

Society of Mary

Marists in the United States

Justice & Peace Alert

October 15, 2021



Racial Justice Ministry
Our Lady of the Assumption Catholic Church
Marist Parish - Archdiocese of Atlanta

Dismantling the Communal Sin of Racism



Peace and love to all from Our Lady of the Assumption Catholic Church (OLA) in Brookhaven, GA. We send our prayers for hope and healing to all, as we join in combatting the urgent crisis of our time.

We are beginning a journey to dismantle the communal sin of racism in our church, our school, our parish, and our community, and we appreciate the opportunity to share our work and to seek the prayers and guidance of all.

Our Identity

We are a parish and congregation born in 1951 in the north Atlanta suburbs, amidst Jim Crow segregation, rising white supremacy, and the struggle for civil and human rights. Today, we are a parish of 1,700 households and more than 5,500 parishioners, and we reflect, in part, the increasing diversity of Atlanta. We have vibrant Indonesian and Latino communities who have found a welcoming home at OLA, but we remain largely a majority white church with a small number of Black parishioners.

Our Inspiration

In recent times, and especially following the death of George Floyd, members of OLA have felt the urgent call to address racial injustice in a visible and transformative way. In our work, we are inspired by the life and example of Sister Thea Bowman, a leading Black Catholic religious sister, educator, musician, and scholar. From her birth in 1937 in the small town of Yazoo City, Mississippi, Sister Thea rose to become a powerful and tireless voice against racism, sexism, and injustice, within the United States and beyond. Though her life was cut short by breast cancer in 1990, her spirit and influence continue to spread far, wide, and deep.

Sister Thea embodies the very qualities and virtues of Mary and the Marist way: strength, wisdom, fearlessness, steadfastness, humility, grace. In 2018, Sister Thea was declared a Servant of God, marking the first of four steps toward canonization in the Catholic Church.

Our Engagement

Since our blessing and kickoff as a new OLA ministry in August 2021, we are engaging in sacred dialogue and conversation within our ministry to discern our mission and focus. To date, we have joined together, via Zoom meetings and other communications, to name the urgent issues that challenge our ministry. We are asking hard questions:

- What are our lived experiences of racism?
- How do we define Racial Justice? How do we define and engage in Restorative Justice?
- What are our thoughts about the Black experience in our church?
- How do we ensure that Antiracism is a key, integral theme in our homilies, prayers of the faithful, parish activities, parish ministries?
- How do we ensure that children in our OLA school and parish receive Antiracism education, training, and experiential learning?
- As a majority white congregation and parish, how do we authentically engage with members of the Black community – both Catholic and beyond?
- How do we combat the alarming rise of white supremacy in our midst?

"I hope this ministry starts a real discussion about racism that is engrained in our lives."

"To develop a better understanding of structural racism and help implement short and long term remedies. To help reduce stereotyping, animosities and violence by parties on both sides."

"I'd like to see us expand our focus to other racial and ethnic groups. Hate isn't limited to one group. But, I understand why we are beginning where we are."

"To have 'light bulb moments' for myself and others."

"Identify the racism in myself and in our social structures. Become fluent in the language of race and racism. Work to raise the awareness of complacent racism in our church, community, and society."

"Make a visible change in our communities...Meaningful discussions about the issues and solutions"

"I want to be part of the solution."

"...to work with other faiths in understanding and changing the impacts of systemic racism."

"...to offer education to all those seeking information about racism and how to end it and enough food for thought that those who think the topic is irrelevant will seek out additional information."

"...to be able to give a cogent presentation to people, most likely one-on-one, to explain how our historical actions have caused the inequities we accept as a society."

Cont'd on next page

Our Hopes and Dreams

While we are continuing in formation together, we are expressing our hopes and dreams for the ministry. Here are some key responses and themes from our members, also captured in our “Word Cloud”.

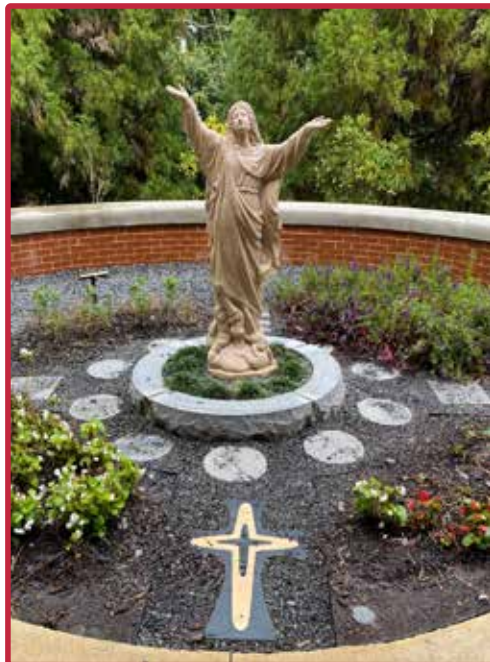
We seek:

- Authentic, real discussions about race
- Better understanding of structural racism and short- and long-term remedies
- Fluency in the language of racism and our historical actions and inequities
- Reduction in racial stereotyping, animosities, and violence
- Identifying of the racism in ourselves and the complacent racism in our church, community, and society
- Work with other faiths in understanding the impacts of systemic racism
- Education to all seeking information about racism and how to end it
- Visible change in our communities

Our Path Forward

As we continue our Marian path forward, we are seeking collaboration, solidarity and sharing with other groups engaged in racial justice work. We invite you to connect with us at racialjustice@olachurch.org.

As is often said, “A journey of thousand miles, begins with a single step.” Our journey has begun.





Good Samaritan Day at Notre Dame Middle School!

On Good Samaritan Day, Notre Dame Middle School students took the school mission out into the community at Grace Centers of Hope, St. Damien of Molokai, St. Irenaeus Earth Ministry, St. Mary of the Hills and Angels' Place.



Mary - support of the Church



Webinar: "For a synodal Church" What is Pope Francis inviting us all to do?





“Who Is My Neighbor? Washington, Afghanistan, Haiti” with Cardinal Wilton Gregory, Muzhgan Azizy, Juan Aznaran, Omayma El Ella, Reynold Hyppolite, and Gerald Smith, Jr.

This unique virtual gathering of young people will begin with a welcome from Cardinal Wilton Gregory and continue with a conversation amongst young people of faith on how we are called to respond to this question of “Who is my neighbor?”

This conversation is the first of a three-part dialogue series this Fall (October 7, November 4, December 2) entitled, Pope Francis, Young People, and Solidarity: Dialogues on Fratelli Tutti and is co-hosted by the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Washington and the Initiative on Catholic Social Thought and Public Life at Georgetown University. View the online dialogue session from October 7th [HERE](#).

Pax Christi USA co-sponsoring the “Caravan of Mothers of Disappeared Migrants”; caravan starts this week

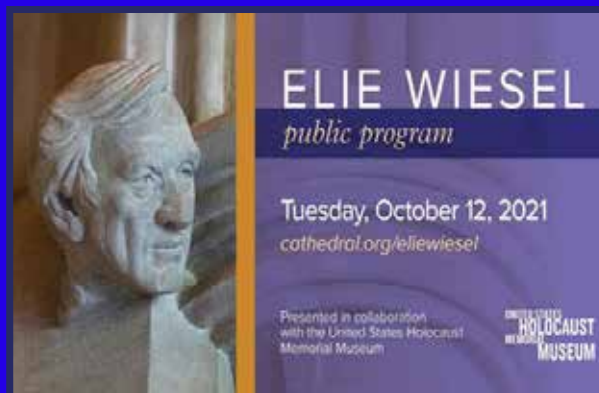


Dignity and the Death Penalty: A Conversation with Cardinal Wilton D. Gregory & Sister Helen Prejean



Webinar: A Policymaker’s Tool for Effective Nonviolent Strategies for Sustainable Peace



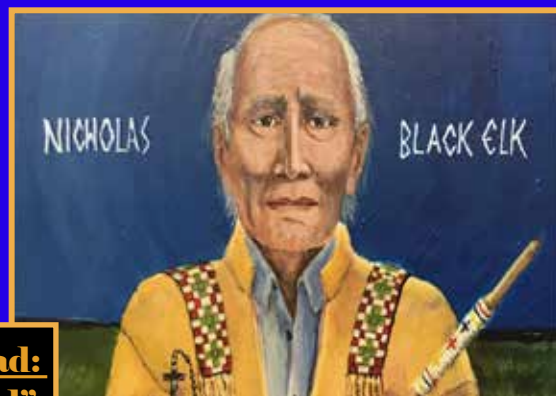


Recording from Elie Wiesel Carving Dedication

Recording of Public Program honoring Elie Wiesel



Knights To The Heights: South Dakota Knights make a pilgrimage to pray for the canonization cause of Nicholas Black Elk



Documentary: “Walking the Good Red Road: Nicholas Black Elk’s Journey to Sainthood”