



from

Assembly to ACTION

ASSOCIATION OF U.S. CATHOLIC PRIESTS

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ERADICATING RACISM

EXPERIENCE

In 1968, the year of Martin Luther King's assassination, Black theologian James Hal Cone called on the Church to become *prophetic*. He argued that the Church had to "make a decisive break with the structure of this society by launching a vehement attack on the evils of racism in all its forms." In 2018 Black Catholic theologian. Shawn Copeland asserted that "black theology is the *prophetic theology of a crucified community in a crucifying world*, ... consciously and intentionally affirms black personhood, ... affirms and values *all* human persons as the expression of God's own self."

As this 50th anniversary year of MLK's death and James Cone's call for the Church to be prophetic, AUSCP Members and Friends need to ask ourselves whether we are living up to the call of our own mission statement to take "prophetic action."

Since its founding in 2011, AUSCP has taken several steps toward eradicating racism among us. We welcome membership of all races. In 2015 we partnered with the National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus and added their representative to our Leadership Team. In

2016 we adopted this goal: "Eliminate Racism in Our Church." In 2017 we followed up on that proposal by addressing the continuing disease of racial bias, division, and discrimination by dedicating our 2017 Assembly in Atlanta to the theme of *PEACE-MAKING IN OUR FRACTURED SOCIETY*. We engaged Black Catholic theologian Bryan Massingale as a keynoter, honored him with



our St. John XXIII Award, and celebrated our Assembly Mass at Our Lady of Lourdes Parish near the Martin Luther King Museum.

ANALYSIS

We can be proud of these actions, but do they measure up to the *prophetic* standard? Are they making a difference? Have they helped *eliminate*, or better,

eradicated racism by addressing its roots.

Clarence Williams defines racism as "as social illness that is promoted by thinking, feeling, and acting as if one race is superior to another race." It afflicts us all, like an addiction.

Biblical Scholar Walter Brueggemann sees imagination and poetry as the key to prophecy. During an interview on Krista Tippett's *On Being*, he said that "even liberal passion for justice just becomes another ideology, and it does not have transformative power." Tippett summed up his passion for imagination and poetry as the "key to the power prophets can have to translate between the world as it is and the world as it might be."

Has anything AUSCP has done so far manifested that kind of imagination and transformative effect? Have we weakened racism at its roots in the minds and hearts of our society and our Church?

Brueggemann observes that what the church's creeds and doctrinal

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tradition “flattens out all the images and metaphors to make it fit into a nice little formulation and then it's deathly.” On the other hand poetry “keeps opening and opening and opening whereas the doctrinal practice of the church is always to close and close and close until you're left with nothing that has any transformative power.” Is our Church guilty of that? What of the AUSCP and me?

REFLECTION

M. Shawn Copeland proposes that “authentic collaboration between blacks and whites” is needed. Black and whites must “work together in effective solidarity for the eradication of white racist supremacy and its effects in themselves, in political and economic arrangements, in culture, and in the church.”

Is the membership of AUSCP able to be more a part of that work than we so far have been? Can we re-envision our Association in a way that will manifest our revolutionary love and advance the cause of racial justice? Can we generate among ourselves a more imaginative portrait of what a society emptied of racist attitudes, dispositions, and actions would look like? Can we fashion imaginative rhetoric that will project that in a prophetic way? Can we manifest the kind of behaviors that will help ourselves and others adopt and develop habits in our relationships with those racially other? Can we imagine practicable steps we can take and help others take that will

offset the white bias and banish the presumption of superiority which so deeply permeates our society while it is being reinforced by current political rhetoric and populist movements?



We live in a time when feelings that many thought were outmoded seem to be reviving and spreading. Feelings of suspicion, fear, contempt an even hatred of individuals or groups deemed to be different because of their ethnic, national or religious affiliation, and as such considered unworthy to participate fully in the life of society. ...

The other is not only a being to be respected by virtue of his intrinsic dignity, but above all a brother or sister to love.

Pope Francis

ACTION

Many options for prophetic action are available. Each of us needs to consider which are feasible for us personally? Which fit the congregations we serve and the communities in which we live? What

imaginative and poetic imagery can we plant in the imaginations, minds, and hearts of others? Here are a few doable prophetic actions:

- 1) Cultivate and promote respect for the intrinsic dignity of every person, starting in the various contexts in which we live, work, move, and act. (Pope Francis)
- 2) Commit ourselves to transform “tolerance” in ourselves into “fraternal love, tenderness, and active solidarity.” (Pope Francis)
- 3) Plan to preach on the forthcoming USCCB Statement on Race, make the text available to your parishioners, convene a meeting to discuss and apply it.
- 4) Make available and promote reading of Bryan Massingale’s *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church* in book groups. Invite him to talk in your community? Publicize his videos on YouTube.
- 5) Promote Clarence E. Williams’ book on *Racial Sobriety: Becoming the Change you want to see*. Lead people through the process.
- 6) Make available Bishop Edward K. Braxton’s 2016 pastoral letter *The Catholic Church and the Black Lives Matter Movement: The Racial Divide in the United States*.
- 7) Meet with black pastors in your area and invite their congregations to gather in prayer with yours (and vice-versa) to remember and celebrate Martin Luther King and his vision of the Beloved Community.
- 8) Put your own imagination to work and invite your congregation to propose options. Imagine and portray how you want your parish to look, cleansed of racism, five years from now.