

July 2020

Volume 6, Issue 2

WE COMMIT OURSELVES:

A social justice newsletter of the Sisters of St. Joseph, Third Order St. Francis

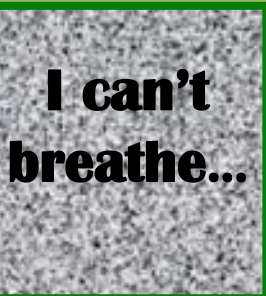
Sr. Cecilia Marie Morton, Sr. Donna Wilhelm, Sr. Dorothy Pagosa, Jennifer Dillon,
Sr. Marjorie White, Sr. Rose Grabowski, Sr. Shannon Fox

—Social Justice Committee



Special Interest Articles:

- Statement on Killing of George Floyd... by CB and SJ Comm
- Why you should stop staying "All Lives Matter"



Individual Highlights:

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Social Justice in the time of Coronavirus

by Sister Dorothy Pagosa

"I can't breathe." These were the last words of George Floyd as we watched the life squeezed out of him after 8 minutes and 46 seconds of torture. They were the last words of Eric Garner during a chokehold for selling loose cigarettes. In this issue we will read about why it is important to say, "Black Lives Matter" and to address other justice issues that have come to the fore.

I can't breathe... This is what happens to those who have died from the Coronavirus. In the past, there has been a concerted effort to stem epidemics – let alone pandemics. This time a disease has become politicized. This is a health issue. Public health officials have been demonized by some; longed for by others to be the ones, rather than politicians, to speak regularly on the virus.

Our congregation has taken the warnings from public health officials seriously and it has borne fruit. To date we have had no outbreaks.

The outbreak of coronavirus has also made stark the additional horrors of racism in our country. Black people have died at twice the rate of white people. Hispanics have died at four times the rate of white people (NPR May 30, 2020). Native Americans have been impacted three times the rate of the white population (PBS May 19, 2020). As of this writing, more than **136,000** Americans have died from the coronavirus.

Over 40 million Americans are unemployed due to the pandemic. I would suggest that the increase in poverty rates and hunger have shown that the economy

was not that great before the pandemic for a vast number of Americans who are not invested in the stock market. Those who depend on health care through their employers are scrambling to get on Medicaid or other options if their employers cannot continue their coverage.

This outbreak also shows the weakness of our healthcare system. Nurses, doctors, EMTs, and other essential workers are heroes and should be paid as such. Hospitals have merged time and time again. The number of hospitals has been reduced because it is based on the number of beds needed on an average basis. Then comes the pandemic. Now might be the time to consider National Health Care, be it expansion of the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare) or Medicare for All.

It is not all negative. I have never seen so many people demonstrate on the issue of racism that included so many blacks, whites, LatinX. They marched in almost every city in this country. Then the entire world joined us. They took a great risk during a pandemic. To date, studies show that the demonstrations have not added to an increase in Covid-19. Most demonstrators wore masks.

I can feel a change in the air. Perhaps we have come to a time of positive change.

Perhaps we will become more concerned with the "minores," with those who are considered the "other" – the marginalized.

May It Be So. ■

Statement on the Killing of George Floyd and Racism in the United States

Issued by Leadership Team and Social Justice Committee

“The ultimate tragedy is not the oppression and cruelty by the bad people but the silence over that by the good people.” Martin Luther King, Jr.



The Leadership Team and the Social Justice Committee of the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Third Order of St. Francis refuse to be silent. We condemn the killing of George Floyd and call for a quick and fair legal process for all involved.

As Franciscans centered on the revelation of the emerging Cosmic Christ, contemplating and celebrating this Divine action in our lives, our deepest desires are to:

- **BUILD** life-giving, trusting communities that cherish each one's personal gifts,
- **EMPOWER** one another to live the truth of Gospel values,
- **BOND** with others in ever widening circles of compassion and peace,
- **SPEAK** to the Church and to the world from our common understanding that there be no outcasts in our experience of life on this earth.

For too long, people of color have been treated as outcasts in this society—their society. This cannot continue. We pledge to raise our voices against all acts of racism. We also call for efforts by our government, police departments and society to address systemic racism which has been left unaddressed for too long.

Leadership Team of the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Third Order of St. Francis
*Sisters Marge White,
 Judith Wood,
 Michelle Wronkowski,
 Barb Krakora*

Social Justice Committee
*Sisters Cecilia Marie Morton,
 Donna Wilhelm,
 Dorothy Pagosa,
 Rose Grabowski,
 Shannon Fox, and
 Ms. Jennifer Dillon*

Note: This statement was issued on June 2, 2020. ■



The Impact of the Coronavirus on Food Insecurity

A Statement from “FEEDING AMERICA” issued on April 22, 2020 notes three impacts on Food Insecurity due to the Coronavirus:

- The Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is impacting vulnerable households in various ways. Many food-insecure individuals have characteristics that put them at a higher risk for severe illness associated with COVID-19.
- Workers who have service occupations or work in the leisure and hospitality industry are more likely to be food insecure and are at risk of

further hardship as many businesses have been forced to close and lay off staff.

- Should unemployment and poverty increase to the level of the Great Recession, **9.9 million** more people may experience food insecurity.

In a more extreme scenario, the number of food-insecure individuals could rise by **17.1 million**.

Demand for charitable food assistance has increased and is expected to continue to increase for the foreseeable future. ■

Why you should stop saying “all lives matter.”

It's a common conversation these days: One person says, “Black lives matter.” Then another responds, “No, all lives matter.”

It's also a complete misunderstanding of what the phrase “black lives matter” means.

The person on the receiving end interprets the phrase as “black lives matter more than any other lives.”

But the point of Black Lives Matter isn't to suggest that black lives should be or are more important than all other lies.

Instead, it's simply pointing out that black people's lives are relatively undervalued in the US—and more likely to be ended by police—and the country needs to recognize that inequality to bring an end to it.

To this end, a better way to understand Black Lives Matter is by looking at its driving phrase as “black lives matter, too.”

So all lives do matter, obviously, but it's one subset of lives in particular that's currently undervalued in America.

The above is an excerpt from an article published in Vox (and American news and opinion website owned by Vox Media). It was written by German Lopez on July 11, 2020.

The full title of his article is, “Why you should stop saying a ‘all lives matter,’ explained in 9 different ways” and here is the link to that article:

[Explained 9 Different Ways](#)

Check out the above link. You'll be glad you did!

Note: The “nine different ways” included on the link are the following:

1. A 3-panel graphic entitled “All Houses Matter”
2. Example: Story of a family meal, “I should get my fair share” instead of nothing
3. Brief video on “*All plates matter*” in a restaurant
4. A tweet: “*There are other diseases too*” (at a cancer fundraiser)
5. Another tweet: “*I too have felt loss*” (at a stranger's funeral)
6. Explanation by a Unitarian Universalist Minister
7. A video explaining what the movement is all about
8. A law professor's response to a student;
9. A brief tweet “*If all lives matter... prove it*”

Hopefully, we can recall this article the next time that we hear or see the phrase “**Black Lives Matter.**” ■



Mladen Antonov/
AFP via Getty Images



The next two pages of this newsletter are directly from the Poor People's Campaign and focus on **Who Is Left Out of the COVID-19 Legislation.**

Topics addressed are: Health, Essential Workers and Direct Payments, Social Welfare, Debt Relief, Immigration and Incarceration, Democracy (this year's elections), and Wealth and Militarism. ■

From Policing to Climate Change, a Sweeping Call for a 'Moral Revolution'

A coalition modeled after the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Poor People's Campaign released an ambitious agenda to help the working poor fight systemic racism and inequality.



To read more about the Poor People's Campaign, go to: www.poorpeoplescampaign.org

THE POOR PEOPLE'S CAMPAIGN

— A NATIONAL CALL FOR MORAL REVIVAL —

WHO IS LEFT OUT OF THE COVID-19 LEGISLATION

Epidemics emerge along the fissures of our society, reflecting not only the biology of the infectious agent, but patterns of marginalization, exclusion, and discrimination. The coronavirus pandemic is no exception. COVID-19 has revealed deep social and economic failures and will reinforce existing health inequities. Before COVID-19, nearly 700 people were dying every day from poverty and inequality, yet the legislative response does not account for the 140 million people who are poor or one emergency closer to being poor today.

Health: The legislation provides for free testing, but it does not go far enough.

- 27.5 million uninsured people, and over 10% of insured people who can't afford to see the doctor, have no guarantee to free or affordable treatment, hospital stays or vaccines.
- 16.8 million health care workers on the front lines are inadequately protected.
- Rural critical access hospitals are few and far between and offer fewer services to the 60 million people living in rural America, who need full-service rural hospitals protected and open.

Essential Workers and Direct Payments: 48% of the workforce including "essential" workers did not receive paid leave, and there are no guarantees for adequate incomes for all.

- Many of the country's 60 million low wage workers are excluded from paid family leave and paid sick leave, because they work for a company with over 500 employees.
- The expanded unemployment insurance cannot keep pace with the rise in unemployment. There were 10 million claims in March 2020 and the Federal Reserve estimates the total by summer will be 47 million, bringing the unemployment rate up to an estimated 32%. During the Great Depression, unemployment was at 25%.
- Direct payments will not reach everyone, and will reach some people up to 5 months late, such as those on supplemental security or disability income, and those without bank accounts, including many indigenous people.
- Many of the 19 million college students fall into a coverage gap for direct payments: if claimed as dependents, they are excluded from the \$1200 for adults; if over 16 years old, they are excluded from the \$500 for children.

Social Welfare: The legislation does not provide adequate housing, food, water or childcare.

- Homeless assistance funding is based on a 500,000 count, but there are 8-11 million people who are homeless on the verge of homelessness. Sweeps and evictions of homeless encampments continue even in this crisis.
- Although 14 million families cannot afford water and hundreds of thousands of rural and indigenous people do not have plumbing, local and state water shut-off moratoriums are only temporary and there is no federal support to guarantee access to water or provide sanitation services.
- 3 million current SNAP recipients did not see increases in their current benefits (\$1.40/meal), despite the need for more support in the months to come, and 700,000 recipients risk losing their existing benefits when work requirements are reinstated.
- The \$3.5 billion allocated for childcare is a fraction of the \$50 billion required to continue childcare, aftercare and early childhood education for poor and low-income children and families.
- 61 million current social security recipients could see lower payments if the Treasury determines there aren't enough resources to replace the decline in the Social Security Trust due to payroll tax deferments.

WWW.POORPEOPLESCAMPAIGN.ORG

THE POOR PEOPLE'S CAMPAIGN

A NATIONAL CALL FOR MORAL REVIVAL

Debt Relief: There is no permanent debt relief for medical debt, housing debt, or student debt.

- Before this pandemic, 72 million people already facing medical debt burdens.
- Millions of low-income families, including nearly half of renters who spend more than 1/3 of their income on rent, will have to re-start payments on rent or mortgages in four to six months.
- 44 million families who carry \$1.5 trillion in student debt will need to re-start payments on October 1.

Immigration and Incarceration: Millions of undocumented people and their children are excluded, while millions more who are incarcerated and detained have no safety protections.

- 11 million undocumented immigrants, their 5 million citizen children, and some 4 million immigrant taxpayers who use an ITIN, are all ineligible for the COVID-19 legislation and its emergency provisions to date.
- 2.3 million incarcerated people, and 52,000 people in detention centers, are at increased risk due to crowded and unsanitary conditions and lack of access to medical treatment.

Democracy This year's elections need \$2 billion for resources to ensure voter participation, but the legislation only provides \$400 million.

- The right to vote for 52 million eligible poor and low-income voters is not protected in the 2020 elections, due to inadequate funds to support voting by mail and extending voting periods.
- Most states are bound by law to balance their budgets. The legislation granted states \$200 billion, but many states relied on federal resources to meet their budgets even before the crisis. States also raised 48% of their revenue from income tax and sales tax, both of which will decline sharply now. Without more support, states will start layoffs, cutting programs, and take other actions that will deepen the economic fallout from the pandemic.

Wealth Inequality and Militarism: Corporations and Wall Street were well provided for and the military received resources it didn't need.

- The legislation provided \$500 billion for corporations, but the oversight requirements may be ignored, allowing investors to profit at the expense of workers and taxpayers.
- Before the legislation was passed, the Federal Reserve released over \$1.5 trillion in low-interest loans to banks and financial institutions.
- Approximately \$10 billion was allocated to the Pentagon and millions of people globally face economic sanctions which make it difficult to receive crucial resources to fight this virus. The sanctions must be lifted immediately.

WE CANNOT RETURN TO NORMAL.

Sign our petition at moveon.org/poverty to demand that the elected leaders of this country support the millions of people who are in dire need of critical attention immediately and address the depths of the crises that have been revealed in this pandemic.

Read more from the Poor People's Moral Budget at poorpeoplescampaign.org/resource/poor-peoples-moral-budget
Everybody has the right to live

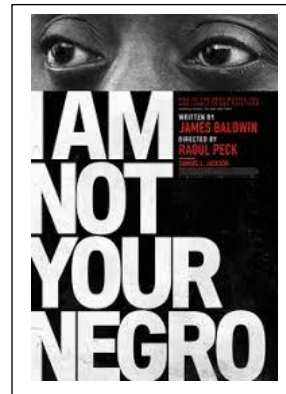
[WWW.POORPEOPLES CAMPAIGN.ORG](https://www.poorpeoplescampaign.org)



Resource Recommendations

From Sister Dorothy Pagosa

Three Movies:



“Stemming from our Franciscan values and the fact that all life is interconnected, members, vowed and non-vowed, are encouraged to be engaged in ministry with those living on the margins of society and struggling to live with dignity.”

SSJ-TOSF Congregational Commitments
26th General Chapter

“Life’s most urgent question is: What are you doing for others?”

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Books and Essays:

- What Does It Mean to Be White?***
by Robin DiAngelo, PhD
- Between the World and Me***
by Ta-Nehisi
- Tears We Cannot Stop: A Sermon to White America***
by Michael Eric Dyson
- White Like Me: Reflections from a Privileged Son***
by Tim Wise
- Also, other Essays and Videos that can be found at www.timwise.org

REMEMBER...

We welcome your submissions in the form of

- “Sightings”
- Brief write-ups of your activities, suggestions for workshops, books, articles, films, resources, etc.

Note: The **next issue** of *We Commit Ourselves* will be published in the Fall.

We will let you know later to which Committee Member items can be sent, and when they will be due.

~ Your Social Justice Committee