

A Spirit Call within a Call

A Message from LCWR's Officers

On July 10, 2020, the national board of LCWR unanimously affirmed a call to place the conference on a five-year journey to address systemic racism and white privilege. The call emerged from an open and honest conversation held among leaders of LCWR and the National Black Sisters' Conference.

The call goes beyond the assembly resolutions that have committed us to do the "critical work of recognizing racism as a systemic, structural cause underlying ... multiple situations of injustice" with a "focus on the intersection of racism, migration, and climate crisis."

That work remains critical. As Hop Hopkins wrote recently in *Racism Is Killing the Planet*, "You can't have climate change without sacrifice zones, and you can't have sacrifice zones without disposable people, and you can't have disposable people without racism."

This call, however, takes us to another level of engagement. One that goes to the heart of remembering "who we are and whose we are," as Servant of God Thea Bowman, FSPA, said, and to our integrity as a conference of religious leaders.

It is a call to the kind of journey through fire and spirit we have been summoned to before. During the past decade, we embarked on such a journey – though not of our choosing – when the integrity of the conference was at stake in the face of the doctrinal investigation. Farther back in time, in 1978, we charted a five-year course in the face of other challenges to uncover the foundational meaning and implications of our identity as *women* in church and society.

Like those, this journey is spiritual in nature, raising existential questions about LCWR and our identity as US women religious, as followers of the way of Jesus who called us "to love one another as I have loved you." (John 15:12)

In a [reflection on Pentecost](#) this year, M. Shawn Copeland, PhD, preached, "As a nation, we gasp for air as rage flames in nearly every corner of our country. We cannot breathe. White racist supremacy is suffocating us, choking the very life and breath of God out of us all, snuffing out the possibilities for embodied difference to live, to breathe." She continued: "We need Spirit-*ruah* to breathe on us, breathe with us, and breathe through us so that we may turn away from indifference, suspicion, and hostility and turn toward openness, compassion, and solidarity."

Together, in the days and months to come, we will identify the steps that beckon us on this journey – the profound truth-telling, reconciliation, repentance, and repair work needed for Spirit-*ruah* to breathe us through to transformative change. As members of a church deeply implicated in the origin and perpetuation of our nation's perduring sin of racism, of congregations that have been complicit, and of a conference whose whiteness has been unexamined, we take our part

in the national reckoning provoked by the horrific public murder of George Floyd and the all-too-many killings that preceded it and yet continue.

“During these soul-wrenching days,” Dr. Copeland reminds us, “we do well to remember that the Spirit cannot and will not be made captive, that the Spirit will not and cannot be tamed.” To be “authentic disciples

of Jesus,” we must “face the wind and fire Spirit-*ruah* breathes.”

Let us go forth.

Jayne Helmlinger, CSJ, President; Elise D. García, OP, President-Elect; Sharlet Wagner, CSC, Past President; Carol Zinn, SSJ, Executive Director

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