic Church**

My tenure at Prince of Peace began in June 2013. As the associate director of music, I facilitate the Children's Choir (kindergarten through fourth grade) and the POP Star Choir (fifth through eighth grades), the handbell choir director, assist with the adult liturgical choir, and the accompanist for the contemporary Mass. My responsibilities have expanded and contracted; I am most proud of the work in Sunday morning worship. Therefore, incorporating spirituals in the Mass is the most logical and theological place to situate and dismantle an anti-Black structure.

"Ite missa est" are the Latin words spoken at the end of every Mass. This is a call to missionary work. The Mass is the source and return of missionary activity in the Catholic Church. If one is going to dismantle a racist, anti-Black structure in the Catholic Church, it must begin in the Mass. God is love and the creator of all. Praying the words of enslaved Africans can

inspire in the hearts of those gathered to create and hope for a world free of racism. That journey across the bridge of the racial divide begins where there is no division—the Eucharistic banquet.

Incorporating spirituals in the Mass at Prince of Peace began before my tenure with the first director of music, Fr. Tony Lackland, now a Black Catholic priest. Cultivating a singing parish has been passed down through the music directors, including Michael Conrady and Brent McWilliams. When I intentionally incorporated spirituals into the repertoire, a culture of singing spirituals was already established. The spirituals were primarily presented as choral anthems. However, I wanted to sing spirituals in a more authentic interpretation—unaccompanied with the congregation.

I found that singing spirituals during the offertory allowed me to model unaccompanied singing and then invite the congregation to sing with me. I followed this invitation pattern for all the spirituals I introduced to the congregation. Most of the congregation would join me in singing. However, that is where the engagement with the text ended. It is necessary to accompany the singing of spirituals in the Mass with education about the enslavement of Africans, the history of Black Catholics in the United States, the eras of Jim Crow and Civil Rights, and the anti-Blackness that is prevalent in the Catholic Church.

Because Prince of Peace is a predominately White parish, I incorporated only one spiritual in a liturgy. In [Appendix C](#) are worship aides from Masses done at Prince of Peace in which spirituals were incorporated into the liturgy. I will analyze one Mass where a spiritual was sung.

*Sunday, October 24, 2021*

This is the 30<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B. Below are the readings appointed for this Sunday.

**First Reading***Jeremiah 31:7–9*

The blind and the lame I will bring back: I will console them.

**Responsorial Psalm***Psalm 126:1–2,2–3,4–5,6*

It is a song of praise to God, who does great things for us.

**Second Reading***Hebrews 5:1–6*

You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek.

**Gospel Reading***Mark 10:46–52*

Master, I want to see.

From the readings above, the theme of the Gospel reading is healing. A blind man, Bartimaeus, was on the roadside begging. When he heard Jesus passing by, he asked Jesus, the Son of David, to have mercy on him. When Jesus heard someone calling for him, he asked the crowd to bring Bartimaeus to him. Jesus asks Bartimaeus, “What do you want me to do for you?” Bartimaeus asked for his sight. Jesus responds: “Your faith has healed you.” Immediately, Bartimaeus received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.

“There is a balm in Gilead” is a spiritual that speaks of Jesus as a healer. Jesus is the balm in Gilead that “can make the wounded whole.” This spiritual was sung during the offertory. The other songs used during the Mass were “I want to walk as a child of the light,”<sup>25</sup> “Remain in Me, I am the Vine,”<sup>26</sup> and “Christ, be Our Light.”<sup>27</sup> Themes of light are paired with the gift of sight; because of Bartimaeus’ faith, he was healed and regained his sight, moving from darkness into light. See [Appendix C](#) for the worship aid to Sunday, October 24, 2024, and two other Masses

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<sup>25</sup> “I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light,” hymnary.org, [https://hymnary.org/text/i\\_want\\_to\\_walk\\_as\\_a\\_child\\_of\\_the\\_light](https://hymnary.org/text/i_want_to_walk_as_a_child_of_the_light) (accessed January 10, 2024).

<sup>26</sup> “Remain in Me, I am the Vine,” OCP. Org, <https://www.ocp.org/en-us/songs/86443/remain-in-me-i-am-the-vine>. (accessed January 10, 2024).

<sup>27</sup> “Christ, Be our Light,” OCP.org, <https://www.ocp.org/en-us/songs/10415/christ-be-our-light> (accessed January 10, 2024).

done at Prince of Peace. I offer two case studies involving spirituals sung at Prince of Peace: “Give Me Jesus” and “Plenty Good Room.”

“Give Me Jesus” was scheduled to be the offertory song for the thirty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A, on Sunday, November 5, 2023. However, the Wednesday before that Sunday, the Parochial Vicar at Prince of Peace instructed me that this song would be removed from the liturgy, and another hymn was chosen to take its place. I requested a meeting with him immediately. On Friday, November 3, 2023, I met with the parochial vicar, a priest of Nigerian ethnicity who grew up in Belgium. I presented him with only the lyrics of “Give Me Jesus.”

In the morning when I rise,  
in the morning when I rise,  
in the morning when I rise,  
give me Jesus.

Refrain:  
Give me Jesus, give me Jesus.  
You may have all this world, give me Jesus.

Dark midnight was my cry,  
dark midnight was cry,  
dark midnight was my cry,  
give me Jesus. [Refrain]

Oh, when I come to die,  
oh, when I come to die,  
oh, when I come to die,  
give me Jesus. [Refrain]

After reading the lyrics, the Parochial Vicar realized he made a miscalculation in judgment. He reversed his decision of removing this spiritual from the Mass and asked if it could be included in the worship aides. Unfortunately, the worship aides were already printed for the weekend liturgies.

At that moment, the Parochial Vicar asked me to write a bulletin column on spirituals and provide a brief history of Black Catholics in the United States. He knew he needed to learn more about the history of spirituals and their use in Mass. I welcomed the opportunity to write this column. To view the bulletin column, click [here](#). On the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe, Year A, November 26, 2023, I inserted “Give Me, Jesus” as a song for communion meditation. Before the final blessing at Mass, the Parochial Vicar thanked me publicly for singing the spiritual. When I sing this spiritual, I ask for Jesus, the one who liberates, to accompany me on my journey at every stage of my life. This prayer has universal application; an enslaved African can sing it; an immigrant crossing the border into Texas can sing it; a police officer can sing it; and a White parishioner at Prince of Peace can sing it.

“**Plenty Good Room**” was the first spiritual that the Pastor, a White male in his 60s, asked the music department to no longer sing at Mass. When I received this news, I was perplexed and saddened. The pastor and I talked about this decision in October 2023. He was unaware of the title of this thesis, and his decision was based on subjective considerations. I told him about the many possibilities the text offers to communities dealing with division. He was embarrassed that he made this decision. Even after providing him with the background of liberation and reconciliation in the text, he stood by his decision based on his dislike of the melody of “Plenty Good Room.” Unfortunately, “Plenty Good Room” has not been sung at Prince of Peace since his decision.

## **Conclusion**

When I began this project in 2020 after the murder of George Floyd, I never thought about spirituals as a tool for bridging the racial divide. I sang spirituals growing up, and my older



relatives, my grandparents, and their siblings would reminisce about the elders in their congregation singing these same songs when they were younger. It never entered my thoughts that spirituals can and do have universal and inclusive appeal, along with opportunities of possibilities.

Can these words inspire an ethical change? Can singing music from a despicable institution of enslavement shape the hearts of parishioners at Prince of Peace theologically? Can spirituals form the foundation for bridging Prince of Peace's racial divide? The answers to these questions are complex and challenging. The answer I have is that God can do all things. The strategies above help facilitate an open and encouraging environment.

It is difficult to evaluate the "success" of a project where one is hoping to bridge the racial divide. I chose to offer strategies that could lead to an encounter rather than a "program" with set steps—an encounter with me, an encounter with spirituals, and an encounter with a marginalized community often seen as a problem and not a gift. I asked my conversation partners to articulate what our conversations meant to them. Below are a few responses from the conversation partners.

*As I reflect on the experience of participating in this group, many thoughts come to mind. First, thank you. In this era of division in Society, of us v. them, of living in our own silos, you created an opportunity for conversation. To listen to each other and learn from each other. The atmosphere of each meeting was of unity and friendship even though not all members of the group knew each other prior to the first meeting. Each session brought insights. Some were about information and history I did not know. Others came from the lived experience as reported by the other group members. Still others came from the reactions and responses of the group members during each session. The enthusiasm of this group was a pleasure to witness. It gives me hope that similar discussions in other parishes is possible. The way forward is challenging. As every gardener knows, cutting the dandelion at the surface of the soil does not eliminate it. The roots are deep.*

*Opportunities like this for dialogue and friendship will go a long way to open hearts and minds.*

A White woman in her sixties

*First of all, thank you, Darnell! You have offered each of us (and all of us, collectively) both an opportunity and a safe community for us to encounter a challenging and sensitive topic. Through the Negro Spirituals, you have wrapped the issue in Christ, His love and His teaching—the only way (I believe) that true racial reconciliation and justice can be achieved. You have shown and challenged us (maybe just me!) with new ideas and knowledge and respectfully left them for us to grapple with. . . as individuals and as a small community.*

*And as Bishop Braxton teaches, “Listen, learn, think, pray, act!” We have listened and learned from each other. I am grateful for each member of our small community; friendships and blossomed and deepened in this environment of respect and patience. We have taken a step toward reconciliation and justice!*

*Now, for me, it is a time for thinking and praying. How can I (or we, if we choose to continue this journey together—and I hope we do!) be a part of the answer to this question of utmost importance?*

A White woman in her seventies

*As for our discussions, thank you Darnell. I am so grateful that you brought us all together and provided us an opportunity to discuss Spirituals. Second, although this is a sensitive subject, I felt comfortable sharing with this group, and learned to embrace and learn from the uncomfortable. As we read the lyrics and sang the songs, I tried to imagine the pain of their days but also the hope of the future. Third, and most important, we learned from each other and created a unique faith-based connection. By just having these conversations, Jesus brings us hope, reconciliation, and justice. I hope we continue to meet and grow as a group; I hope we continue to embrace Spirituals at Mass; and I hope we can begin a change at POP, and beyond, of living and embracing a life of love and acceptance, just as Jesus did.*

A White woman in her forties

*The gathering and conversations we shared based on our own personal perspectives were informative, insightful, and thoroughly educational.*

*The session I found most engaging was the one where we delved into the different Negro spirituals and explored their historical context. I thought they were profoundly enriched to bring a deeper appreciation and understanding of the emotional depth of slavery within our history and the church. It was also encouraging to think about how many of these spirituals are significant in helping bring healing and hope for unity and racial reconciliation.*

*Although, at times, I observed a certain discomfort amongst some in our group based on specific discussions, experiences, or personal thoughts, I reflected on what has given me peace. **We are all shaped by our own experiences, environments, and backgrounds, which can influence our perspectives.** Nevertheless, there is solace in the very act of coming together to tackle challenging issues, as it reflects Christ’s mission in*

*action. Let's be encouraged by the understanding that our peace is rooted NOT solely in our past but will come from our ongoing pursuit of unity in the present!*

A Black man in his fifties

The conversation partners show that the group wants this work to continue. Although the conversation at times became uncomfortable, all felt safe sharing their experiences with the group. I can build on the trust established with this group to work at Prince of Peace, establishing a commission to address the racial divide.

I am a Black Man, married to a White woman, and we are the parents to a biracial and multiethnic daughter. I am vested in helping the parishioners at Prince of Peace cross the racial divide. I imagine a place where my daughter can live where racism does not exist. I also dream of a place where race, power, and class are not inextricably bound. We must do the work as a parish to cultivate an anti-racist church. This work will span a continuum of space and time.



FIGURE 2. THE AUTHOR AND HIS FAMILY.

My work at Prince of Peace, using spirituals to bridge the racial divide, is not meant for a Black person only. A White person can do this work. However, it is helpful that as a Black man, I have an expansive and diverse perspective I can offer the community at Prince of Peace. I can communicate with them my background and perspective on race as a Black man, not speaking for the entire African diaspora. I speak as a Black man raised by David and Darlene St. Romain in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. I am the grandson of Tillie and Elie Jackson, Hilary and Cecile St. Romain, who all lived and grew up in South Louisiana. I attended public schools in East Baton Rouge Parish. My cultural identity is that of a Black Catholic from South Louisiana. I graduated from Louisiana State University with a Bachelor of Music degree and Southern Methodist University with Master of Sacred Music and Master of Music degrees. Since 2000, I have been employed in mostly White Catholic Churches. I have navigated mostly White educational institutions. Most importantly, on Sunday afternoons, I sit around a table with both Black and White people present, and we share a meal.

I am a Black man with a light skin complexion. I am aware that my color preference is more palatable to White congregations. This reality is bolstered by the fact that the three Black people who are employed at Prince of Peace Church and School have the same complexion as me or lighter. This fact is important because I have a teaching role in the parish. My experiential background has helped me foster a rapport with congregation members, allowing me to have conversations on race that are both challenging and revealing. I am the embodiment of the mixing of cultures and ethnicities that occurs in South Louisiana. I identify as a Black man.

In the future, I want to explore how anti-Black racism manifests throughout the African diaspora, specifically in the Global South, including Brazil, Puerto Rico, Haiti, and Cuba. These cultures

have indigenous songs from which wisdom can be drawn. Using those songs in Catholic parishes in the United States may provide insights and strategies for eliminating the cultural vestiges of racism.

For those who minister in predominately Black Catholic parishes In the United States, what does anti-racist work help contribute to the theological-ethical framework? Many Black parishes are now ethnically diverse, with cultures represented from Africa and South America. Studying these parishes can help illuminate how the body of Christ works to form unity within cultural diversity.

“Plenty Good Room” is a theological-ethical framework to dismantle anti-Blackness at Prince of Peace. This thesis uses spiritual titles as chapter titles. The order of the titles is chosen to move from despair to hope and eventually around the eternal banquet where there is room for everybody. “Plenty good room” is a place where no more divisions exist, where I am accepted as a Black man in my Black body with all of my Blackness. It is also a place where Black and White people are entirely themselves, and the link between race and power is extinguished. It is a place where all of God’s children are gathered into one. Unity and diversity exist, and peace is everlasting. This is a place of reconciliation and a realized and unrealized eschatology. The Eucharistic banquet table is where this occurs, and if we truly become what we eat, Jesus is the source and return for anti-racist work.

## APPENDIX A

### Reconciliation Service: A Service for the Breath of Life.

Gathering Spiritual: "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child"

Sometimes I feel like a motherless child  
Sometimes I feel like a motherless child  
Sometimes I feel like a motherless child  
A long ways from home  
A long ways from home

Greeting:

Grace and peace be with you  
from God our Father  
and from the Lord Jesus Christ  
who laid down his life for our sins.

(R.) Glory to him for ever. Amen.

Opening Prayer:

Almighty and merciful God,  
you have brought us together in the name of your Son  
to receive your mercy and grace in our time of need.  
Open our eyes to see the evil we have done.  
Touch our hearts and convert us to yourself.  
Where sin has divided and scattered,  
may your love make one again;  
where sin has brought weakness,  
may your power heal and strengthen;  
where sin has brought death,  
may your Spirit raise to new life.  
Give us a new heart to love you,  
so that our lives may reflect the image of your Son.  
May the world see the glory of Christ  
revealed in your Church,  
and come to know  
that he is the one whom you have sent,  
Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord.

(R.) Amen.

Spiritual: "I've Been Buked"

I've been 'buked an' I've been scorned, children  
I've been 'buked an' I've been scorned

I've been talked about, who's you're born

Reading from the Old Testament

Ex 20:1–21

A reading from the Book of Exodus

I, the Lord, am your God. You shall not have other gods.

God delivered all these commandments:

“I, the Lord, am your God,

who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that place of slavery.

You shall not have other gods besides me.

You shall not carve idols for yourselves

in the shape of anything in the sky above

or on the earth below or in the waters beneath the earth;

you shall not bow down before them or worship them.

For I, the Lord, your God, am a jealous God,

inflicting punishment for their fathers' wickedness

on the children of those who hate me,

down to the third and fourth generation;

but bestowing mercy down to the thousandth generation

on the children of those who love me and keep my commandments.

“You shall not take the name of the Lord, your God, in vain.

For the Lord will not leave unpunished

him who takes his name in vain.

“Remember to keep holy the sabbath day.

Six days you may labor and do all your work,

but the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord, your God.

No work may be done then either by you, or your son or daughter,

or your male or female slave, or your beast,

or by the alien who lives with you.

In six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth,

the sea and all that is in them;

but on the seventh day he rested.

That is why the Lord has blessed the sabbath day and made it holy.

“Honor your father and your mother,

that you may have a long life in the land

which the Lord, your God, is giving you.

“You shall not kill.

“You shall not commit adultery.

“You shall not steal.

“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

“You shall not covet your neighbor's house.

You shall not covet your neighbor's wife,

nor his male or female slave, nor his ox or as

nor anything else that belongs to him.”

When the people witnessed the thunder and lightning,  
the trumpet blast and the mountain smoking,  
they all feared and trembled.  
So they took up a position much farther away  
and said to Moses,  
“You speak to us, and we will listen;  
but let not God speak to us, or we shall die.”  
Moses answered the people,  
“Do not be afraid,  
for God has come to you only to test you and put his fear upon you,  
lest you should sin.”  
Still the people remained at a distance,  
while Moses approached the cloud where God was.

The word of the Lord.

Psalm 51:

“Create in Me a Clean Heart O God” by Kenneth Louis, LMGM Psalter

Rom 12:1–2, 9–18

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans  
Be transformed by the renewal of your mind.  
I urge you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God,  
to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice,  
holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship.  
Do not conform yourselves to this age  
but be transformed by the renewal of your mind,  
that you may discern what is the will of God,  
what is good and pleasing and perfect.  
Let love be sincere;  
hate what is evil,  
hold on to what is good;  
love one another with mutual affection;  
anticipate one another in showing honor.  
Do not grow slack in zeal,  
be fervent in spirit,  
serve the Lord.  
Rejoice in hope,  
endure in affliction,  
persevere in prayer.  
Contribute to the needs of the holy ones,  
exercise hospitality.  
Bless those who persecute you,  
bless and do not curse them.  
Rejoice with those who rejoice,



weep with those who weep.  
Have the same regard for one another;  
do not be haughty but associate with the lowly;  
do not be wise in your own estimation.  
Do not repay anyone evil for evil;  
be concerned for what is noble in the sight of all.  
If possible, on your part, live at peace with all.  
Beloved, do not look for revenge  
but leave room for the wrath;  
for it is written,  
Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.

The word of the Lord.

Spiritual: “Nobody’s Knows the Trouble I’ve Seen”

Nobody knows the trouble I’ve seen;  
Nobody knows my sorrow.  
Nobody knows the trouble I’ve seen;  
Glory, Hallelujah!

Sometimes I'm up, sometimes I'm down;  
Oh, yes, Lord.  
Sometimes I'm almost to the groun',  
Oh, yes, Lord.

.

✠ A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew

Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.  
Jesus said to his disciples:  
“When the Son of Man comes in his glory,  
and all the angels with him,  
he will sit upon his glorious throne,  
and all the nations will be assembled before him.  
And he will separate them one from another,  
as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.  
He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.  
Then the king will say to those on his right,  
‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father.  
Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.  
For I was hungry and you gave me food,  
I was thirsty and you gave me drink,  
a stranger and you welcomed me,  
naked and you clothed me,  
ill and you cared for me,

in prison and you visited me.’  
 Then the righteous will answer him and say,  
 ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you,  
 or thirsty and give you drink?  
 When did we see you a stranger and welcome you,  
 or naked and clothe you?  
 When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?’  
 And the king will say to them in reply,  
 ‘Amen, I say to you, whatever you did  
 for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.’  
 Then he will say to those on his left,  
 ‘Depart from me, you accursed,  
 into the eternal fire prepared for the Devil and his angels.  
 For I was hungry and you gave me no food,  
 I was thirsty and you gave me no drink,  
 a stranger and you gave me no welcome,  
 naked and you gave me no clothing,  
 ill and in prison, and you did not care for me.’  
 Then they will answer and say,  
 ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty  
 or a stranger or naked or ill or in prison,  
 and not minister to your needs?’  
 He will answer them, ‘Amen, I say to you,  
 what you did not do for one of these least ones,  
 you did not do for me.’  
 And these will go off to eternal punishment,  
 but the righteous to eternal life.”

The Gospel of the Lord.

Poem: “Strange Fruit”

Southern trees bear  
 a strange fruit  
 Blood on the leaves and blood at the root  
 Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze  
 Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees  
 Pastoral scene of the gallant South  
 The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth  
 Scent of magnolia, sweet and fresh  
 Then the sudden smell of burning flesh  
 Here is a fruit for the crows to pluck  
 For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck  
 For the sun to rot, for the tree to drop  
 Here is a strange and bitter crop

Homily

Penitential Intercessions

Our God seeks out what is lost, leads home the abandoned, binds up what is broken and gives strength to the weak; let us ask him to help us.

**(R.) Lord, help us to breathe the breath of Christ.**

As we make our confession, rescue us from slavery to sin and lead us to the freedom enjoyed by your children. **(R.)**

Make us a living sign of your love for all to see: people reconciled with you and with each other. **(R.)**

In this sign of your love you forgive us our sins: may it teach us to love others and to forgive their sins against us. **(R.)**

We acknowledge our Silence, not taking a stance on the Sin of Racism. **(R.)**

We acknowledge our abuse of Power. **(R.)**

May your power keep safe from all danger those whom your love sets free from the chains of sin. **(R.)**

By your redeeming love overcome our sinfulness and the harm it has brought us. **(R.)**

Psalm: “Psalm 139” arranged by Leon C. Roberts.

Concluding Prayer:

Lord God,  
creator and ruler of your kingdom of light,  
in your great love for this world  
you gave up your only Son  
for our salvation.  
His cross has redeemed us,  
his death has given us life,  
his resurrection has raised us to glory.  
Through him we ask you  
to be always present among your family.  
Teach us to be reverent in the presence of your glory;  
fill our hearts with faith,  
our days with good works,  
our lives with your love;

may your truth be on our lips  
and your wisdom in all our actions,  
that we may receive the reward of everlasting life.  
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

**(R.) Amen.**

Closing Song: “Amazing Grace”

Depart in Silence

## APPENDIX B

### Homily from the Reconciliation Service

Homily for the prayer service on racism rev. Tom Cloherty  
Pastor, prince of peace catholic community Plano, Texas  
June 18, 2020 (eve of Juneteenth)

First of all, thank you for the gift of your presence here tonight, whether you are here in person or watching live stream. My personal thanks to Darnell St. Romain and all who worked to make this prayer service possible.

May the peace of God which is beyond all understanding be with all of you!

I need to let you know that i have listened to, read or watched the messages of Pope Francis, our own former bishop, now Cardinal Kevin Farrell, our present bishops Edward Burns and Greg Kelly, bishop Fabre of Houma-Thibadeaux diocese in Louisiana, archbishop Wilton Gregory of Washington, DC, bishop Robert Barron of Los Angeles, Father Brian Massingale, the US bishops pastoral letter against racism entitled: “Open wide your hearts, the enduring call to love” and a host of secular journalist and commentators. The thoughts that follow are my reflections on what i have heard and read and attempting to apply in a spiritual and pastoral manner.

The seventeenth-century poet John Donne wrote: no man is an island, entire of itself, every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as any of thy friends or if thy own were; any man’s death diminishes me because I am involved in mankind! Let me repeat that last line: any man’s death diminishes me because I am involved in mankind.

We are gathered here tonight because we are involved in mankind and the death of George Floyd, Robert Fuller, Malcom Harsch, Rayshard Brooks and sadly too many others to name, have diminished us as a whole, much less as members of the body of Christ and the human race. In the book of genesis, we are told that God created the heavens and earth and all the creatures of the land, sea and sky. He saw what he created and said that it was good. However, on the sixth day of creation, when he created mankind and breathed life into him, he looked on what he had created and said it was very good. Into no other of God’s creation did God breathe his life, only into mankind, which shows us the specialness of mankind in general and each person specifically. This means that this specialness is to be recognized and cherished in every man and woman as they are a creation of a gracious and loving God.

We are challenged to see, experience and reverence that breath of God that lies within each one of us. St. Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians, writes: God has so constructed the body as to give greater honor to the lowly members, that there may be no dissension in the body, but that all members may be concerned for one another. If one member suffers, all the members suffer....

Dear friends, in this present time, sadly more than one member of the body of Christ has suffered and we all should be aware of that suffering and to the best of our ability share in that suffering

that too many, so many are experiencing due to the sin of racism, a sin that cries to the heavens for justice.

Just this very day, the pope's representative to the United Nations spoke these words to its assembly on racism: all members of the human family made in the image and likeness of God are equal in their inherent dignity regardless of his or her race, nation, sex, origin, culture, or religion. As such, it is the responsibility of the state (and we are that state) to recognize, defend and promote each person's basic human rights.

As Christians we have been reminded time and time again in the past, and yet again, we are reminded in these present times, that we, all men and all women, have been made in the image and likeness of God, no exceptions. Jesus repeatedly spoke of the two great commandments: to love the lord our God with the fullness of our being and to love our neighbor as ourselves, and if we say that we love God yet hate our neighbors, then we are liars.

In John's gospel, Jesus says as I have loved you, so must you love one another. Just how has Jesus loved us? Look to his life and ministry, his words, and deeds, for that answer. He loved everyone: man or woman, saint or sinner, rich or poor, believer or pagan, healthy or ill, living or dead, but his deepest love was always for the poor, the oppressed, and the suppressed.

He listened to them, prayed with them, walked beside them, taught them the good news, brought them healing and wholeness, and offered them forgiveness. We desperately need to listen to the messenger, Jesus, and his message of life, love, acceptance, and peace. If we are to truly call ourselves disciples of Jesus, then we are charged to do likewise.

There are those who would say that racism is a political issue, and there is great truth in that perspective, especially when our Declaration of Independence states: that all men are created equal. And endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights; among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

There is no way to deny that racism has political overtones, but it is, first and foremost, a spiritual and moral issue that needs and deserves our immediate attention. This sin of racism grieves the heart of God because it very deeply and negatively affects God's creation, those who are sons and daughters of God, brothers, and sisters of not only Jesus Christ but also brothers and sisters of our very selves.

In the recitation of the Confiteor, we pray "for what I have done and for what I have failed to do." In other words, we are asked to reflect on our sins of commission and, just as importantly, our sins of omission. Perhaps, just perhaps, we have never uttered a racist word or committed a racist action, but how many times have we failed to speak up and speak out when we have witnessed others doing such? There is an axiom that says silences seem to give consent...it may be an old saying, but that does not make it any less true.

We need to admit our ignorance about racism and make sure that we become educated about what it is and the effects it has on others. We need not be afraid to visit with our brothers and sisters of all colors to hear what their stories are and what their experiences of racism have been.

We need to hear what has caused others to become disheartened, discouraged, disadvantaged, and disenfranchised.

We need to see how perceptions must be changed along with policies and procedures that discriminate against our brothers and sisters of color. We must work for rightful accountability by those in charge because when a system is broken, then people's lives become broken...their hopes, their dreams, and their visions are consequently shattered.

We need to give comfort to the aggrieved and those who are hurting so that they have some sense of solace from us who are their brothers and sisters. We must underscore the need for fraternal charity and human dignity.

We need to seek a peaceful coexistence with and mutual acceptance and racial equality for others who are different from ourselves, and in doing so, perhaps we will come to realize there is not that much difference after all. We need to pray for an end to violence and for the peace of God that surpasses all understanding, for nothing is gained by violence; indeed, so much is lost. We need to be courageous in confronting family, friends, and others when we encounter experiences of racism. We need to realize that indifference is not an option. St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians: be on guard, stand firm in the faith. Be courageous, be strong, let every act be done in love. Thus, in and with love, we need to build and work together for that which will last and long endure in serving the common good of all persons...all persons.

The Romans were told by St. Paul to be transformed, love one another with mutual affection, show honor to one another, have honor for one another, love, and be at peace with all. Indeed, we must be transformed by God's amazing grace, and then, as disciples of Christ, we must help transform society to see that those whom God created are very good and deserve mutual respect, dignity, acceptance, and love.

In Matthew's Gospel just proclaimed, Jesus certainly highlighted the fact that we are all children of God when he reminded us: that when we care for the least of our brothers and sisters by giving food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, welcoming strangers, visiting the sick and imprisoned. . . then we did it to and for Jesus.

In the first book of kings, Solomon pleased the lord so much that the lord told him he could ask for anything, and it would be given to him. . . be it power, land, wealth, etc., all that Solomon asked for was an understanding heart.

I truly believe that we need to ask for the same thing in this day and age...we need to ask for an understanding heart to see how the God of love and justice created us to be one in mind and heart so that we can end racism and recognize the dignity due to each human being. Why? Because, as the poet John Donne reminded us. . . that the death of even one man diminishes us, because we are involved in mankind.

May God prompt and bless that involvement and may it be God's blessings that send us forth strengthened for our task on earth, refreshed in soul and renewed in mind. So, let us go forth as Micah the prophet dictates: to do justice, love goodness, and walk humbly with our God, and, I add parenthetically, with our brothers and sisters of every race.

May we recognize that every human being, every human being, has within them the breath of God, a gift that is to be recognized, cherished, and respected. Let us realize that every breath we draw is a gift from God as it is a sign of life and a sign of love. May we work for and pray that every individual, every person, is given the opportunity to experience that breath of God from the first moments of conception until the last breath of life is drawn, and all moments, all stages of life in between.

Remember, regarding racism and our relations with others, what you do matters. Also, what you don't do matters. And "never again" begins with you. The most beautiful moment in life is the present moment; for at that moment, you can amend the mistakes of the past, and at that moment, you can construct and transform the future to shape a better tomorrow, not only for yourself but for all others.

May we seek the intercession of Mary, under the title of the immaculate conception who is the patroness of the United States, so she may intercede for us with her son, the patron of this, our family of faith, the prince of peace, so that we might be instruments of the lord's peace by our words and works to, for and with our brothers and sisters of every race.

May we also seek the aid of God's living and loving spirit to help us renew the face of the earth, so as we love and serve one another, we might see and experience the face of God in all whom we encounter.

As we began this service, so we end it.

May the peace of God, which is beyond all understanding, be with all of you!



# APPENDIX C

## Worship Aids from Sunday Masses at Prince of Peace.

Sunday, October 24, 2021

### Communion Rite

REMAIN IN ME, I AM THE VINE

**COMMUNION SONG**

*Refrain*

Re-main in me, I am the vine. Re-main in me;  
you shall have life, You are the branch - est: bear  
fruit for all to see. I am the vine, re-main in me.

*Verses*

- No branch can live with-out the tree,
- No long - er slaves, I call you friends,
- As I have done so you should do,
- As I died, so too shall you die,
- I am the way, the truth, the life,

- nor grow or serve a - part from me,
- I shall be with you to the end,
- so as to love as I love you,
- As I rose, so too shall you rise,
- I am your liv - ing sac - ri - fice,

- This I have told you that you may see
- Keep my com-mand - ments; I dwell in you;
- For in your wit - ness, my love is shown;
- Do not be trou - bled; your eyes have seen,
- I of - fer free - ly my life for you,

- my love in you, your joy com - plete,
- So now bear wit - ness to the truth,
- in sim - ple ways, my heart made known,
- You trust in God, have trust in me,
- Go now and do as I would do,

**PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION**

**CONCLUDING RITE**

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**  
**BLESSING AND DISMISSAL**

**RECESSIONAL HYMN** I WANT TO WALK AS A CHILD OF THE LIGHT

- I want to walk as a child of the light,
- I want to see the bright-ness of God,
- I'm look - ing for the com - ing of Christ.

I want to fel - low Je - sus,  
I want to look at Je - sus,  
I want to be with Je - sus.

God set the stars to give light to the world. The  
Clear sun of right-eous-ness shine on my path And  
When we have run with pa-tience the race, We

star of my life is Je - sus,  
show me the way to the Fa - ther,  
shall know the joy of Je - sus.

In him there is no dark-ness at all. The  
night and the day are both a - like. The  
Lamb is the light of the cit - y of God.  
Shine in my heart, Lord Je - sus.

You: Ephraim 5:1-6; Revelation 21:23; John 12:46; Luke 1:5; Hebrews 12:1; Kathleen Thompson, b.1954. © 1970, 1972, C掖honian  
Trust, BOSTON, MA 02116. © 1971, Kathleen Thompson, b.1954. © 1970, 1972, C掖honian Trust, Boston, MA 02116.

**THIRTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**  
**OCTOBER 24, 2021**

**GATHERING HYMN** CHRIST BE OUR LIGHT

*Verses*

- Long - ing for light, we wait in dark-ness,
- Long - ing for peace, our world is trou - bled,
- Long - ing for food, man - y are hun - gry,
- Long - ing for shel - ter, man - y are home-less,
- Man - y the gifts, man - y the peo - ple,

Long - ing for truth, we turn to you,  
Long - ing for hope, man - y de - spair,  
Long - ing for wa - ter, man - y still thirst,  
Long - ing for warmth, man - y are cold,  
man - y the hearts that yearn to be - long.

Make us your own, your ho - ly peo - ple,  
Your word a - lone has pow'r to save us,  
Make us your bread, bro - ken for oth - ers,  
Make us your build - ing, shel - ter - ing oth - ers,  
Let us be ser - vants to one an - oth - er,

light for the world to see,  
Make us your liv - ing voice,  
shared un - til all are fed,  
walls made of liv - ing stone,  
mak - ing your king - dom come.

*Refrain*

Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts.  
Shine through the dark - ness. Christ, be our light!  
Shine in your Church gath-ered to - day.

**KYRIE**  
**GLORIA**

*All*

Glo-ry to God in the high - est, and on  
*To Verses*  
earth peace to peo - ple, peo - ple of good will.

**COLLECT**

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## LITURGY OF THE WORD

READING I Jeremiah 31:7-9  
*THE BLIND AND THE LAME I WILL BRING BACK; I WILL CONSOLE THEM.*

### RESPONSORIAL PSALM 126

The Lord has done great things for  
us; we are filled with joy.

READING II Hebrews 5:1-6  
*YOU ARE A PRIEST FOREVER ACCORDING TO THE ORDER OF MELCHIZEDEK.*

### GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

GOSPEL READING Mark 10:35-45  
*MASTER, I WANT TO SEE.*

### HOMILY PROFESSION OF FAITH

I believe in one God, the Father almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.  
I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God,  
born of the Father before all ages.

God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God,  
begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father,  
through him all things were made.

For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven,  
*All bow at the following words up to: and became man.*  
and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary,  
and became man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate,  
he suffered death and was buried,  
and rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.  
He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the  
Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead  
and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,  
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,  
who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified,  
who has spoken through the prophets.

I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins  
and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead,  
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

### GENERAL INTERCESSIONS AND BUILDING CAMPAIGN PRAYER

Gracious God:  
We, your sons and daughters,  
thank you for the blessings you have bestowed on our community.

By the power of your Holy Spirit, guide this process of renewal.

May all the bricks laid, nails driven, and wood placed represent  
each of us as the living stones of your Church, and, upon the  
foundation laid by your Son, Jesus, provide for us and future  
generations buildings that will allow all to grow in grace, wisdom  
and love.

Through the intercession of our Mother Mary, all the angels and  
saints, may the Prince of Peace bless this undertaking and bring  
your will to completion.  
Amen.

## LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

*We invite the children to bring their gifts to the Altar.*

PREPARATION OF THE GIFTS THERE IS A BALM IN GILEAD

There is a balm in Gil-e-ad To

make the wound-ed whole; There is a

balm in Gil-e-ad To heal the sin-sick soul.

Verses

1. Some-times I feel dis-cour-aged And  
2. Don't ev-er be dis-cour-aged, For  
3. If you can-not preach like Pe-ter, If you

think my work's in vain, But then the Ho-ly  
Je-sus is your friend; And if you lack for  
can-not pray like Paul, You can tell the love of

Spir-it Re-vives my soul a-gain,  
knowl-edge, He'll ne'er re-luse to lend,  
Je-sus And say, "He died for all."

### EUCCHARISTIC PRAYER - Mass of Christ, Light of the Nations Alonso

#### SANCTUS

Ho-ly, Ho-ly, Ho-ly Lord God of hosts.

Heav-en and earth are full of your glo-ry.

Ho-san-na in the high-est.

Bless-ed is he who comes in the name

of the Lord. Ho-san-na in the

high-est. Ho-san-na in the high-est.

#### MEMORIAL ACCLAMATION

We pro-claim your Death, O Lord, and pro-

fess your Res-ur-rec-tion un-til you come a-gain.

#### GREAT AMEN

A-men, a-men, a-men, a-men.

#### LORD'S PRAYER

##### LAMB OF GOD

*Cantor or Choir* All  
Lamb of God, you take a-way the sins of the

*Cantor or Choir* All  
world, have mer-cy on us. Lamb of God, you

take a-way the sins of the world, grant us peace.



## LITURGY OF THE WORD

**READING I** Daniel 12:1-3  
*At that time your people shall escape.*

### RESPONSORIAL PSALM 16



You are my in - her - i - tance, O Lord.



You are my in - her - i - tance, O Lord.

**READING II** Hebrews 10:11-14, 18  
*By one offering he has made perfect forever those who are being consecrated.*

**GOSPEL READING** Mark 13:24-32  
*He will gather his elect from the four winds.*

### HOMILY

#### PROFESSION OF FAITH

I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible. I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages. God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father, through him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven, All bow at the following words up to: and became man, and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered death and was buried, and rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

### GENERAL INTERCESSIONS AND BUILDING CAMPAIGN PRAYER

Gracious God:  
 We, your sons and daughters,  
 thank you for the blessings you have bestowed on our community.  
 By the power of your Holy Spirit, guide this process of renewal.

May all the bricks laid, nails driven, and wood placed represent each of us as the living stones of your Church, and, upon the foundation laid by your Son, Jesus, provide for us and future generations buildings that will allow all to grow in grace, wisdom and love.

Through the intercession of our Mother Mary, all the angels and saints, may the Prince of Peace bless this undertaking and bring your will to completion.  
 Amen.

## LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

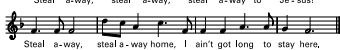
*We invite the children to bring their gifts to the Altar.*

### PREPARATION OF THE GIFTS

### STEAL AWAY



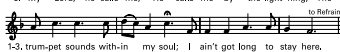
Steal a-way, steal a-way, steal a-way to Je - sus!



Steal a-way, steal a-way home, I ain't got long to stay here,



1. My Lord, he calls me, He calls me by the thun-der; The  
 2. Green trees are bond-ing, Poor sin - ners stand a - trem-bling; The  
 3. My Lord, he calls me, He calls me by the light-ning; The



1-3, trum-pet sounds with-in my soul; I ain't got long to stay here.

Text: Traditional. Music: Spiritual.

### EUCCHARISTIC PRAYER - Mass of Christ, Light of the Nations

Alonso



Ho - ly, Ho - ly, Ho - ly Lord God of hosts.



Heav-en and earth are full of your glo - ry.



Ho - san - na in the high - est.



Bless-ed is he who comes in the name

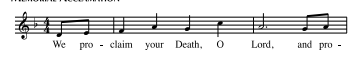


of the Lord. Ho - san - na in the



high-est. Ho - san - na in the high-est.

### MEMORIAL ACCLAMATION



We pro - claim your Death, O Lord, and pro -



less your Res - ur - rec-tion un - til you come a - gain.



A - men, a - men, a - men, a - men.

### LORD'S PRAYER



Lamb of God, you take a - way the sins of the



world, have mer - cy on us. Lamb of God, you



take a - way the sins of the world, grant us peace.

# Sunday, January 29, 2023

## Great Amen

A - men, a - men, a - men.

A - men, a - men, a - men.

## Communion Rite

### The Lord's Prayer Sign of Peace

### Lamb of God

### Communion Hymn

### Rejoice, Be Glad

1. Bless-ed are the poor—the peo-ple who live in  
2. Bless-ed are the kind—the mer-ci-ful ones shall  
3. You are salt and light—let earth taste and see God's

God's ho-ly reign. Bless-ed are the sad, for  
mer-cy re-ceive. Bless-ed are the good, your  
glo-ry re-vealed. Let your good-ness shine; the

com-fort is yours through sor-row and pain. Bless-ed are the  
heart shall see God be-cause you be-lieve. Bless-ed chil-dren,  
lost are re-stored, the bro-ken are healed. All will be ful-

meek for you will in-her-it what long was de-nied.  
come: grow peace for a plan-et still chok-ing with hate,  
filled—the law and the proph-ets have shown us the way,

Hun-gry, thirst-y ones, your long-ing for jus-tice will  
Per-se-cut-ed ones, for you all the bless-ings of  
Heav-en comes to earth; re-joice and be glad for cre-

be sat-is-fied,  
heav-en a-wait,  
a-trion's new day.

### Refrain

Re-joice, be glad, for heav-en is com-ing. Re-

joice, be glad, for heav-en is com-ing. Re-

joice, be glad, for heav-en is com-ing to you.

## CONCLUDING RITE

### Announcements

### Blessing and Dismissal

### Recessional Hymn

### Plenty Good Room

There's plen-ty good room, plen-ty good room,

plen-ty good room in ma Fa-ther's king-dom,

Plen-ty good room, plen-ty good room, just

choose your seat and sit down. There's

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## FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

JANUARY 28-29, 2023

## PRINCE OF PEACE

## CATHOLIC COMMUNITY



We all know Jesus's Sermon on the Mount. The Beatitudes are scripted and framed in parish halls across the world. But the Beatitudes can't be relegated to some familiar, lofty statements about the Christian life. Jesus calls serious bluff on what society values most: wealth, power, prestige. He flips the tables on who is truly blessed: the poor, the persecuted, the peacemakers. Jesus preaches a radical sermon that should jar us to action. The Beatitudes aren't meant to just be looked at - they are meant to be lived.

### Gathering Hymn

### Eye Has Not Seen

### Refrain:

Eye has not seen, ear has not heard  
what God has ready for those who love him;  
Spirit of love, come, give us the mind of Jesus,  
teach us the wisdom of God.

1. When pain and sorrow weigh us down, be near to us, O Lord;  
forgive the weakness of our faith,  
and bear us up within your peaceful word. *Refrain:*
2. Our lives are but a single breath, we flower and we fade,  
yet all our days are in your hands,  
so we return in love what love has made. *Refrain:*
3. To those who see with eyes of faith, the Lord is ever near,  
reflected in the faces  
of all the poor and lowly of the world. *Refrain:*
4. We sing a mystery from the past in halls where saints have trod,  
yet ever new the music rings  
to Jesus, Living Song of God. *Refrain:*

### Gloria

### Mass of the Angels and Saints

Glo-ry to God in the high-est, and on

earth peace to peo-ple of good will.

*Last time to Coda*

**Collect**

Grant us, Lord our God, that we may honor you with all our mind, and love everyone in truth of heart. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

**LITURGY OF THE WORD**

**Reading I** Zephaniah 2:3, 3:12-17  
*I will leave in your midst a people humble and lowly.*

**Responsorial Psalm 146**

Bless - ed are the poor in spir - it;  
the king - dom of heav - en is theirs.  
the king - dom of heav - en is theirs.

**Reading II** 1 Corinthians 1:26-31  
*God chose the weak of the world.*

**Gospel Reading** Matthew 5:1-12  
*Blessed are the poor in spirit.*

**Homily**

**Profession of Faith**

I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages.

God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father; through him all things were made.

For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven, All bow at the following words up to: and became man, and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered death and was buried, and rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

**General Intercessions and Building Campaign Prayer**

Gracious God: We, your sons and daughters, thank you for the blessings you have bestowed on our community. By the power of your Holy Spirit, guide this process of renewal.

During this period of construction and transition, send us your Spirit of Peace. May all the bricks laid, nails driven, and wood placed represent each of us as the living stones of your Church, and, upon the foundation laid by your Son, Jesus, provide for us and future generations buildings that will allow all to grow in grace, wisdom and love.

Through the intercession of our Mother Mary, all the angels and saints, may the Prince of Peace bless this undertaking and bring your will to completion. Amen.

**LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST**

**Preparation of the Gifts**

Be Not Afraid

- 1. You shall cross the barren desert, but you shall not die of thirst. You shall wander far in safety through you do not know the way. You shall speak your words in foreign lands and all will understand. You shall see the face of God and live.

*Refrain:*  
Be not afraid. I go before you always. Come, follow me, and I will give you rest.

- 2. If you pass through raging waters in the sea, you shall not drown. If you walk amid the burning flames, you shall not be harmed. If you stand before the power of hell

and death is at your side, know that I am with you through it all. *Refrain:*

- 3. Blessed are your poor, for the kingdom shall be theirs. Blest are you that weep and mourn, for one day you shall laugh. And if wicked tongues insult and hate you all because of me, blessed, blessed are you! *Refrain:*

**Eucharistic Prayer - Mass of the Angels and Saints** Janco Sanctus

Ho - ly, Ho - ly, Ho - ly Lord God of  
hosts. Heav'n and earth are full of your glo - ry. Ho -  
san - na, ho - san - na, ho - san - na in the  
high - est, ho - san - na, ho - san - na, ho -  
san - na in the high - est. Bless - ed is he who comes in the  
name of the Lord. Ho - san - na, ho -  
san - na, ho - san - na in the high - est, ho -  
san - na, ho - san - na, ho - san - na in the high - est.

**Memorial Acclamation**

We pro - claim your Death, O Lord, and pro -  
fess your Res - ur - rec - tion un - til you come a - gain.

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