



Resolutions To Action

LCWR Global Concerns Committee

Volume 28, Number 2

Spring 2019

White Privilege

Bea Tiboldi, OP

EXPERIENCE

People exchange ideas, news, thoughts, and feelings during a conversation. However, bringing up “white privilege” might silence a conversation either because of people’s defensiveness, ignorance, or embarrassment. That is exactly the time we need to stay in the conversation. In the article, “*LCWR Confronts Racism and Religious Life*,” Margaret Alandt, IHM and Pat McCluskey, IHM invite us to have “the courage to own it [white privilege], and the willingness to learn to be accountable to people of color.” Much effort is still needed to follow their advice.

I invite all of us white folks for a quick check-in. When was the last time you wondered if it was safe to take a walk in your neighborhood? When was

the last time you worried about not being served at a restaurant? Have you ever felt that the sales representatives assumed that you were not able to afford what you were about to buy? White privilege is being able to walk in your neighborhood without feeling like you are under scrutiny or fearing you might be held at gunpoint. It is being able to walk into a restaurant without even considering the possibilities you won’t be served. It is being able to window-shop or shop without having to worry about people wondering whether you are likely to shoplift – just to name a few.

Another noteworthy experience of privilege is that white people generally are still able to look to police for protection, while people of color more often fear any encounter with police. Would you have ever thought that it is more dangerous for the child-of-color to have a toy gun

than for a white child? We now know this to be true because of the loss of Tamir Rice’s life. Could you ever imagine your pool party being ruined by the police? Dajerria Becton was held at gunpoint for not obeying a policeman when he told her to leave the party.

White privilege is real. It is an unearned benefit, freedom, or power. White privilege refers to advantages that are being exercised consciously or unconsciously. As the YouTube video, *What Is White Privilege?*

Resolutions to Action is an occasional publication of the Global Concerns Committee of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR). Members of the committee are:

Gemma Doll, OP; Susan Dunning, CSJ; Susan Francois, CSJP; Donna Marie Gribshaw, CDP; Eileen Haynes, SCL; Patricia Siemen, OP; and Ann Scholz, SSND, staff. Please address correspondence to:

LCWR
8737 Colesville Rd. Suite 610
Silver Spring, MD 20910
301-588-4955
fax: 301-587-4575
ascholz@lcwr.org

LCWR
www.lcwr.org

Here's What People On The Street Have To Say claims: "you might not be aware of it if you have it, but you sure ... know if you don't."

SOCIAL ANALYSIS

One might think that we have come far since the Civil Rights Movement. Maybe, maybe not. However, I believe that the smirk on the face of Nick Sandmann, the high school student from Kentucky at the March for Life, was an expression of white privilege in modern USA as he confronted Native American leader and Vietnam Veteran Nathan Phillips.

The First Amendment of the Constitution protects freedom of speech. Does it really protect everyone's freedom of speech? Most of us are able to voice our concerns. People of color may be afraid to voice their concerns because of the fear of getting shot or of being arrested.

White privilege is something that developed slowly, starting when Europeans arrived in what is now the United States. Now, it is our legacy, the norm. White privilege is built into the system. Whites are more likely to be admitted to college or university. Textbooks in schools present the white race as the norm. Many whites are offered a job through personal connections of friends. We see more white people on TV than people of color. Establishing credit, renting an apartment, getting a mortgage, buying a car can too often be easier for whites than for people of color. That's white privilege.

REFLECTION

White privilege reinforces inequities, discrimination, prejudices, and racism.

Those of us with unearned privilege cannot deny white privilege, but it does matter how we use it. As I reflect on having freedom of speech, I recall the times in the novitiate when I was not left alone until I learned how to stay in conversations and voice my concerns. I was empowered to speak up when there was a need for it. We need to continue to call the attention to racial and socioeconomic inequities, and then we need to stay in conversations until a concern is resolved.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church #1929-1948 notes in detail how we are to treat others with dignity and respect. I would like to highlight #1946: "differences should encourage charity." Donte Robinson and Rashon Nelson used their differences to encourage charity. [Robinson and Nelson](#) were handcuffed unjustly simply for waiting for a friend at a Starbucks store. Through social media, they called for attention and justice. Starbucks CEO Kevin Johnson apologized, and he also thanked the two men for "their willingness to reconcile." Once Robinson and Nelson were reconciled and compensated, both sides started to use this experience "to begin a relationship ... and to share learnings and experiences."

Many religious congregations commit themselves to accompany the marginalized in learning centers, through

social and counseling services, in parenting education, through helping asylum-seekers in El Paso, Texas and in Tucson, Arizona, and in many other circumstances. God is asking us "only to do justice and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8) Now more than ever, we need to witness God's love and justice -- with a humble attitude instead of the attitude of superiority.

I have seen good examples of using the privileges to show respect and to treat others with human dignity. In Akron, Ohio, our monthly "Building Racial Harmony" series promotes racial harmony by educating participants about racism, implicit bias, white privilege, and the effects of these, by praying for the elimination of racism, by having conversations, and by challenging ourselves to promote peace and human dignity. One of my sisters, who is white and not afraid of police, used her white privilege to help chase down and corner a young white male who learned a lesson on accountability that day.

ACTION

- Become aware of your privileges, name them and claim them. Use them to help to make the world a better place.
- Use your voice. Speak truth to power. Call attention to unjust situations and try to meet other's needs.
- Be accountable.
- Exercise the spiritual and corporal works of mercy and Catholic Social Teachings.
- Create opportunities for racial and socioeconomic reconciliation.