

SPRIT CALL WITHIN A CALL

LCWR Region Presentation

September 2023

GREETINGS!

I AM ANITA BAIRD, AND I AM A MEMBER OF THE RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF THE DAUGHTER OF THE HEART OF MARY AND PRESENTLY SERVE AS THE UNITED STATES' PROVINCIAL. I AM ALSO CO-CHAIR OF LCWR'S "SPIRIT CALL WITHIN A CALL COMMITTEE.

SPIRIT CALL EMERGED FROM AN OPEN AND HONEST CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE LEADERS OF LCWR AND THE NATIONAL BLACK SISTERS' CONFERENCE IN LIGHT OF THE HORRIFIC MURDER OF GEORGE FLOYD IN 2020.

AS WE ENTER INTO THE FOURTH YEAR OF LCWR'S COMMITMENT TO A FIVE-YEAR TRANSFORMATIVE JOURNEY TO ADDRESS SYSTEMIC RACISM AND WHITE PRIVILEGE, 'SPIRIT CALL WITHIN A CALL' IS INVITING US TO GO DEEPER, TO RECOMMIT TO THE JOURNEY THAT WILL TRANSFORM US, OUR COMMUNITIES, AND THOSE WE MINISTER WITH AND SERVE.

WE ARE BEING CALLED TO A LIFE-CHANGING EXPERIENCE REQUIRING A LIFE-CHANGING RESPONSE.

IN THEIR JULY 10, 2020 MESSAGE THE PRESIDENCY WROTE: "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."

"IT IS A CALL TO THE KIND OF JOURNEY THROUGH **FIRE AND SPRIT, (HENCE THE TITLE, 'SPIRIT CALL WITHIN A CALL.'**" IT IS A CALL TO TRANSFORMATION FOR LCWR AND ITS MEMBER CONGREGATIONS—NOT JUST THE LEADERSHIP BUT EVERY MEMBER OF EVERY CONGREGATION, BELONGING TO LCWR."

IN HER 2021 PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS, ELISE GARCIA, O.P. PRESENTED "FOUR WAYS IN WHICH WE MIGHT CARVE DEEPER GROOVES OF CONSCIOUS RELATIONALITY IN EVOLUTION – FOR OUR OWN LIBERATION AND THE LIBERATION OF OTHERS?"

- LEARNING AND TELLING THE TRUTH OF OUR HISTORY
- DISMANTLING ARTIFICIAL CONSTRUCTS OF RACE AND CASTE

- KNOWING CHRIST CRUCIFIED THROUGH THE DARK WISDOM OF THE ENSLAVED AND,
- WALKING THE TALK OF OUR RADICAL RELATIONALITY AS WOMEN RELIGIOUS

IN THE LATEST ISSUE OF LCWR UPDATE, THEN PRESIDENT-ELECT MAUREEN GEARY, O.P. WROTE *“RACISM PERSISTS WITH GRIEVOUS CONSEQUENCES FOR ALL HUMANITY; BOTH FOR THOSE WHO EXPERIENCE IT AND THOSE WHO PERPETUATE IT.”*

“WE HEAR A POWERFUL SUMMONS TO ACCOUNTABILITY, TO BRING HEALING, TO FIND OR RECLAIM MEANING AND PURPOSE. A CALL TO BEGIN SOMEWHERE, ANYWHERE, BUT IF CHANGES ARE TO COME, WE MUST BEGIN.”

THIS IS NOT THE FIRST TIME THAT LCWR HAS TAKEN SUCH A BOLD, PROPHETIC STANCE. IN 1978 WE CHARTERED A FIVE-YEAR COURSE TO UNCOVER THE FOUNDATIONAL MEANING AND ALL THAT IMPLIED AS REGARDS OUR IDENTITY AS WOMEN IN THE CHURCH AND SOCIETY; AND YOU DID IT AGAIN WHEN THE INTEGRITY OF THE CONFERENCE WAS AT STAKE DURING THE DOCTRINAL INVESTIGATION.

THOSE WERE BOTH PIVOTAL MOMENTS THAT CHANGED THE VERY IDENTITY OF LCWR...MOMENTS THAT NOT ONLY IMPACTED LCWR BUT THE ENTIRE CHURCH BODY.

YOU MADE A COMMITMENT THAT IN THE YEARS TO FOLLOW YOU WOULD IDENTIFY THE STEPS THAT WOULD LEAD TO PROFOUND TRUTH-TELLING, RECONCILIATION, REPENTANCE, AND REPARATIVE WORK “NEEDED FOR SPIRIT-RUAH TO BREATHE US THROUGH TO TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE.”

YOU HAVE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT AS MEMBERS OF A CHURCH DEEPLY IMPLICATED IN OUR NATION’S ORIGINAL SIN, AS CONGREGATIONS WHO HAVE BEEN COMPLICIT, AND AS A CONFERENCE, WHOSE WHITENESS HAS FOR TOO LONG BEEN UNEXAMINED, WE MUST HOLD OURSELVES ACCOUNTABLE. WE MUST ACKNOWLEDGE OUR OWN SINFULNESS, AND SEEK FORGIVENESS THROUGH REPARATIVE JUSTICE.

YET, AS A CONFERENCE, WE MUST ADMIT THAT THERE HAS BEEN SOME PUSH-BACK AND LACK OF URGENCY ON THE PART OF SOME.

THOSE WHO ARE NEW TO THE CONFERENCE MAY NOT BE AWARE OF THIS PROPHETIC STANCE THAT LCWR HAS TAKEN. OTHERS, OVERWHELMED WITH THE IMMEDIACY OF ISSUES FACING THEIR COMMUNITIES, MAY NOT HAVE THE DESIRE OR ENERGY TO FOCUS ON THIS ISSUE; WHILE THERE ARE A FEW, WHO DO NOT SEE THIS AS A FAITH ISSUE THAT CALLS FOR THE LONG-TERM COMMITMENT OF THEIR COMMUNITIES.

IT IS MY HOPE THAT THIS PRESENTATION WILL AFFORD US A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF THE FACT THAT “SPIRIT CALL WITHIN A CALL” IS NOT SIMPLY A FIVE YEAR COMMITMENT TO ADDRESSING RACISM WITHIN OUR CONFERENCE AND RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES; BUT RATHER IT IS A LIFE-CHANGING, TRANSFORMATIONAL COMMITMENT.

THIS WORK REQUIRES TRUTH-SEEKING AND TRUTH-TELLING. IT REQUIRES US TO WALK TOGETHER ALONG A LESS-TRAVELED PATH...THE GOSPEL PATH OF JUSTICE.

IT IS OUR HOPE THAT THE PASSION FOR RACIAL JUSTICE IS REIGNITED AND EMBRACED WITH THE SAME COMMITMENT THAT WE EXPERIENCED AS A CONFERENCE DURING THE DOCTRINAL INVESTIGATION; OR OUR ONGOING COMMITMENT TO WORKING FOR IMMIGRATION JUSTICE AND THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH.

IF WE CANNOT STAND WITH OUR SISTERS AND BROTHERS OF COLOR WITH THAT SAME COMMITMENT AND PASSION THEN WHO ARE WE REALLY? THIS WORK SPEAKS TO OUR VERY INTEGRITY AS WOMEN RELIGIOUS AND AS A CONFERENCE.

GOD IS CALLING US TO LEAD THE WAY THAT OTHERS MIGHT BECOME GOSPEL JUSTICE-SEEKERS.

WHAT DO THE SCRIPTURES TELL US ABOUT JUSTICE?

DT 32:4 “AND ALL HIS WAYS ARE JUST.”

PS 32:28 “FOR THE LORD LOVES THE JUST.”

IS 30:18 “FOR THE LORD IS A GOD OF JUSTICE.”

AMOS 5:24 “LET JUSTICE ROLL ON LIKE A RIVER.”

LK 11:42 “YOU NEGLECT JUSTICE AND THE LOVE OF GOD.”

REV. 16-7 “TRUE AND JUST ARE YOUR JUDGEMENTS.”

WHAT WOULD LCWR LOOK LIKE? WHAT WOULD OUR CONGREGATIONS LOOK LIKE AS TRULY DIVERSE, ANTI-RACIST, INTERCULTURAL COMMUNITIES?

WILL YOU CHOOSE TO BE PART OF A TRULY TRANSFORMATIONAL JOURNEY AS INDIVIDUALS AND AS A COLLECTIVE BODY BEARING WITNESS TO THE VERY HEART AND ESSENCE OF THE GOSPEL?

LET’S EXPLORE WHAT THIS TRANSFORMATIVE MOMENT MIGHT LOOK LIKE FOR LCWR AND ITS MEMBER CONGREGATIONS.

- EVERY ACT OR DECISION WILL REFLECT YOUR COMMITMENT TO FOCUS ON THE INTERSECTIONALITY OF RACE, MIGRATION AND CLIMATE CRISIS; UNDERSTANDING THAT RACISM IS AT THE HEART OF THESE ISSUES.
- IF WE ARE GOING TO RESOLVE THESE PRESSING ISSUES OF OUR DAY...GLOBAL WARMING, THE VIOLENT AND DESTRUCTIVE ABUSE OF THE EARTH'S RESOURCES OF WHICH THE UNITED STATES IS THE GREATEST OFFENDER; SYSTEMIC RACISM AND VIOLENCE AGAINST THE WORLD'S POOR, PARTICULARLY PEOPLE OF COLOR; CHILDREN; THE MENTAL AND PHYSICALLY CHALLENGED; IMMIGRANTS FROM NON-WHITE NATIONS AS WELL AS OUR LGBTQ BROTHERS AND SISTERS...WE MUST ADDRESS THEM THROUGH THE LENSES OF SYSTEMIC RACISM.
- IT REQUIRES THAT WE EXAMINE AND REASSESS OUR UNDERLYING ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS ROOTED IN WHITE PRIVILEGE AND ACCESS. WE MUST REEXAMINE AND REASSESS OUR MISEDUCATION ABOUT THE CHURCH'S ROLE IN EXERCISING POWER AND DOMINANCE OVER EVERYTHING AND EVERYONE INCLUDING MOTHER EARTH.

THROUGH THE ISSUING OF SEVERAL PAPAL BULLS IN THE 15TH CENTURY, THE CATHOLIC CHURCH ENDORSED THE DOCTRINE OF DISCOVERY, SANCTIONING THE BRUTAL CONQUEST AND COLONIZATION OF NON-CHRISTIAN PEOPLES AND NATIONS OF AFRICA AND THE AMERICAS, WHO WERE CONSIDERED TO BE 'ENEMIES OF CHRIST.'

THE GLOBAL SCALE WITH WHICH THE DOCTRINE OF DISCOVERY EXPRESSED ITSELF IN THE "AGE OF DISCOVERY"—FIRST IN AFRICA, THEN THE AMERICAS, AND BEYOND ---CREATED A UNIFIED CHRISTENDOM, WHICH BECAME THE OPPOSING FORCE AGAINST THE GREAT GLOBAL PLURALITY OF CULTURES.

ALONG WITH SANCTIFYING THE SEIZURE OF NON-CHRISTIAN LANDS, IT ENCOURAGED THE ENSLAVEMENT OF NATIVE, NON-CHRISTIAN PEOPLES IN AFRICA AND THE NEW WORLD; THEREBY SERVING AS THE BASIS AND JUSTIFICATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF DISCOVERY, THE GLOBAL SLAVE TRADE OF THE 15TH AND 16TH CENTURIES, AND THE AGE OF IMPERIALISM.

THIS DOCTRINE GOVERNS UNITED STATES INDIAN LAW EVEN TODAY AND CITED AS RECENTLY AS 2005 IN THE CITY OF SHERRILL V. ONEIDA INDIAN NATION OF NEW YORK.

OUR CHURCH'S ROLE IN BLESSING AND SANCTIONING THE SLAVE TRADE MAKES THIS IN A VERY REAL WAY OUR WORK TO DO AS CHRISTIANS, CATHOLICS AND VOWED WOMEN RELIGIOUS. THIS IS OUR "ORIGINAL" SIN. IT IS OURS TO OWN AND TO REPENT.

IN A RECENT ISSUE OF NETWORK'S NEWSLETTER, DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND CHIEF EQUITY OFFICER, JOAN F. NEAL WROTE IN HER ARTICLE, [The Edge of Solidarity: Renewal Comes from Expanding Our View of the Human Family](#)

“THIS PAST SPRING, THE VATICAN ISSUED A DOCUMENT REPUDIATING THE ‘DOCTRINE OF DISCOVERY,’ WHICH WAS USED TO JUSTIFY COLONIALISM AND ATROCITIES AGAINST INDIGENOUS PEOPLE FOR CENTURIES.

WHILE THIS MOVEMENT BY THE CHURCH IS WELCOME AND LONG OVERDUE, IT IS NOT WITHOUT ITS FLAWS. NOT ONLY DOES THE VATICAN DOCUMENT MINIMIZE THE CHURCH'S ACTIVE AND

SUPPORTIVE ROLE IN COLONIALISM AND THE OPPRESSION AND ABUSE OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE, IT ALSO MAKES NO MENTION OF THE TRANSATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE. ONCE AGAIN, THE INSTITUTIONAL CHURCH HAS FAILED TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR ITS ROLE IN ENSLAVING HUMAN BEINGS.

THIS IS A HELPFUL ILLUSTRATION OF HOW EVEN THOSE WHO SEEK TO BE ALLIES IN THE STRUGGLE FOR JUSTICE IN OUR SOCIETY WILL BE CONFRONTED TIME AND AGAIN BY THE LIMITS THEY PLACE ON SOLIDARITY — BY THE PEOPLE WHOSE STRUGGLES WE FAIL OR CHOOSE NOT TO SEE. SOLIDARITY IS LIKE THE EDGES OF A CANVAS OR PICTURE FRAME. IT CAN BE EXTENDED WIDE TO INCLUDE THE ENTIRE HUMAN FAMILY. OR IT CAN BE NARROWED SO THAT SOME INDIVIDUALS, OR EVEN ENTIRE COMMUNITIES, ARE LEFT STANDING BEYOND THE EDGES OF OUR “FAMILY PICTURE.”

SPIRIT CALL WITHIN A CALL” IS INVITING US TO A DEEP AND PROFOUND REPENTANCE FOR OUR MISDEEDS. IT IS CALLING US TO AN INTENSE TRANSFORMATION OF OUR IDEAS; OUR RIGHTS; OUR MANIFEST DESTINY; CHALLENGING US TO WIDEN THE PICTURE FRAME TO INCLUDE EVERY MEMBER OF THE FAMILY.

POPE FRANCIS' ENCYCLICAL, LAUDATO SI, EXPRESSES A MORE INDEPTH MEANING THAN SIMPLY SAVING OUR PLANET. IT IS ABOUT GOD'S LOVING PLAN FOR ALL OF CREATION.

WE MUST ALSO REALIZE THAT WE CANNOT COMMIT TO ECOLOGICAL JUSTICE WITHOUT COMMITTING TO RACIAL JUSTICE.

ECOLOGICAL INJUSTICE IS THE RESULT OF OUR SUPREMIST BELIEFS THAT ONE GROUP IS SUPERIOR OVER ANOTHER; THEREFORE, THAT GROUP IS ENTITLED, ENDOWED BY THE CREATOR, WITH NO ACCOUNTABILITY TO OTHERS.

OUR SUPREMIST BELIEFS HAVE ALLOWED US TO PILFER THE LAND AND RESOURCES OF OTHER NATIONS AND PEOPLES FOR OUR BENEFIT AND THAT OF FUTURE GENERATIONS TO COME.

THOSE WHO CAME TO THIS COUNTRY SEEKING LIFE, LIBERTY AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS; BRUTALLY TOOK AND INHABITED NATIVE LANDS AND TO THIS DAY CONTINUE TO REAP THE BENEFIT OF THE WEALTH DERIVED FROM THE ENSLAVEMENT OF AFRICANS FOR MORE THAN 240 YEARS.

IN “SPIRIT CALL’S” STATEMENT, WE BEAR WITNESS TO THE FACT THAT WE DESIRE A RADICAL TRANSFORMATION BY ERADICATING THE CANCER OF RACIAL SUPERIORITY.

IN ORDER TO DO THIS WE MUST COMMIT TO A DEEPER AWARENESS AND ANALYSIS OF WHITE PRIVILEGE AND THE BURDEN ENDURED BY THE DISENFRANCHISED AND PEOPLE OF COLOR.

LCWR HAS MADE A COMMITMENT TO EXPOSE, AND SURGICALLY REMOVE THE MALIGNANCY OF RACISM WITHIN ITS ORGANIZATION AND ITS MEMBER CONGREGATIONS, AND MINISTRIES.

THIS WILL REQUIRE DECONSTRUCTING THE OLD PARADYMS AND CREATING NEW ONES.

WE CAN NO LONGER JUST THINK INDIVIDUALLY OR OUT OF OUR OWN RACIAL CONTEXT OR EXPERIENCE.

WE MUST BE REIMFORMED AND THEREFORE REIMAGINED OUT OF OUR SHARED EXPERIENCES SHAPED BY A NEW AND RE-CREATIVE REALITY.

IT MEANS THAT EVERY VOICE IS HEARD AND RESPECTED BUT MOST ESPECIALLY THE VOICES OF OUR MEMBERS OF COLOR.

WE ARE WILLING TO LISTEN TO EACH OTHER’S HOPES, DREAMS, PAINS AND FRUSTRATIONS BECAUSE IT EMBODIES THE WHOLE.

WE ARE WILLING TO OPENLY DISCUSS OUR BIASES, FEARS AND APPREHENSIONS ACROSS RACE, CULTURE AND CLASS AS WE ENTER THIS UNFAMILIAR TERRITORY.

AS WE BEGIN THE PROCESS OF TRANSFORMATION, WE MUST ASK THE HARD QUESTION. WHAT ARE WE WILLING TO DO AS A CONFERENCE, AND WITHIN OUR CONGREGATIONS TO MOVE BEYOND OUR LIMITATIONS AND FEARS IN ORDER TO ADDRESS THE SIN OF RACISM; TO ACKNOWLEDGE HOW WHITE PRIVILEGE AND POWER HAS SHAPED US; AND THEREFORE HAS SHAPED WHO WE ARE AS WOMEN RELIGIOUS?

UNTIL WE FIND THE COURAGE TO ACKNOWLEDGE AND ACCEPT THAT THE MAJORITY OF OUR CONGREGATIONS ARE “RACIALLY-BIASED” IN THAT THEY WERE FOUNDED BY WHITE CATHOLICS TO SERVE THE NEEDS OF WHITE CATHOLICS—AND WHILE THAT IS NOT THE TOTAL SUMMATION OF WHO WE ARE—UNTIL WE ARE ABLE TO ACKNOWLEDGE THIS REALITY, WE WILL NEVER FIND THE COURAGE TO BEGIN THE WORK OF TRANSFORMING OUR INSTITUTIONS INTO ANTI-RACIST, INTERCULTURAL COMMUNITIES.

ONCE WE ACKNOWLEDGE THIS TRUTH, EVERYTHING THAT WE ENVISION WILL BE FROM AN INCLUSIVE UNDERSTANDING OF WHO WE ARE AS THE BODY OF CHRIST; AS A EUCHARISTIC PEOPLE.

WHEN LCWR AND ITS MEMBER CONGREGATIONS WERE UNDER INVESTIGATION BY THE VATICAN, WE STOOD UNITED AS A BODY. WE DID NOT WAIVER. WE SPOKE TRUTH TO POWER. THE WHOLE WORLD WITNESSED OUR STANCE WITH COURAGE AND CONVICTION FOR WHAT WE BELIEVED IN; FOR WHAT WE WERE WILLING TO LAY DOWN OUR LIVES FOR.

WE HAVE WORKED PASSIONATELY ADVOCATING TO END HUMAN TRAFFICKING; WHICH WHETHER YOU KNOW IT OR NOT IS VERY MUCH A RACIAL ISSUE. THE MAJORITY OF THE MORE THAN 40 MILLION BEING TRAFFICKED ARE FROM ASIAN AND AFRICAN NATIONS.

WE MUST ASK THE HARD QUESTION THEN. WHY ARE WE NOT WILLING TO WORK JUST AS PASSIONATELY TO ERADICATE RACISM; TO STAND UP AND SPEAK TRUTH TO POWER REGARDLESS OF THE CONSEQUENCES; TO LAY DOWN OUR LIVES THAT OTHERS MIGHT BE FREE?

THOSE WHO BENEFIT FROM THE PRIVILEGE THAT COMES WITH BEING WHITE IN AMERICA MUST DESIRE AND SEEK A CONVERSION OF HEART; BEING WILLING TO UNDERGO A SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION ACCORDING TO THE WORD OF GOD.

THIS COMMITMENT REQUIRES A PROPHETIC VISION OF THE FUTURE THAT WE DESIRE WITH ALL OF OUR HEARTS TO CREATE.

IT DEMANDS THAT WE DIE TO THE OLD WAYS OF BEING AND BELIEVING IN ORDER THAT WE MIGHT BE REBORN FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS TO BEAR WITNESS TO OUR CATHOLICITY, OUR ONENESS IN THE BODY OF CHRIST; BECOMING A VISIBLE SIGN OF THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF GOD'S GRACE...TO MOVE TOWARDS THE EDGE OF TOMORROW.

WE ARE CALLED TO WORK TIRELESSLY FOR JUSTICE, INCLUSION AND EQUITY; CELEBRATING OUR DIVERSITY WHILE EMBRACING OUR UNITY AS WE MOVE FROM THE POINT OF TOLERANCE TO AUTHENTIC ACCEPTANCE AND INCLUSION OF THE OTHER AS MEMBERS OF THE ONE BODY OF CHRIST.

NOW IS THE ACCEPTABLE TIME TO CREATE AN INCLUSIVE, ANTI-RACIST, INTERCULTURAL TABLE OF WELCOME BY SPEAKING AND ACTING BOLDLY, HONESTLY, AND PROPHETICALLY.

NOW IS OUR ACCEPTABLE TIME TO DO AS LCWR PROPHETICALLY WROTE IN "A SPIRIT CALL WITHIN A CALL" STATEMENT..."THE CRITICAL WORK OF RECOGNIZING RACISM AS A SYSTEMIC CAUSE UNDERLYING MULTIPLE SITUATIONS OF INJUSTICE."

LET NOT OUR WORDS FALL ON ROCKY GROUND BUT RATHER ON RICH, FERTILE SOIL WHERE IT WILL BEAR FRUIT ONE-HUNDRED-FOLD.

THIS IS OUR APPOINTED WORK, SISTERS; THE APPOINTED WORK OF LCWR AND THE APPOINTED WORK OF OUR CONGREGATIONS; NOT WITH WORDS BUT WITH DEEDS; TO LIVE INTO OUR INTEGRITY AS WOMEN COMMITTED TO ERADICATING THE SIN OF RACISM IN OUR HEARTS AND IN OUR COMMUNITIES.

THERE IS NO MORE IMPORTANT WORK FOR US TO DO AS WE ANSWER SPIRIT'S CALL INVITING US ON A JOURNEY OF "PROFOUND TRUTH-TELLING, RECONCILIATION, REPENTANCE AND REPARATIVE JUSTICE" NEEDED FOR SPIRIT-RUAH TO BREATHE US THROUGH TO TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE.

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Anita Baird, DHM

09/25/2023