AQUINAS INSTITUTE OF THEOLOGY

TRAUMA-INFORMED PREACHING AND RACIAL JUSTICE:

FINDING OUR VOICE IN THE AGE OF BREATHLESSNESS

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Thesis Project Presented to the Faculty of the
Aquinas Institute of Theology, Saint Louis, Missouri
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree Doctor of Ministry in Preaching

2024

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To my wife, Lyndy, who has always encouraged and helped me find my voice

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Acknowledgments

I am profoundly grateful to Fr. Gregory Heille, O.P., and Fr. Manuel Williams, C.R., who inspired me to work on this thesis project during the course "Preaching and Racism: Finding Our Way Forward." To Fr. Gregory Heille, my advisor, and Fr. Kevin O'Brien, S.J., my reader, your thoughtful comments and suggestions helped me go further than I thought possible. I owe a profound debt of gratitude to the Doctor of Ministry faculty who taught me: Fr. Gregory Heille, O.P., Sr. Sara Fairbanks, O.P., Fr. Jay Harrington, O.P., Dr. Nathan Chase, Dr. Brian Matz, and Dr. Ashley Theuring. A special thank you to Joe Pisani, my editor, and Astrid Alvarez and Valerie Bien-Aime, my observers, for their patience, kindness, and belief that we were doing something important. I am incredibly grateful for the ten priests and deacons who dedicated ten weeks of their lives toward learning to preach about racial justice. The training program presenters made significant contributions in the classroom: Dr. Ashley Theuring, Dr. Shannen Dee Williams, Erin Neil, and Fr. Reggie Norman. Additionally, the focus group participants provided invaluable insights and feedback. To the 2020 Doctor of Ministry Cohort members, thank you for your prayers and steadfast friendship. I am eternally grateful to Bishop Frank J. Caggiano, Bishop of Bridgeport, Connecticut, for his steadfast support during my studies and commitment to racial justice. Finally, I thank God for my parents, Patrick and Mary Ann, the best witnesses of the faith, and my wife Lyndy and my children, Kristi, Patrick, Robby, Brianne, and Sabrina, whose love and encouragement were a constant source of strength.

Glossary

Racial Justice. "The systematic fair treatment of people of all races, resulting in equitable opportunities and outcomes for all. Racial justice – or racial equity – goes beyond "anti-racism." It is not just the absence of discrimination and inequities, but also the presence of deliberate systems and supports to achieve and sustain racial equity through proactive and preventative measures."[1]

Racism. "A belief that race is a fundamental determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race."[2]

Structural Racism. "Laws, rules, or official policies in a society that result and support a continued unfair advantage to some people and unfair or harmful treatment of others based on race."[3]

Systemic Racism. "The oppression of a racial group to the advantage of another as perpetuated by inequity within interconnected systems (such as political, economic, and social system)."[4]

[1] "Racial Justice in Education: Key Terms and Definitions," National Education Association, accessed July 4, 2023, https://www.nea.org/professional-excellence/student-engagement/tools-tips/racial-justice-education-key-terms-and.

[2] "racism," Merriam-Webster Dictionary, accessed July 4, 2023, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/racism.

[3] "structural racism," Cambridge Dictionary, accessed July 4, 2023, https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/structural-racism.

[4] "systemic racism," Merriam-Webster Dictionary, accessed July 4, 2023, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/systemic%20racism.

Theology of Trauma. "Trauma theology is a theological discipline that seeks to both do theological justice to traumatic experiences and also to reimagine theologies in the light of such experiences. Whilst suffering has always been of interest to Christian theology, trauma theology distinguishes between suffering and trauma, noting the specific impact trauma has on the embodied life of trauma survivors. Envisioning trauma experiences as an earthquake that shatters theological landscapes, trauma theology sees its work as that of construction of reimagined theologies in the wake of these experiences."[5]

Trauma. "Any disturbing experience that results in significant fear, helplessness, dissociation, confusion, or other disruptive feelings intense enough to have a long-lasting negative effect on a person's attitudes, behavior, and other aspects of functioning."[6]

White Privilege. "The set of social and economic advantages that white people have by virtue of their race in a culture characterized by racial inequality."[7]

Xenophobia. "Fear and hatred of strangers or foreigners or of anything that is strange or foreign."[8]

[5] Karen O'Donnell, "Trauma Theology," In *St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology*, edited by Brendan N. Wolfe et al. University of St Andrews, 2022–. Article published April 6, 2023. https://www.saet.ac.uk/Christianity/TraumaTheology.

[6] "APA Dictionary of Psychology: Trauma," American Psychological Association, accessed July 4, 2023, https://dictionary.apa.org/trauma.

[7] "white privilege," Merriam-Webster Dictionary, accessed July 4, 2023, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/white%20privilege.

[8] "xenophobia," Merriam-Webster Dictionary, accessed July 4, 2023, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/xenophobia.

ABSTRACT

TRAUMA-INFORMED PREACHING AND RACIAL JUSTICE: FINDING OUR VOICE IN THE AGE OF BREATHLESSNESS

Toole, Patrick, B.S.E.E., M.B.A., D.Min. Aquinas Institute of Theology, Saint Louis, Missouri, 2024.

In the aftermath of the tragic killing of George Floyd and subsequent racial unrest that divided the nation, Catholic preachers have largely remained silent. The preachers in my diocese have also been reluctant to speak out. I developed and tested a training program to prepare and motivate priests and deacons within the Diocese of Bridgeport, Connecticut, to preach on racial justice through trauma-informed instruction. Trauma-informed instruction includes the science of trauma and its effects on the body, along with a theological perspective and preaching structures based on these insights.

The first chapter outlines the thesis project's genesis, ministerial context, problem, purpose, hypothesis, assumptions, and limitations. Chapter 2 investigates the thesis project's interdisciplinary framework. This chapter examines the relationship between fear and racism, the relevance of the trauma recovery process to racial justice preaching, and advice for preachers based on insights from trauma-informed psychology. Chapter 3 explores my theological framework. This chapter uses Hans Urs von Balthasar's Holy Saturday theology as a metaphor for racial trauma survivors. The chapter also applies trauma-informed theology to racial justice preaching. Chapter 4 articulates the thesis' homiletic foundation. This chapter discusses trauma-informed preaching and racial trauma, analyzes preaching on racial justice, and presents preaching structures and methods for challenging topics, such as racism.

Five priests and five deacons attended my racial justice training program in Bridgeport, Connecticut, from October 5 through December 15, 2023. Chapter 5 presents this ministerial intervention in detail. Chapter 6 presents the thesis study's results, including quantitative and qualitative data triangulated from multiple sources that support the hypothesis that trauma-informed instruction prepares and motivates preachers to speak on racial justice. The chapter also examines lessons learned and suggests areas of improvement for future training programs. It concludes with a discussion of future opportunities.

Chapter 1

Contextual Overview of the Project

There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

—Gal. 3:28

Introduction

In November 2018, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops published *Open Wide Your Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love—A Pastoral Letter Against Racism*. The pastoral letter invites us to a "conversion of hearts, minds, and institutions to address the evil of racism that still exists in our communities."[9]

The Conference said in no uncertain terms: "We pray that the reader will join us in striving for the end of racism in all its forms, that we may walk together humbly with God and with all of our brothers and sisters in a renewed unity. For there is no place for racism in the hearts of any person; it is a perversion of the Lord's will for men and women, all of whom were made in God's image and likeness."[10]

Since the letter's publication, our nation is still haunted by racial violence, which seems to have escalated. The victims' names echo throughout the media and are invoked by countless protestors in cities and towns: Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Tory Brown,

[9] "Open Wide Our Hearts Bulletin Insert," United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2018, https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/racism/upload/open-wide-our-hearts-bulletin-insert.pdf, 1.

[10] National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Open Wide Yours Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love—A Pastoral Letter Against Racism* (Washington DC: United Sates Catholic Conference, 2018), 3.

and Tyre Nichols. These are a few of the unarmed African Americans killed by law enforcement. Racist hatred has also incited more mass murders. On May 14, 2022, Payton S. Gendron, a white supremacist, shot and killed six Black women and four Black men at a grocery store in Buffalo, New York. On August 26, 2023, a lone gunman killed three Black people at a Dollar General store in Jacksonville, Florida. The shooter left a racist manifesto expressing his hatred for Black people. Many People of Color live and work in racially biased institutions, structures, and organizations, resulting in economic inequality, educational disparity, employment barriers, and criminal justice inequity.

The United States Bishops' pastoral letter recognized when the Church "stood by silently when grave acts of injustice were committed."[11] Unfortunately, that silence continues from the ambo. Rarely do Catholic clergy preach on racial justice. The time has come for Catholic preachers to no longer remain silent in the face of what the bishops describe as "one particularly and persistent destructive form of evil."[12]

Thesis Project Genesis

George Floyd's murder on May 25, 2020, was a defining moment in our nation's history, and I would add in the history of the American Church. It caused me to contemplate the following questions: Why are Black bodies harmed at a grossly disproportionate rate in the United States? Why would a seemingly intelligent, rational white police officer shoot a Black person running away, sitting in a car, or playing in a park? Most importantly: Why do we, as preachers, mostly remain silent?

[11] National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Open Wide Yours Hearts,* 22.

[12] Ibid., 31.

Although people in my diocese protested in modest numbers for several months, the outrage subsided, and not much seemed to change. Black Lives Matter signs were displayed on lawns, storefronts, and offices, but many were gone by year-end. The coronavirus pandemic demonstrably affected the number of protesters because many feared leaving their homes. The pandemic, however, provided further evidence of the disparity between People of Color and the white population. By the end of the pandemic's first year, the State of Connecticut reported that the age-adjusted COVID death rate per 100,000 for Blacks was 240; for Hispanics, it was 184, while for whites, it was only 101.[13] Many racial minority individuals held front-line jobs, requiring them to work through the pandemic, which in part explains this significant statistical difference. Although the coronavirus pandemic consumed my time at work and home, the questions surrounding George Floyd's death continued to trouble me grievously.

Then, during the summer of 2021, I attended a course titled "Preaching and Racism: Finding Our Way Forward." The readings and class discussions opened my eyes to the historical, structural, and systemic injustices caused by racial injustice in the United States. I experienced *metanoia*—a spiritual change of heart and mind. I realized that I am a beneficiary of white privilege and a person of power in the Church and my community. This led me to an incontrovertible conclusion: I must collaborate with my Black sisters and brothers to find solutions. There was no other way.

I was ashamed to admit that in my lifetime, I had done nothing to help eradicate the structural and systemic sin of racism. I was moved to action. I volunteered to chair a

[13] "COVID-19 Cases and Deaths by Race/Ethnicity – ARCHIVE," CT Data, January 1, 2021, https://data.ct.gov/Health-and-Human-Services/COVID-19-Cases-and-Deaths-by-Race-Ethnicity-ARCHIV/7rne-efic/data.

new diocesan committee on racial justice; I hired a full-time diocesan Coordinator of Multi-cultural Diversity and helped found a tuition-free college in partnership with Fairfield University for Students of Color in Bridgeport, Connecticut. And now, I will focus on assisting clergy in preaching about racial justice.

Trauma-Informed Preaching in the Age of Breathlessness

The title of my thesis project is *Trauma-Informed Preaching and Racial Justice: Finding Our Voice in the Age of Breathlessness.*[14] Preaching racial justice through "trauma-informed theology" aims to help heal those wounded by traumatic racist experiences and to awaken the hearts of those unaware or indifferent to racism. Contrary to preaching a triumphant Gospel, this approach gives people hope in the resurrection while honoring the trauma that remains embodied within all of us. No one escapes this Earth without experiencing trauma, either personally or communally. Current world events testify to the traumatic intensity around us. The coronavirus pandemic, war in Ukraine, economic instability, natural disasters, gun violence, human trafficking, and racism leave us breathless. Trauma-informed preaching guides and encourages preachers to find their voice against racial injustice in this Age of Breathlessness, characterized by increased anxiety and fear. We often lose our breath as we cope with the violence, unrest, crises, and natural disasters surrounding us. This feeling of breathlessness, in turn, leads to a greater degree of trauma, which the American Psychological Association describes as "any disturbing experience that results in significant fear, helplessness, disassociation,

[14] Patrick Saint-Jean, *The Crucible of Racism: Ignatian Spirituality and the Power of Hope* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2022), Saint-Jean, *The Crucible of Racism*, 17.

confusion or other disruptive feelings intense enough to have a long-lasting negative effect on a person's attitudes, behavior and other aspects of functioning."[15]

Ministry Context

The Diocese of Bridgeport serves 370,000 Catholics and encompasses the geographic location of Fairfield County in the southwest corner of Connecticut. My investigation focuses on the clergy who preach at the predominantly white parishes in the Diocese of Bridgeport. This subset represents 90 percent of the diocesan clergy and 85 percent of the total diocesan parishes. The Diocese of Bridgeport has 75 parishes, 116 non-retired diocesan priests, and 48 non-retired permanent deacons. The predominantly white parishes are socioeconomically middle to upper middle class, mainly in suburban areas. There are no predominantly African American parishes in the diocese. Within the presbyterate is one African American priest, one priest from the Dominican Republic, and three priests from Haiti. The diaconate has two deacons from Haiti.

I serve as the Chancellor and Secretary of the Curia for the Diocese of Bridgeport. All administrative departments report to me, except for the Clergy Office, Legal Office, and Tribunal. I am also on the Council of Deans and the Council of Episcopal Vicars for Ethnic Communities. In addition, I chair the Committee on Racial Justice and teach the final homiletics course in the permanent diaconate formation program. The Most Reverend Frank J. Caggiano, the diocesan bishop, supports and endorses my research and this thesis project.

[15] "APA Dictionary of Psychology: Trauma," American Psychological Association, accessed July 4, 2023, https://dictionary.apa.org/trauma.

Exposing a Problem

The problem I will address in my research study is that clergy in my diocese rarely preach about the sin of racism, which is undoubtedly a social and political issue of grave concern. Using Microsoft Forms as a mechanism for polling, I sent an electronic questionnaire to a representative sample of diocesan priests and deacons to understand better how often, when, and what deters them from preaching about racial justice. I modeled the questionnaire after one developed by Rev. Dr. Leah D. Schade, Associate Professor of Preaching and Worship at Lexington Theological Seminary in Kentucky. In 2016, Schade, a Lutheran minister, conducted a national survey of mainline Protestant ministers titled "Preaching About Controversial Justice Issues."[16]

Twenty-two clergy responded to my inquiries, representing 13 percent of the active clergy (non-retired). The questionnaire is in Appendix 1. The following were the results (Fig.1):

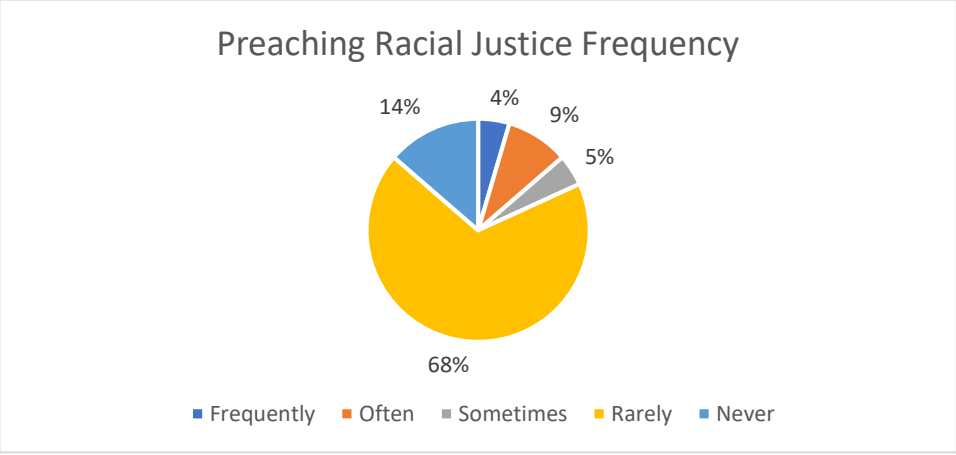

Figure 1. The frequency diocesan clergy preach on racial justice.

[16] Leah D. Schade, *Preaching in the Purple Zone: Ministry in the Red-Blue Divide* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019), Chapter 1.

The data supports my problem statement. Most clergy in the Diocese of Bridgeport, 82 percent of the respondents, claimed they rarely or never preach about racial justice.

The data further indicates that national current events are the most prominent catalyst for preaching about racial justice (Fig.2). Fifty-five percent indicated they preach about racial justice when there is a national issue. The Church's responsibility to preach on this issue and local events also influence racial justice preaching.

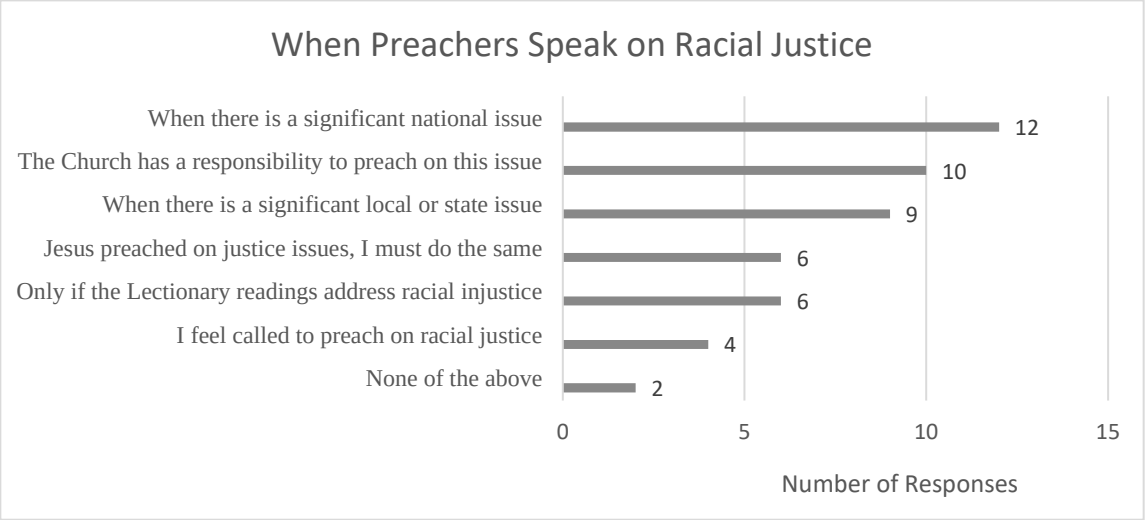

Figure 2. The motivation for clergy in the Diocese of Bridgeport to preach about racial justice.

Among the preachers responding to my survey, most preachers, 59 percent, are concerned about being too political (Fig. 3). Given the polarized political climate in the United States, clergy are hesitant to be perceived as taking sides on an issue that has become highly politicized. Many clerics also want to avoid creating division in their congregations. Despite the many reservations clergy may have about preaching racial justice, the evidence is clear that racial injustice exists within the Diocese of Bridgeport. When asked to agree with the statement, "Race relations in the United States are

generally good," only 25.3 percent of the people in my diocese agreed with this statement.[17]

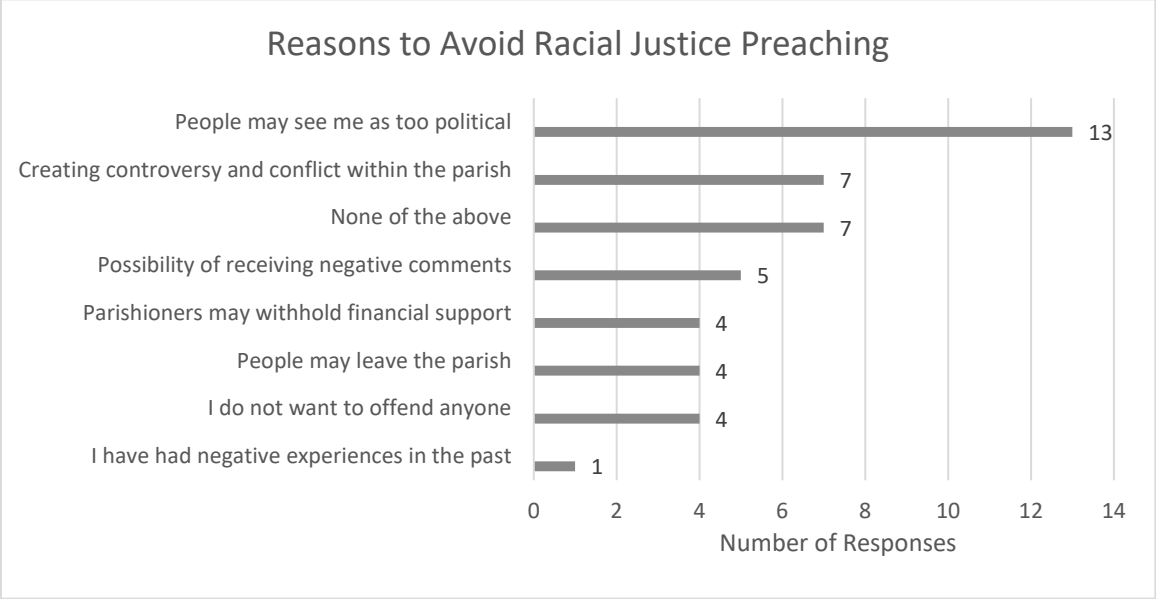

Figure 3. The reasons why clergy in the Diocese of Bridgeport choose not to preach racial justice.

Fairfield County demographics are 64 percent white, 19 percent Hispanic, 10 percent Black, 5 percent Asian, and 2 percent other.[18] The white households' medium income ($122,318) is twice the median income for Black ($62,777) and Hispanic households ($59,676).[19] The disparity is even more significant when comparing parishes. The demographics within the parish boundaries of our wealthiest parish are 4 percent Hispanic and 1 percent Black. The median income is $174,151.[20] The demographics within the parish boundaries of the poorest parish are 42 percent Hispanic and 43 percent

[17] Mission Insite, The ReligiousInsite Report: Diocese of Bridgeport (2021), 16.

[18] Mission Insite, The ExecutiveInsite Report: Diocese of Bridgeport (2022), 3.

[19] Mission Insite, The FullInsite Report: Diocese of Bridgeport (2022),15.

[20] Mission Insite, The FullInsite Report: St. Aloysius Parish (2022),13, 20.

Black. The median income is $40,322.[21] Structural racism, as evidenced by severe economic disparity, is a significant issue for my diocese.

The State of Connecticut prison system also reflects significant racial bias. A study based on the 2010 United States Census determined the state's population was 71 percent white, 13 percent Hispanic, and 10 percent Black. The prison population, however, was 31 percent white, 29 percent Hispanic, and 41 percent Black.[22] The number of people incarcerated per 100,000 by racial/ethnic group demonstrates the extraordinary disparity. The rate for the white population was 241, while the rate for the Black population was 2,260.[23] Thus, comparatively, the incarceration rate for Black people was 9.4 times that of white people.

In addition, the state's educational system shows extreme disparity between the white, Hispanic, and Black populations. In Connecticut, the percentage of residents with bachelor's degrees is white—45 percent; Black—23 percent; and Hispanic—18 percent. The percentages are even lower for urban cities within the diocese. For example, in Bridgeport, they are: white—36 percent; Black—18 percent; and Hispanic—9 percent.[24] Twice as many white people have bachelor's degrees than Black people. The disparity is even worse for Hispanics, where the ratio is four to one. Numerous studies have shown

[21] Mission Insite, The FullInsite Report: Blessed Sacrament Parish (2022),13, 20.

[22] "Connecticut Profile," Prison Policy Initiative, accessed August 27, 2023, https://www.prisonpolicy.org/profiles/CT.html.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Cynthia Willner, "Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Earnings, Employment, and Education in Connecticut," CT Data Collaborative, June 16, 2022, https://www.ctdata.org/acs-racial-and-ethnicity-disparities.

poor educational advancement for People of Color translates into fewer job prospects and economic poverty.

I witnessed this phenomenon firsthand while working at a Fortune 500 technology company headquartered in New York. We recruited the most competitive students from the top universities for professional positions. Since Students of Color represented less than 6 percent of the total student population at these schools, this limited our pool of candidates. The inability to hire Students of Color for desirable entry-level professional positions resulted in underrepresentation at all managerial levels.

A recent study by McKinsey & Company found that although the percentage of Black people in the workforce is 12 percent, managerial positions are only 7 percent, and the senior vice president level is 4 percent to 5 percent. Furthermore, Fortune 500 companies have only three Black chief executive officers. If the Fortune 500 chief executive officers represented the diversity in the general population, there would be sixty Black chief executive officers instead of three.[25] As a result, one of the most significant challenges our society continues to face is creating pathways to higher education for Black and Hispanic students.

Our healthcare system exhibits the same pervasive racial inequity. One story can illuminate the issue—and how it has caused anxiety within the African American community. Two years ago, a nurse from one of the major medical centers in Bridgeport told me about an African American woman she met in the Emergency Department. The woman accompanied her mother to the hospital. While the doctor examined her mother,

[25] "Race in the Workplace," McKinsey & Company, February 21, 2021, https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/race-in-the-workplace-the-black-experience-in-the-us-private-sector.

her daughter told the nurse that her mother insisted on changing her clothes before going to the hospital. “Wait, I have to put on my Sunday best,” she said. The daughter asked, “Why?” Her mother responded that she was afraid the physician would not examine her if she looked like “a poor Black woman.” As much as we think we have made progress in socioeconomic equality in the Diocese of Bridgeport, our Sisters and Brothers of Color carry the wounds of racial injustice caused by generational trauma.

Since George Floyd died in police custody on May 25, 2020, there have been countless opportunities to speak out against racial injustice when we preach. The evidence that generational, structural, and systemic racial inequalities exist in my diocese is overwhelming. Yet, most preachers avoid the necessity because they feel uncomfortable or, tragically, do not see the need.

Purpose

This thesis project aims to create and test a preaching training program for clergy at predominantly white parishes so they will be prepared and motivated to preach on racial justice. I see an overwhelming need to address this issue because no diocesan program urges preachers to speak out on racial equity. The diocesan racial justice committee endorses this thesis as one of its strategic initiatives. In addition, this thesis project aligns with an essential priority of my bishop to build a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive Church.

Hypothesis

By studying racism through trauma-informed instruction, clergy will become prepared and motivated to preach on racial justice. Trauma-informed instruction includes the science of trauma and its effects on the body and a new theological perspective and

preaching based on these insights. Preachers must understand how racial trauma affects individuals and formulate their homilies with these considerations in mind.

Assumptions

My research indicates that preachers are afraid to speak about racism because it is political, polarizing, challenging, and personal. Therefore, a primary goal of this intervention is to create a safe space for preachers to express their feelings and desire to speak about racial justice. Moreover, a trauma-informed program will allow preachers to talk about racial justice in a human way, not political; empathetic, not judgmental; and communal, not divisive.

Limitations

Although the preachers who take the training program represent the diocesan clergy (priests and deacons) of the Diocese of Bridgeport, no more than twelve participants can attend the training program. This limitation exists to help foster an open and collaborative environment for discussion. This thesis project will draw from the history of racism in the United States, the response by the United Sates Catholic bishops, and Ignatian spirituality but will not cover these academic areas. I will only address trauma-informed preaching on racial justice to predominantly white congregations.

Chapter Outline

Following this first chapter, which describes the thesis project's genesis, title, ministerial context, problem, purpose, hypothesis, assumptions, and limitations, Chapter 2, titled "The Psychology and Impact of Racial Trauma," will outline the thesis project's interdisciplinary framework. The chapter begins by defining racial trauma and its relationship to fear and racism. Then, I describe the recovery process and its relevance to

racial justice preaching. The chapter concludes with advice for preachers based on insights from trauma-informed psychology. By understanding trauma from a psychological perspective, preachers will acquire a basic understanding of racial trauma, its effects, and some potential ways to move forward.

Chapter 3 addresses the theological framework: "Trauma-Informed Theology and Racial Justice." The chapter begins by defining trauma-informed theology. I then explore Hans Urs von Balthasar's Holy Saturday theology as a metaphor for racial trauma survivors within this Age of Breathlessness. Balthasar reminds us that Holy Saturday represents a middle state between death and resurrection. God enters the abyss of our suffering in this middle state and transforms from within. Then, the chapter examines racial justice from a liturgical perspective by applying trauma-informed theology to the liturgical symbols of kneeling and the cross. Both offer a compelling theological image of the sacredness of breath. The chapter concludes by exploring the question, "Why does God allow racism?" within the context of the theodicy problem. The goal is to give preachers a trauma-informed theological perspective on racism.

Chapter 4 articulates the thesis' homiletic foundations: "Preaching and Racial Justice." The chapter has three sections. The first section discusses trauma-informed preaching from the perspective of racial trauma. The second section explores the works of preachers regularly speaking on racial justice. The final section presents preaching structures and methods for challenging topics such as racism. This chapter aims to give preachers a foundation, structure, and examples for developing sermons on racial justice.

Chapter 5, "Trauma-Informed Preaching and Racial Justice: A Training Program to Find Our Voice in the Age of Breathlessness," describes the training program in detail,

including data collection triangulation through questionnaires, focus groups, and field notes. The course consists of four consecutive weekly 90-minute classroom sessions, followed by a practice homily and, finally, liturgical preaching on racial justice. The chapter concludes with the thesis' ethical and data analysis procedures.

Chapter 6, "Results, Insights, and Future Opportunities," presents the thesis study's results, including the participants' preparedness and motivation levels. The results include qualitative and quantitative data gathered throughout the process. The chapter also describes lessons learned and suggests areas of improvement for future training programs. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion on disseminating the material, including areas for future research.

Chapter 2

The Psychology and Impact of Racial Trauma

As young Bertha sat in her bedroom one evening, she heard police questioning a male teenager outside who had recently moved back to Canton, Mississippi, after living in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Bertha had known the boy when they were children. The police officers felt the boy was being disrespectful. "He refused to be courteous, to say, 'Yes, sir. No, sir.' The police shot him."[26] Wounded, the boy ran through Bertha's yard and died on the lawn of an adjacent property. The elderly woman who lived there said, "We got to soak up the blood so the children won't be scared."[27] This tragic event was just one of many racial incidents that traumatized Bertha Elizabeth Bowman, better known as Servant of God Sister Thea Bowman. The Catholic Church gives the title Servant of God to those whose cause for sainthood is under investigation. Bowman is the first, and to date only, African American woman to profess vows with the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration.[28]

Growing up in Canton, Mississippi, during the 40s and 50s, Bowman witnessed countless examples of overt racism. There were separate drinking fountains for Blacks

[26] Charles Smith and John Feister, *Thea's Song: The Life of Thea Bowman* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009), 28.

[27] Ibid., 29.

[28] "Sister Thea Bowman's Story," Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, accessed November 20, 2023, https://www.fspa.org/content/about/sister-thea-bowman.

and whites. The town had segregated neighborhoods, schools, and even cemeteries. Bowman's mother wanted her to have a better life, so she sent her to a newly established Catholic school. Bowman, a Methodist, converted to Catholicism at nine because of the kindness, generosity, and love the white religious sisters showed their students.[29]

Soon after her baptism, she attended Mass at the "white" Catholic church in Canton. As she sat in an empty pew halfway down the middle aisle, an older woman explained to her that the congregation had bought the last pew expressly for Black people and then escorted her to the back.[30] Sadly, Bowman's experiences of racism are all too common for countless generations of African Americans.

Racial trauma can radically transform a few survivors, such as Bowman, allowing them to transcend the injustices they experienced. They see life in new ways and sometimes use what they have learned through suffering to help others and advocate for social change. However, many will find themselves locked in a state of fear, unable to move toward recovery. If preachers better understand racial trauma from a psychological perspective, they will be able to help survivors feel safe, supported, and welcomed by the Christian community.

This chapter begins by defining trauma and the relationship between trauma, fear, and racism. Then, I analyze the traumatic recovery process and its relevance to trauma-informed preaching and the pursuit of racial justice. The chapter concludes with advice for preachers and offers some words that will be helpful in addressing racial trauma survivors in a homily—and words the preacher should avoid.

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[29] Smith and Feister, *Thea's Song*, 36.

[30] Ibid., 6.

Trauma

Dr. Judith Herman, psychiatrist and former professor at Harvard Medical School, studied the history of psychological trauma from the late nineteenth century through modern times, focusing on women who were victims of sexual abuse and men who served in the armed forces during wartime. Herman defines trauma as follows:

> Psychological trauma is an affliction of the powerless. At the moment of trauma, the victim is rendered helpless by overwhelming force. When the force is that of nature, we speak of disasters. When the force is that of other human beings, we speak of atrocities. Traumatic events overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection, and meaning.[31]

Herman's research demonstrates that violence against the human body psychologically forces the victim to disassociate from the present and leaves the person with a shattered self-image. According to Herman, "Traumatized people feel utterly abandoned, utterly alone, cast out of the human and divine systems of care and protection that sustain life. Thereafter, a sense of alienation, of disconnection, pervades every relationship, from the most intimate familial bonds to the most abstract affiliations of community and religion. When trust is lost, traumatized people feel that they belong more to the dead than to the living."[32] Also, many victims falsely believe what happened to them was their fault and are overcome by guilt. As a result, they are at high risk of turning to drugs and alcohol to numb the pain.[33]

A contemporary of Herman, Dr. Bessel van der Kolk, a psychiatrist and president of the Trauma Research Foundation in Brookline, Massachusetts, studied the biological

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[31] Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1997), 48.

[32] Ibid., 75.

[33] Ibid., 65.

and neurological traumatic effects in soldiers and incest victims. His ground-breaking research enabled new treatments for patients suffering from a specific traumatic disorder, which is known as Posttraumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSD). The American Psychiatric Association defines PTSD as follows: "Posttraumatic stress disorder is a psychiatric disorder that may occur in people who have experienced or witnessed a traumatic event, series of events or set of circumstances. An individual may experience this as emotionally or physically harmful or life-threatening and may affect mental, physical, social, and/or spiritual well-being. Examples include natural disasters, serious accidents, terrorist acts, war/combat, rape/sexual assault, historical trauma, intimate partner violence and bullying."[34]

Van der Kolk was among the first psychiatrists to test psychoactive drugs, such as Prozac, and analyze brain scans of PTSD patients. He found that drugs did not help his patients.[35] However, the brain scans he studied allowed him to better understand what happens neurologically to people with PTSD, which led him to discover more effective treatment options such as Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) therapy. He writes, "For the first time we could watch the brain as it processed memories, sensations, and emotions and begin to map the circuits of mind and consciousness."[36] By studying these images, he learned that when trauma victims have flashbacks, the right hemisphere of the brain overfunctions, and the left hemisphere shuts down.[37] The person

[34] "What is Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)?", American Psychiatric Association, accessed November 21, 2023, https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/ptsd/what-is-ptsd.

[35] Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York: Penguin Books, 2015), 35.

[36] Ibid., 39.

[37] Ibid., 44.

relives the experience as if it were in the present and is unable to discern that the danger has long passed. The person reacts emotionally and loses the ability to be rational. This imbalance in the brain also makes it difficult for them to describe the experience in words. When they speak of the traumatic event, they talk about their victimization rather than their feelings, emotions, and the reality of their situation.[38]

Van der Kolk also discovered a direct connection between fear and trauma. He found that when a trauma survivor encounters an image, sound, or thought related to their traumatic experience, the amygdala within the brain's limbic system, which controls our behavioral and emotional responses, warns of immediate danger, even though the event occurred years ago.[39] The person's body produces stress hormones, which increase "blood pressure, heart rate, and oxygen intake—preparing the body for fight or flight."[40] The body responds as if in immediate danger, even though the person may be completely safe.

Dr. Alisha Moreland-Capuia, a psychiatrist and faculty member at McLean Hospital—Harvard Medical School, extended Van der Kolk's insights to explain the connection between fear, trauma, and racism. In addition, Moreland-Capuia postulates that racial trauma could be a form of PTSD. She writes, "Williams, Metzger, Leins, and DeLapp (2018) evaluated racial trauma in the context of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* fifth Edition (DSM-5) framework, calling attention to racism as a form of trauma that may fit into the posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

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[38] Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps Score*, 47.

[39] Ibid., 42.

[40] Ibid.

category. The article contends that the psychological sequelae of racial trauma from conditions like work-related discrimination, police brutality, healthcare disparities, and economic disparities may warrant a diagnosis of PTSD in the presence of an identifiable form of trauma that contributes to re-experiencing, avoidance of trauma cues; negative mood/cognitions; and hyperarousal."[41] For People of Color, Moreland-Capuia defines racial trauma as "fear that doesn't turn off."[42]

An African American friend recently told me that when his mother moved from North Carolina to Connecticut, it took her two years before she could look a white person in the eyes. Even though she was an executive in a telephone company, she was taught by her parents from a young age that looking a white person in the eyes is dangerous. This behavior is an example of "fear that does not turn off." Many People of Color often feel toxic traumatic stress caused by generational and structural racism in ordinary situations, such as when they are at work, in the car, walking outside, or at a restaurant.

However, there is hope. Even though the American Psychiatric Association does not formally recognize racial trauma in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, psychologists are leveraging the knowledge gained from treating traumatic disorders and applying it to the hidden wounds inflicted on People of Color by racism. One critical learning from trauma research is the recovery process. The following section

[41] Monica T. Williams, Isha W. Metzger, Chris Leins, Celenia DeLapp, *Assessing Racial Trauma Within a DSM-5 Framework: The UCONN Racial/Ethnic Stress & Trauma Survey*, 2018, https://doi.org/10.1037/pri0000076. Quoted in Alisha Moreland-Capuia, *The Trauma of Racism: Exploring the Systems and People Fear Built* (Cham Switzerland: Springer, 2021), 113.

[42] Alisha Moreland-Capuia, *The Trauma of Racism: Exploring the Systems and People Fear Built* (Cham Switzerland: Springer, 2021), 113.

examines the traumatic recovery process and its relevance to trauma-informed preaching and racial justice.

Recovery

Herman posits three recovery stages for traumatic disorders: "establishing safety, reconstructing the trauma story, and restoring the connection between survivors and their community."[43] She admits these stages are an oversimplification and not meant to describe a clean, linear recovery path.[44] Trauma is complex, and a patient may regress, bringing up issues once thought resolved. However, this recovery model will be helpful for preachers to develop homilies that connect with trauma survivors and the broader community. The following section examines and applies the model's psychological insights to trauma-informed preaching and racial justice.

Safety

From a psychological perspective, the first step in traumatic recovery is to help the survivor restore a level of power and control.[45] Therefore, establishing safety is essential in the recovery process. Herman says: "This task [establishing safety] takes precedence over all others, for no therapeutic work can possibly succeed if safety has not been adequately secured. No therapeutic work should even be attempted until a reasonable degree of safety has been achieved."[46] The reason safety is such a foundational element is that "survivors feel unsafe in their bodies" and within their daily

[43] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 4.

[44] Ibid., 223.

[45] Ibid., 229.

[46] Ibid., 229-230.

interactions with others.[47] Healing and recovery cannot begin while a person lives in a state of heightened awareness.

Herman encourages psychologists to assist trauma survivors by helping them gain control of their bodies and their environment. Bodily control entails improving sleep patterns, eating habits, and exercise. In addition, if the traumatic experience involved physical harm, these injuries must receive medical attention. Environmental control includes safety at home, financial security, and every aspect of a person's daily life.[48] While Herman's model addresses a broad range of traumatic disorders, establishing safe environments is also critical for racial trauma survivors.

Psychologist Kenneth V. Hardy, President of the Eikenberg Academy for Social Justice in New York City, describes safety for racial trauma as follows:

> Conducting intensive, racially sensitive, trauma-informed therapy requires the therapist to provide a zone of safety where Clients of Color can be reflective about their race related pain and have a place to metabolize it. Secure, sacred places to deeply explore the invisible wounds of racial trauma are virtually nonexistent for many People of Color. Much of the pain associated with the "thousand cuts" inflicted by the "normal" everyday acts of racial oppression that many People of Color sustain is just beneath the surface. The type of therapeutic work desired and needed to heal this pain cannot be easily packaged into rigidly structured eight-to-ten-session treatment protocols. In contrast, the healing process requires careful pacing that allows the client adequate time to think, reflect, explore, and breathe as well as to sort through the complexities of race.[49]

The invisible wounds Hardy mentions are an important characteristic that distinguishes racial trauma from many other traumatic disorders. Hardy writes extensively about the "invisible wounds of racial trauma" in his book *Racial Trauma:*

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[47] Ibid., 230.

[48] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 230-231.

[49] Kenneth V. Hardy, *Racial Trauma: Clinical Strategies and Techniques for Healing Invisible Wounds* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2023), 351.

Clinical Strategies and Techniques for Healing Invisible Wounds. A by-product of our nation's racist history, these invisible wounds include the following:

1. **Internalized Devaluation:** Historically, in the United States, the white dominant population devalued people of color through racism and discrimination.
2. **Assaulted Sense of Self:** People of Color feel that they must abandon their customs and traditions to conform to a white society.
3. **Learned Voicelessness:** For generations, People of Color did not have a voice within the systems and structures that govern them.
4. **Psychological Homelessness:** People of Color can become haunted by the decisions they have made to conform to a white-dominated society.
5. **Rage:** Racial trauma survivors may express rage caused by hyper-exposure to racial injustice.
6. **Intangible Loss and Invisible Collective Grief:** From lynchings to Black people unjustly murdered, such as George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, the Black community collectively mourns the loss of innocent lives.
7. **Orientation Toward Survival:** Many Black people live in a perpetual state of heightened awareness because of the constant threat of random, unwarranted stops by law enforcement and the many forms of racial injustice they experience during their daily routines.[50]

The insights gained by studying trauma from a psychological perspective can help preachers better prepare racial justice homilies. A crucial element is the physical space where the preaching will occur. The location must be welcoming and safe. People of Color should feel they are entering a sacred space that honors their humanity and dignity.

Much of the art within our churches represents Christianity from a white European perspective. Rarely do we see images of African, Latin American, or Asian saints. The Cathedral in my diocese, the Diocese of Bridgeport, is named in honor of St. Augustine, a fifth-century bishop from Northern Africa. There is a painting of St. Augustine within the vestibule of the Cathedral, welcoming those who enter through the main doors. The saint is depicted as an elderly white man, which is unrealistic given Augustine's African heritage. The Cathedral's congregation is highly diverse, with a

[50] Hardy, *Racial Trauma*, Chapters 6-12.

significant representation of the Haitian, Latino, and Vietnamese communities. The bishop is renovating the church with new art and statuary to reflect the parish's and diocese's diversity and multicultural beauty.

Another vital consideration when establishing a safe environment is to have proper training for the volunteers who greet and welcome people. Recently, a Black Catholic couple attended Sunday Mass in my diocese. Upon walking into the church, the greeter approached them and said, "You must be looking for the Protestant church. It's down the street." Clergy cannot take for granted that everyone who volunteers will treat all who enter with the same respect and dignity. Proper racial sensitivity training is essential.

Finally, pastors should invite People of Color to participate in the liturgy as readers, extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, musicians, and altar servers. A diversity of liturgical ministers fosters an inclusive and safe environment. Inviting multicultural participation also helps demonstrate the pastor's commitment to racial equity.

Reconstructing the Trauma Story

From a psychological perspective, the second recovery stage is characterized by remembrance and mourning. Therapists help survivors reconstruct and tell their traumatic stories. Herman writes, "This work of reconstruction actually transforms the traumatic memory, so that it can be integrated into the survivor's life story."[51] Often, trauma survivors disassociate from the events that caused their trauma to cope with what happened to them. Therefore, the therapist must help the survivor confront their past, put

[51] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 254.

into words the horrors they experienced, and accompany them as a supporting witness to their story.[52] Critical to this process is the therapist's ability to help patients move forward in recovery without retraumatizing them. The therapist aims to help survivors create a new, integrated, hopeful worldview while coming to terms with their past.

Regarding racial trauma, Hardy refers to remembrance as "naming." He writes: "The process of naming enables the client to have their 'craziness'—that is, their internal second guessing, acts of self-deprecation, and feelings of being an imposter—acknowledged and dismantled by having it all externally named and validated. Invisible wounds (individually and collectively), habits of survival, shame, and racial oppression are but a few examples of phenomena that warrant naming. As naming is incorporated into the therapeutic process, it helps create a shared language, common understanding, and a new way of thinking, being, and seeing one's world."[53] Naming the invisible wounds helps racial trauma survivors in the recovery process because it recognizes and validates racially based suffering experienced by People of Color.[54]

An essential part of this recovery stage is justice—holding the perpetrators accountable for the harm they inflicted on innocent victims. Herman asserts that survivors often fall into two opposing fantasies: a quest for revenge and unconditional forgiveness.[55] Both reactions attempt to regain control and power over the traumatic

[52] Ibid., 254.

[53] Hardy, *Racial Trauma,* 356.

[54] Ibid., 357.

[55] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 275-276.

experience. In Christian tradition, revenge is never an option, but forgiveness is a topic familiar to most preachers.

Speaking about forgiveness to trauma survivors requires careful thought and consideration. Marie M. Fortune, founder and senior analyst of the FaithTrust Institute in Seattle, Washington, cautions against telling trauma victims that forgiveness leads to miraculous healing. Although her work focuses on victims and survivors of sexual and domestic violence, it is equally applicable to racial trauma survivors. Fortune writes: "This [unconditional forgiveness] is the most common response that victims or survivors hear from family, friends, and the church. The first thing that those who are trying to be helpful want to discuss is forgiveness, meaning the one victimized should simply forgive and then be rewarded magically with healing."[56] Often, friends and family members just want survivors to move on, so encouraging someone to forgive unconditionally is an easy solution. However, recovering from trauma is not a simple process.

When speaking to trauma survivors, preachers should avoid references or stories about people who forgave unconditionally. Fortune writes about the consequences of preaching forgiveness without justice as follows:

1. No one (including us as bystanders) ever has to deal with accountability for the offender. This is particularly advantageous for the nonrepentant offender.
2. The victims, whose priority is their own individual healing, can decide that they have the power to bring about this healing by their own agency in the "act" of forgiving. This is a cruel hoax for the victim.
3. The bystanders (often you and I and many members of our churches) can stand by and do nothing, self-righteously reassured that we have no lines in this play.

[56] Marie M. Fortune, "Preaching Forgiveness?," in *Telling the Truth: Preaching about Sexual and Domestic Violence*, ed. John S. McClure and Nancy J. Ramsay (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1998), 50.

> As a result, the victim is shamed or cajoled into saying the magic words "I forgive him," convinced by us that now she will feel better; now God will love her; and now she can remain in good standing within her church.[57]

Although some people who experience racial trauma can forgive unconditionally, most survivors require and deserve restorative justice.

Another essential aspect of forgiveness is to avoid pretending the injustice did not happen. With national events, such as George Floyd's death, or local events that cry for racial justice, preachers must take the opportunity to say something. Silence is not helpful for individual or communal healing. We should take advantage of these occasions to create safe spaces, bring to light existing racism, and galvanize the community to act in solidarity with our Sisters and Brothers of Color.

One of the worst things a preacher can say is, "Get over it and move on with your life." Trauma survivors cannot simply move on. Their biological and neurological systems have changed so they can deal with whatever they experienced, real or perceived. Asking a victim of racial injustice to forgive and forget is not physically possible. The preached word must demonstrate presence, empathy, and compassion for people not ready to move on with their lives. Kevin J. O'Brien, S.J., Vice Provost and Executive Director, Fairfield Bellarmine in Bridgeport, Connecticut, writes: "Forgiving does not mean forgetting. To the contrary, it is important to name the hurt of injustice, a key step to the restoration of relationships (if such reconciliation is possible). Living in truth helps to liberate us from the hold that harm may have on us."[58] Preachers must

[57] Ibid., 50-51.

[58] Kevin O'Brien, *Seeing with the Heart: A Guide to Navigating Life's Adventures* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2023), 49.

name generational sins to ensure the community does not repeat or perpetuate these transgressions but rather works together for a more hopeful and just future.

Forgiveness also requires survivors to let go of anger, hatred, and bitterness. In a sermon at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, on November 17, 1957, civil rights activist Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. spoke about the dangers of hatred:

> Hate distorts the personality of the hater. We usually think of what hate does for the individual hated or the individuals hated or groups hated. But it is even more tragic, it is even more ruinous and injurious to the individual who hates. You just begin hating somebody, and you will begin to do irrational things. You can't see straight when you hate. You can't walk straight when you hate. You can't stand upright. Your vision is distorted. There is nothing more tragic than to see an individual whose heart is filled with hate.
>
> . . . Psychologists and psychiatrists are telling us today that the more we hate, the more we develop guilt feelings, and we begin to subconsciously repress or consciously suppress certain emotions, and they all stack up in our subconscious selves and make for tragic, neurotic responses.[59]

King writes that love opens the door to forgiveness.

> Long before modern psychology came into being, the world's greatest psychologist who walked around the hills of Galilee told us to love. He looked at men and said: "Love your enemies; don't hate anybody." It's not enough for us to love your friends—because when you start hating anybody, it destroys the very center of your creative response to life and the universe; so love everybody. Hate at any point is a cancer that gnaws at the very vital center of your life and your existence. It is like eroding acid that eats away the best and the objective center of your life. So Jesus says love, because hate destroys the hater as well as the hated.[60]

Asking a racial trauma survivor to love their enemies during recovery is not the same as asking them to forgive and forget. Loving our enemies recognizes that the person

[59] Martin Luther King, Jr., *A Knock at Midnight: Inspiration from the Great Sermons of Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Warner Books, Inc., 1998), 51-52.

[60] King, *A Knock at Midnight*, 52-53.

who harmed us is not intrinsically evil but rather committed an evil act. O'Brien writes, "While not minimizing our hurt or excusing hurtful behavior, we try to see people in a more radiant light: they are more than their worst act; they remain children of God."[61] Love nurtures healing and helps direct our anger toward defeating structural and systemic racism rather than harboring anger against our sisters and brothers. Love also opens the door for perpetrators to seek reconciliation with their victims and the community.

King understood the power of love and its essential relationship with forgiveness. He closed his sermon with the sentence, "So this morning, as I look into your eyes, and into the eyes of all my brothers in Alabama and all over America and over the world, I say to you, 'I love you. I would rather die than hate you.'"[62]

Preaching forgiveness is appropriate for trauma-informed racial justice preaching. However, preachers must take great care that their words are sensitive to traumatic wounds and the recovery process. If done well, the homily can be a source of consolation and encouragement for survivors and the broader community.

Restoring the Connection

Once trauma survivors progress through the first two recovery stages, they are ready to enter the final stage: restoring the connection. This period helps the person develop a more hopeful worldview and build new relationships. Survivors can embrace newfound freedom and engage in life in ways previously denied them because of their traumatic experiences. Herman writes: "In the third stage of recovery, the traumatized person recognizes that she has been a victim and understands the effects of her

[61] O'Brien, *Seeing with the Heart*, 50.

[62] King, *A Knock at Midnight*, 59.

victimization. Now, she is ready to incorporate the lessons of her traumatic experience into her life. She is ready to take concrete steps to increase her sense of power and control, to protect herself from future danger, and to deepen her alliances with those whom she has learned to trust."[63]

Herman further defines four behaviors that survivors engage in as part of this final recovery stage. The following is a summary of these behaviors:[64]

1. **Learning to fight:** Rather than avoiding situations that could trigger fear, the survivor, with the help of a therapist, engages in controlled situations to gain confidence and environmental control.
2. **Reconciling with oneself:** The survivor uses their imagination to create a new self, taking from their past experiences whatever is necessary to build confidence and envision a hope-filled future.
3. **Reconnecting with others:** The survivor can now trust others appropriately and increase intimacy. The traumatic event begins to fade, and the survivor begins to believe firmly that the trauma will not happen again.
4. **Finding a survivor mission:** In some cases, survivors leverage their traumatic experience to fight for justice. The insights gained during recovery help them transcend their trauma and fight for a more just world.

Although these behaviors apply broadly to trauma recovery, they are also relevant to racial trauma. Each behavior helps survivors come to terms with their experiences and transfigure the wounds of racial injustice.

In addition to the individual's engagement in the recovery process, the community plays a vital role in this final stage. Hardy writes: "Part of the context of healing for many People of Color resides in having access to formal and/or informal communal healing structures—such as barber shops, beauty salons, churches, temples, mosques, and synagogues—or somewhat mental-health-focused structures—such as retreats, racial

[63] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 287.

[64] Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 288-312.

affinity groups, movement groups, and healing circles—these experiences provide endless opportunities for people with racial trauma to speak, to be heard and seen, and to feel consensually validated."[65]

Community is arguably the most crucial element in recovery because people who suffer from traumatic injuries cannot recover on their own. Patrick Saint-Jean, S.J., Doctor of Clinical Psychology and a psychology professor at Creighton University, uses the African word *ubuntu*, "I am because we are," to describe the critical nature of our communal connection.[66] He writes: "Physically, we human beings cannot exist without one another; we rely on both local and global communities for almost every aspect of our daily lives. By hurting others, we actually hurt ourselves, just as by helping others, we help ourselves. Spiritually, we are all interconnected; the Divine Spirit breathes through us all. We reach our fullest potential in connection with others."[67] Community-based structures or institutions make it possible for racial trauma survivors to find their voice, mourn their past, and discover a more hope-filled future.

Somatic Healing

Underlying Herman's recovery model is the understanding that people carry trauma within their bodies. Dr. Resmaa Menakem, best-selling author, trauma expert, and therapist, writes: "Contrary to what many people believe, trauma is not primarily an emotional response. Trauma always happens in the body. It is a spontaneous protective

[65] Harding, *Racial Trauma*, 357.

[66] Patrick Saint-Jean, *The Crucible of Racism: Ignatian Spirituality and the Power of Hope* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2022), 85.

[67] Ibid., 86.

mechanism used by the body to stop or thwart further (or future) potential damage."[68] Therefore, therapists must give special attention to somatic healing throughout the recovery process.

Menakem believes that all "traumatic healing involves recognizing, accepting, and moving through pain—clean pain."[69] The survivors with whom I have spoken in advanced recovery describe clean pain as surrendering and accepting the reality of their situation. They learn to release the tension and stress in their bodies as they place their trust in a more hopeful future. The recovery process, including somatic healing, transforms them and allows them to live in the present. Those from a Christian faith tradition spoke about feeling God's presence and experiencing God in new and unexpected ways, bringing them peace as they transitioned through clean pain. Sr. Thea Bowman is an example of someone who grew spiritually through this process.

When I lived in North Carolina in the late 80s, my next-door neighbor, James, was a retired Connecticut school teacher. He was an African American, who suffered from diabetes and had difficulty walking. James graduated from college with a degree in mechanical engineering, but he said no one would hire him because he was Black. The only job James could get was teaching woodshop in high school. He was bitter, not because he couldn't get a job in his trained profession, but because of the lack of respect he received from young Black engineers. On several occasions, James mentioned that no young Black engineer ever thanked him for his sacrifice. He helped break the race barrier

[68] Resmaa Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies* (Las Vegas: Central Recovery Press, 2017), 7.

[69] Ibid., 165.

in the engineering profession and paved the way for others to gain employment in the engineering field. And yet, he went to his grave angry, believing no one appreciated the trauma and pain he endured to help future generations achieve their professional goals. Menakem calls this "dirty pain."

Menakem defines dirty pain within the African American community as "self-hate: internalized oppression; a bias favoring light skin over dark; a preference for shopping in white-owned businesses because we believe that 'white people's ice is colder; a habit of teaching our kids by 'whupping' them; widespread use of the N-word; and a reflexive denigration of brothers and sisters who have achieved success."[70] All these behaviors cause racial trauma survivors to retain traumatic experiences and hold onto the stress, fear, and anger within their bodies.

Words matter to trauma survivors, so preachers must choose their words carefully. By understanding clean pain and the body's response, preachers can choose words that help people progress in recovery. The following section applies the lessons learned from trauma-informed therapy to determine which words and phrases preachers should avoid and which words and phrases are appropriate.

Advice for Preachers

Over the past six years, I have worked closely with Erin Neil, the Director of Safe Environments and the Victim Assistance Coordinator of the Catholic Diocese of Bridgeport. Neil has more than twenty years of experience counseling sexual abuse victims. I based the following advice for preachers on my conversations with her, my

[70] Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands*, 167.

pastoral ministry experience, and my research obtained from interviews with racial trauma survivors.

What Not to Say

Preachers should not try to accelerate the recovery process. As previously stated, trauma survivors cannot simply "move on." Consequently, the homily must respect traumatic recovery by establishing a safe space, remembering and mourning, and reconnecting survivors with the community. Some phrases to avoid are the following:

- You need to move forward and get over this.
- You need to try and stop thinking about this.
- You need to move on for the sake of your family.

Preachers must avoid telling people how they should "feel"—trauma results from a person's experience, whether it is real or perceived. The preacher can never fully know or understand what a traumatized person is confronting. Phrases to avoid include the following:

- You need to feel better. Things could always be worse.
- You just have to be more positive. Stop being so negative.
- You are a survivor, not a victim.

Many homilies end with a call to action. Regarding racial trauma, the preacher must be cautious not to conclude by recommending actions that are neither helpful nor possible. Some examples include the following:

- Pull yourself up by your bootstraps.
- Don't dwell on it.
- Whenever you experience racism again, step up and stop it.

Finally, preachers should never imply that atrocities committed against innocent victims are part of God's plan. The most common phrase in this category is "Everything happens for a reason." There are no acceptable justifications for racism.

What to Say

Consistent with Herman's model, preachers should use phrases that honor the traumatic recovery process. The following phrases help establish a safe space for those who have experienced racial injustice:

- You are not alone.
- We are here to support you.
- We are available if you ever want to talk about your experience.
- What happened to you is not your fault nor part of God's plan.

The preacher can also speak on behalf of the victims to help them remember and mourn racial atrocities.

- I heard the following about your story/journey.
- You did not imagine this.
- We cannot remain silent about these events.
- Speak the truth and avoid euphemisms that minimize the reality of the atrocity.

Finally, the preacher can help survivors reconnect with the community and grow stronger in faith.

- Together, we can do something about this.
- You are not alone. God and this community are with you.
- Hope is possible.

When preaching to racial trauma survivors, the preacher should send a clear, supportive message that states: "I see you. I believe you. Your experience moves me. A better future is possible."

Conclusion

Just nine months before her death, Sr. Thea Bowman addressed the United States Bishops Conference in June 1989. Sitting in a chair, looking frail and weakened by breast cancer, her voice echoed through the hall as she preached and taught for thirty-five

minutes about what it is like to be Black in the Catholic Church and society. She began by singing:

> *Sometimes I feel like a motherless child.*
> *Sometimes I feel like a motherless child.*
> *Sometimes I feel like a motherless child.*
> *A long way from home, a long way from home.*
>
> *Sometimes I feel like an eagle in the air.*
> *Sometimes I feel like an eagle in the air.*
> *Sometimes I feel like an eagle in the air.*
> *Still I'm a long way, I'm a long way, I'm a long way from my home.*

Bowman then went on to recall the history of Black people in scripture, mourn the experience of Black people in American history, and name the challenges Black people face in contemporary society. She expressed the needs of her community and implored the bishops to do better. Bowman concluded her remarks with a hopeful message and an invitation to come together as a faith community:

> Today we're called to walk together in a new way toward that Land of Promise and to celebrate who we are and whose we aren't. If we, as a Church, walk together—don't let nobody separate you—that's one thing black folk can teach you—don't let folks divide you up—you know, put the lay folk over here and the clergy over here—put the bishops in one room and the clergy in the other room—put the women over here and the men over here—The Church teaches us that the Church is a family of families and the family got to stay together and we know, that if we do stay together, come here brother—we know that if we stay together—if we walk and talk and work and play and stand together in Jesus' name—we'll be who we say we are—truly Catholic and we shall overcome—overcome the poverty—overcome the loneliness—overcome the alienation and build together a Holy City, a new Jerusalem, a city set apart where they'll know that we are here because we love one another.[71]

[71] Thea Bowman, *Subcommittee on African American Affairs: Sr. Thea Bowman's Address to the U.S. Bishop's Conference*, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, June 1989, https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/cultural-diversity/african-american/resources/upload/Transcript-Sr-Thea-Bowman-June-1989-Address.pdf.

Bowman ended by asking the bishops to interlock hands. Then, together, they sang the gospel spiritual, “We Shall Overcome.” She received thunderous applause for her remarks. Bowman’s words visibly moved the audience so much that some bishops had tears in their eyes.

Bowman is an extraordinary example of a racial trauma survivor who worked through her clean pain to challenge and change the world. Despite her success, she paid a price. Black historian Shannen Dee Williams, Associate Professor of History at the University of Dayton, reminds us that “Bowman, like many pioneering Black priests and sisters in white congregations, died young, at the age of fifty-two.”[72] Even though people can grow and transform through their traumatic experiences, the body does not always fully forget or heal.

Bowman’s preaching that day exemplified the use of trauma-informed therapy to speak about racial justice. She established safety, remembered and mourned the Black experience, and strongly encouraged everyone to come together as a united community. Bowman spoke the truth, based on her personal experience as a racial trauma survivor. Not all preachers will be able to draw from experience. Without first-hand knowledge, the psychology and neuroscience of trauma provide valuable insights for preachers so they may also follow the path of Sr. Thea Bowman and fight for racial justice.

[72] Shannen Dee Williams, *Subversive Habits: Black Catholic Nuns in the Long African American Freedom Struggle* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2022), 264.

Chapter 3

Trauma-Informed Theology and Racial Justice

We live in the age of breathlessness, an age in which personal and societal trauma are pervasive. The pandemic, war in Ukraine and the Middle East, economic instability, gun violence, human trafficking, and racial violence are some of the many challenges that leave us breathless. Over the past decade, at least thirty-five Black people lost their lives in police custody while exclaiming, "I can't breathe."[73] As Christians, we cannot be indifferent to their breathlessness. Patrick Saint-Jean, S.J., a psychology professor at Creighton University, explains breath's sacredness: "Breath symbolizes both God's Spirit and the continuous gift of life. The breath embodies our ability to connect body and spirit. When breath departs from the body, so does the spirit. In that sense, breath is universal and utterly unique to the individual."[74] When we deny People of Color a just society, we block God's breath that flows through all creation.

For many racial trauma survivors, life is like Holy Saturday, a perpetual suspended state between death and resurrection. Trauma-informed theology can help preachers better understand the human experience in this age of breathlessness and guide their theological reflection in the wake of traumatic events.

[73] Patrick Saint-Jean, *The Crucible of Racism: Ignatian Spirituality and the Power of Hope* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2022), 19.

[74] Ibid., 20.

This chapter will define trauma-informed theology in the context of racial justice. Then, by applying Hans Urs von Balthasar's Holy Saturday theology as a metaphor for trauma survivors, I will explain how God enters the abyss of our suffering. The Spirit moves trauma survivors toward resurrection, and a fundamental transformation occurs between death and resurrection. But just as Jesus' resurrected body still had the wounds of his passion, so, too, do survivors bear the wounds of racial trauma. Although their wounds remain, Christ transforms their brokenness into a new creation.

Certain liturgical gestures and symbols can embody the trauma of the age of breathlessness, including the gesture of kneeling and the symbol of the cross. Kneeling and the cross are appropriate controlling images for racial justice preaching. This section will explore the theological implications of these liturgical symbols and their application for preaching.

Finally, I will discuss racial trauma from the perspective of theodicy and seek to answer how we, as believers, reconcile the following seemingly incompatible truths, which theodicy addresses: "1) There is a God. 2) God is all-powerful. 3) God is loving and good. 4) There is innocent suffering."[75] Therefore, why does God allow racism? Relying on the Book of Job and the Parable of the Weeds (Matt. 13:24-30), I will explore the theodicy argument within the context of those suffering from racial injustice.

[75] Thomas G. Long, *What Shall We Say?: Evil, Suffering, and the Crisis of Faith* (Grand Rapids:: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 23.

Trauma-informSed Theology

A friend, whom I will call Samuel, is in his sixties, three-quarters Native American and one-quarter Mexican. He grew up in South Texas in extreme poverty in a rural farming town established by German immigrants fleeing religious persecution. Ninety percent of the farm laborers were Mexican Americans, including many undocumented workers. Samuel's family lived with the other farmworkers on the west side of the tracks, while the white community lived on the east side. The west side had unpaved roads, outhouses, rusted cars, and no sewage system, while the east side had immaculate lawns, sidewalks, and well-maintained single-family homes.

Samuel was a bright child. When he was seven, his mother successfully fought to have him placed in the all-white elementary school, where he was the only non-white student. He met a white person for the first time when he entered first grade. Although he excelled in class as the top student, the next eight years proved traumatizing for him. Bullies beat him almost daily, and his classmates never invited him to their birthday parties. He had to enter through the back door if he visited a classmate's home. If he touched something in their house, a parent would spray the object with Lysol or throw it away. He and other People of Color were allowed to swim in the town pool once a month. Then, the town would disinfect the pool the following day.

Samuel's parents raised him Catholic, although his mother was Methodist. Even his parish offered no solace or protection from the racism he had to endure. There were two Masses on Sunday, 8 a.m. and 10 a.m. While volunteering as an altar server, Samuel asked the pastor why there were two Masses, and the pastor responded, "Well, Samuel, the white people get up early, have discipline, and can make the 8 a.m. Mass. But you

Mexicans are lazy, and we have to have a 10 a.m. for you."[76] Samuel thought this was ironic since he and other Mexican Americans arrived at 6 a.m. to prepare the church for the 8 a.m. Mass. In addition, the pastor charged one hundred dollars for Latino burials but did not charge for white burials. Shortly before he died from cancer, the pastor told Samuel that he was condemned to hell and was one of the worst people he ever met.

As traumatic as these events are, they pale in comparison to the other indignities Samuel suffered. He would not go into detail, but he told me about a group of white men who tortured and buried him alive. Before entering college, he experienced severe racial trauma that left him with an inferior and shattered self-image. His story offers a context to explore the four primary characteristics of trauma-informed theology, as defined by theologian and therapist Jennifer Baldwin, the Executive Director of the Grounding Flight Wellness Center in Woodstock, Georgia, which specializes in trauma recovery/post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety and depression, and vocational discernment. The four characteristics are: "the priority of bodily experience, full acceptance of trauma narratives, natural given-ness of human psychological multiplicity, and faith in the robust resiliency of trauma survivors."[77]

Whether a person experiences trauma through racism, rape, abuse, or war, "trauma is fundamentally a bodily experience,"[78] she writes. In many cases, the body retains the trauma for years to come, locked within its memory. People with PTSD are prime examples of trauma's lasting impact on the body. Sometimes during the night,

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[76] Interview with a racial trauma survivor, June 20, 2022.

[77] Jennifer Baldwin, *Trauma-Sensitive Theology: Thinking Theologically in the Era of Trauma* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018), 7.

[78] Ibid.

Samuel's wife would find him curled up in a fetal position, crying, whimpering, and screaming. She would hold him and rock him, whispering over and over in his ear, "I love you. You're safe." During these episodes, Samuel was unaware of what was happening. He exhibited common coping mechanisms for severe trauma survivors, including disassociation and detachment.

The implication here is that preachers must come to understand that post-traumatic healing requires more than faith and reason. Very often, our homilies give the impression that people can overcome trauma through willpower or a more intentional faith life. In addition, the Christian tradition tends to emphasize intellectual and spiritual dimensions of holiness while depicting the body as a representation of humanity's sinful inclinations.[79] The preacher cannot ignore the body's inherent dignity and sacredness. Traumatic healing requires mind, body, and spirit integration, consistent with the unity of body and soul of every human being.

Although Samuel now freely discusses his traumatic experiences, it took many years before he could disclose the abuse he suffered growing up in South Texas. Many survivors are reluctant or hesitant to talk about their trauma, fearing they won't be believed or will have their stories challenged. "The role of the religious care and mental health professionals is not to adjudicate the 'facts' of trauma; it is to advocate for safety, to support and facilitate the repair of traumatic injury, and to promote recovery and resiliency," Baldwin says.[80] "In my experience, I have found that when speaking with

[79] Baldwin, *Trauma-Sensitive Theology*, 8.

[80] Ibid., 9.

racial trauma survivors, it is best to accept their stories as told, knowing that these stories may change over time as the person progresses through the healing process."

The third characteristic of trauma-informed theology is the natural givenness of human psychological multiplicity, the mind's ability to exhibit different, sometimes inconsistent, selves. Although Christian spirituality encourages an integrated self, we must recognize the complexity of human psychology. People can accommodate competing emotions. Sometimes, these feelings manifest themselves as a struggle between mind and heart. For example, a person may realize they should stay longer at work to finish a project; however, if it is a beautiful day outside, they may be tempted to leave early to go jogging or relax in the sun. In the case of trauma survivors, they may feel depressed, angry, or broken from their experience. Yet, they still cling to hope or experience happiness amid their suffering.

Samuel exemplifies this multiplicity. Although his environment constantly reinforced an inferior self-image with limited opportunity, he nevertheless maintained a holy and human desire to keep pressing forward, have a better life, and make this world a better place. Even today, when describing his life, this multiplicity is evident. As he told his story, I felt his pain and anxiety while simultaneously being inspired by his capacity to find the good within his trauma-filled history and his optimism for a better future.

The final characteristic is robust faith in human resiliency. Samuel's life is evidence that trauma does not define the person. Furthermore, spiritual and temporal forces can transform our brokenness. After high school, he encountered a more supportive environment in college and eventually received a Ford Foundation Fellowship, which allowed him to get advanced degrees at a major California university

and an Ivy League college. After graduating, he entered the financial services industry and became a successful hedge fund manager. He now works as a financial advisor for high-net-worth clients and spends his free time helping first-generation students get into Ivy League schools and addressing systemic issues that plague Native American reservations.

Perhaps the most remarkable transformation is Samuel's faith. As a child, his mother encouraged him to be an altar server. He excelled, but Mass was strictly an obligation. He found nothing life-giving through his weekly liturgical participation. His pastor's consistent racist remarks reinforced his low self-esteem and doubts about any chance for a better life, further alienating him from the institutional Church. Like many that the Church victimized who blame the institution for failing to protect them, his experience could have led him to lose trust in God or Catholicism. Yet, his faith is more vital now than ever before.

He explained to me that he realized his negative experiences with his parish priest resulted from the individual and not the institution. He believes that anything involving human beings will, by nature, be imperfect. "Within that context, we have to accept the conscious responsibility of making things better,"[81] he said. Through the support of friends, mental health professionals, and God's grace, Samuel accepted his situation and maintained hope for a better life. Despite the isolation and loneliness he endured, he attributed his coping ability to an ongoing quest for self-awareness and to his commitment to serve others rather than oneself. Samuel's recovery is about self-

[81] Interview with a racial trauma survivor, June 20, 2022.

empowerment, claiming your voice, and finding agency rather than continuing to be victimized, ceding authority and self to others.

Samuel has an active prayer and liturgical life, which helps animate his charitable endeavors. Through a consulting group he chairs, the National Executive Service Corporation (NESC), he provides consulting to non-profit companies, including many dioceses. He also helps Catholic entities invest in areas typically reserved for large corporations and high-net-worth individuals.

Although Samuel has come a long way, he admits he still has flashbacks and nightmares. He described his life as a walk through "the valley of death." Like many trauma survivors, his recovery continues to transform him, yet his wounds remain. Samuel knows he will never be completely healed but remains hopeful in his desire for resurrection. In the Christian tradition, Holy Saturday—the interval between Jesus' death and resurrection—symbolizes Samuel's recovery and the recovery process experienced by many trauma survivors.

Holy Saturday

Scripture is silent on what happened to Jesus on Holy Saturday. However, from the time of the Church Fathers, Christian tradition attests to Jesus' descent into hell. In St. Ignatius of Antioch's letter to the Magnesians, he writes that the prophets waited for Jesus, and "when he came, raised them from the dead."[82] The consensus of the Fathers is that Jesus entered into hell to free the just through his redemptive sacrifice on the cross. Medieval artists echoed this belief, depicting Jesus in his glorified body, triumphantly freeing the righteous souls trapped in hell awaiting their redeemer (Figure 4).

[82] Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Magnesians* 9.2.

Figure 4. Duccio. *Descent into Hell*, 1308-1312, accessed October 18, 2023. https://www.wikiart.org/en/duccio/descent-into-hell-1311.

Theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar offers a different perspective on Holy Saturday. From 1941 to 1965, Swiss physician Adrienne von Speyr mystically experienced Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection. Balthasar documented these visions, which became the basis for his Holy Saturday theology.[83] Based on von Speyr's visions, he paints a picture of Jesus' descent, characterized by isolation, absence, and intense forsakenness. This alternative interpretation appropriately describes the state of life for many racial trauma survivors.

Within hell's abyss, personified by God's absence, Jesus walks alone, unable to see where he is going or from where he came. Balthasar writes, "He encounters the horror of sin separated from men, and 'walks' through sin (without leaving a trace, since, in hell and in death, there is neither time nor direction)."[84] Jesus, cut off from all relationships, including his Father, no longer feels the Father's presence and encounters

[83] Shelly Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 51.

[84] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *First Glance at Adrienne von Speyr*, trans. Antje Lawry and Sr. Sergia Englund, O.C.D., 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1981), 63-64.

humanity's most feared and catastrophic suffering: complete isolation and abandonment. Shelly Rambo, Associate Professor of Theology at Boston University, writes, "God experiences, within God's inner life, the forsakenness of those in hell."[85] Some affected by racism may experience something similar: the emotional suffering of being cut off from economic, educational, and social opportunities—a constant reminder of being different and, in some situations, less than their white counterparts.

Yet divine love pierces through the hopelessness. With this state of unimaginable suffering, the Holy Spirit acts as a single, fragile thread, connecting the Father and the Son. "Although love was killed on the cross, it was not fully extinguished."[86] The Spirit, preserving the trinitarian relationship, lets God enter into complete solidarity with humanity through the Son, "becoming one of the forsaken."[87] Divine "love travels to a place where there is no love," thus firmly proclaiming that "there is no place where God does not go."[88]

Balthasar's theological interpretation of Holy Saturday mirrors the experience of trauma survivors, who often describe feelings of emptiness, loneliness, and isolation. Suspended between death and life, they cannot feel God's presence. Yet, as those who suffer from traumatic pain walk through "the valley of death," Jesus' descent into hell offers consolation and hope. The Spirit creates a fragile connection between the Father and Son as the Son walks within hell's emptiness. Similarly, the Spirit connects the

[85] Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma*, 68.

[86] Ibid., 57.

[87] Ibid., 68.

[88] Ibid.

survivor to God. This connection provides a refuge for those injured by racial trauma, giving them hope as Jesus walks beside them, often revealed through the presence of others. As they walk and come to terms with the reality of their situation, the Spirit transforms them in this middle state between death and resurrection. The horizon ceases to be an endless wasteland. Hope in the resurrection lies in the distance, perhaps barely perceptible.

Balthasar summarizes this hope, especially applicable to racial trauma survivors, which lies beyond Holy Saturday in the following excerpt taken from one of his radio homilies:

> When life is hard and apparently hopeless, we can be confident that this darkness of ours can be taken up into the great darkness of redemption through the light of Easter dawns. And when what is required of us seems burdensome, when the pains become unbearable, and the fate we are asked to accept seems simply meaningless—then we have come very close to the man nailed on the Cross at the Place of the Skull, for he has already undergone this on our behalf and, moreover, in an unimaginable intensity. When surrounded by apparent meaninglessness, all we can do is wait and endure, quite still, like the Crucified, not seeing anything, facing the dark abyss of death. Beyond this abyss, there waits for us something that, at present, we cannot see, namely, a further abyss of light in which the world's pain is treasured and cherished in the ever-open heart of God. Then, we shall be allowed, like the Apostle Thomas, to put our hand into the gaping wound; feeling it, we shall realize in a very bodily way that God's love transcends all human senses, and with the disciple we shall pray: "My Lord and my God."[89]

Balthasar preaches redemptive hope by respecting embodied traumatic injuries. No matter how painful the memories or how deep the wounds, divine love comforts, consoles, and heals.

As edifying as this message is for trauma survivors, preachers can use Balthasar's Holy Saturday theology to help those unaware of or indifferent to racial injustice better

[89] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *You Crown the Year with Your Goodness: Radio Sermons*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 86
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understand what many People of Color endure daily. This lack of awareness or indifference takes on the form of several common arguments. For example, some white people argue that racism no longer exists in their community or happened so long ago that they bear no responsibility. And there are others who believe the country's legal system ensures racial equality, encouraging us to move forward and put the past behind us. There is often a communal bias to avoid painful memories, to move quickly from Good Friday to Easter Sunday. Residing in the middle state between death and resurrection is uncomfortable.

Yet, this is where many survivors of racial injustice live their lives. This is where preachers must bring their congregation so they can walk alongside those weighed down by traumatic injury. By bringing everyone to this liminal state, a preacher can authentically encourage the community to create a safe environment for People of Color. We can honor their stories in this environment and help them reconnect with the congregation. These opportunities for Christian encounter and accompaniment must replace our lack of awareness and indifference.

Connecting Liturgical Symbols and Racial Justice

A homilist may choose to employ gestures or symbols for trauma-informed preaching and racial justice. The following sections explore the gesture of kneeling and the symbol of the cross. Although preachers can use kneeling and the cross as controlling images when they appear in the lectionary readings, it is also appropriate to use these symbols during penitential times within the liturgical year, such as Lent, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday.

Kneeling

> After withdrawing about a stone's throw from them and kneeling, he prayed, saying, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me; still, not my will but yours be done." He was in such agony and he prayed so fervently that his sweat became like drops of blood falling on the ground.
>
> —Luke 22:41-42, 44

In 2013, I visited the Basilica of the Agony on the foothills of the Mount of Olives facing Jerusalem. The windows are alabaster to defuse the light and create a soft, quiet ambiance inside the church. Within the sanctuary is a large flat rock believed to be where Jesus prayed before his arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane. The experience deeply moved me as I knelt and touched the rock. I imagined the isolation and pain Jesus must have experienced as he prepared to enter his passion. In Luke 22: 39-46, Scripture tells us that in this moment, our Lord earnestly calls to the Father but hears nothing in return. The apostles remain at a distance, depriving him of human consolation. Sweat pours from his brow: "He was in such agony and prayed so fervently that his sweat became like drops of blood falling on the ground" (Luke 22:44).[90] Yet there he kneels, as Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger wrote, "assuming the fall of man and prays to the Father out of the lowest depths of dereliction and anguish."[91] Jesus unites himself with all who fall to their knees and pleads for God's deliverance in the face of unbearable trauma. He teaches us how to approach God in prayer and petition, especially during life's most challenging trials.

[90] All scripture quotations are from NABR unless otherwise indicated.

[91] Joseph Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, trans. John Saward (2000; repr., San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 187.

In recent times, the gesture of kneeling has taken on a political connotation. During the 2016 National Football League (NFL) season, quarterback Colin Kaepernick started "taking a knee" during the National Anthem to protest racism and police brutality. He originally sat on the bench in protest. Kaepernick changed to kneeling after a conversation with Nate Boyer, a former Green Beret and NFL player. Boyer convinced him that kneeling is more respectful, similar to how soldiers kneel by a fallen soldier's grave out of respect. Many viewed this gesture as disrespectful to the country and those who served to protect it in the armed services. Although many players adopted Kaepernick's gesture of protest during the National Anthem, no real change resulted. Then, four years later, on May 25, 2020, kneeling took on new meaning for the African American community and ignited a spark that globally raised awareness of racial injustice in America.

Law enforcement officials, who suspected George Floyd of paying with a twenty-dollar counterfeit bill, handcuffed him and brought him outside for questioning. During the subsequent interrogation, Officer Derek Chauvin knelt on Floyd's neck for more than nine minutes, including almost four minutes when Floyd was non-responsive. Floyd said he could not breathe twenty-five times.[92] According to court records, he repeatedly cried out for his recently deceased mother and asked officers to tell his children that he loved them as he felt his life slipping away.[93] The transcript and video of George Floyd's arrest are shocking. How could someone intentionally act in such a brutal,

[92] Saint-Jean, *The Crucible of Racism,*18.

[93] State of Minnesota, Judicial Branch, District Court, July 8, 2020, https://www.mncourts.gov/mncourtsgov/media/High-Profile-Cases/27-CR-20-12951-TKL/Exhibit207072020.pdf, 13-14.

callous, and harmful way against another human being? Americans will forever remember the image of George Floyd being suffocated in police custody.

In the aftermath, I recall people assembling in protest, kneeling, and holding signs that said, "I can't breathe." People knelt as one in communion, recapturing the symbolic nature of kneeling as a sign of respect for the fallen and a protest against injustice. When Christians kneel in prayer, the gesture transcends kneeling in solidarity with those who are brought to their knees by the sin of racism. Kneeling recognizes that some things are beyond our control; there are some things that only God can resolve. Rev. Kelly Brown Douglas, former Dean of the Episcopal Divinity School at Union Theological Seminary, writes: "To pray is to recognize that it is not all up to us, for there is a power that is beyond us. It is through prayer that we can reach beyond ourselves to the mystery that is God's transforming power. It is prayer that connects us to God's promise. The fact that we pray perhaps signifies our faith in the God who promises us a more just future."[94] As Christians, we prayerfully kneel in petition, directing our hearts toward God to heal and bring justice to a wounded world. Our prayer also strengthens us to fight against the evil of personal and structural racism. Prayer can give us the same strength embodied in Christ as he walked the road to Calvary.

George Floyd gave up his spirit as Officer Chauvin knelt with his full weight on Floyd's neck. A Christian gesture of petition and humility became an instrument of death. In the aftermath, people reclaimed kneeling as a gesture of respect for racial violence

[94] Kelly Brown Douglas, *Resurrection Hope: A Future Where Black Lives Matter*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2021), 184.

victims and as a protest against racial injustice. As Christians, we expand the symbolic nature of kneeling to include the divine. The preacher can remind the congregation that we kneel in imitation of Our Lord in the Garden of Gethsemane. Just as Jesus' prayer rose from the anguish and depths of human suffering, we also pray on our knees with the same lament and fervor for the victims of racism and for the strength to work for a more just world.

The Cross

> Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala.
>
> —John 19:25

In his book, *The Spiritual Work of Racial Justice*, Saint-Jean asks, "Beneath the Cross, where do you stand?"[95] Preachers at primarily white congregations have an opportunity to address this question from at least two perspectives: 1) by helping people understand the similarities between Christ crucified and innocent Black bodies harmed by racial injustice and 2) by helping people discern what it means to stand at the foot of the cross in solidarity with our sisters and brothers of color.

There is a troubling correlation between Jesus on the cross and the history of lynching in the United States. Two thousand years ago, those in power nailed Jesus to the wood of the cross. He was an innocent victim, yet put to a cruel and violent death. This brutality repeated itself in the form of lynching in the United States. There were those in the white majority who mercilessly beat and hung Black people from a tree. There were

[95] Patrick Saint-Jean, *The Spiritual Work of Racial Justice: A Month of Meditations with Ignatius of Loyola* (Vestal, NY: Anamchara Books, 2021), 225.

more than 3,446 Black people lynched between 1882 and 1968.[96] In their death, we "see the presence of the crucified Christ."[97]

Never have I seen the presence of Christ on the cross more evident than in the picture of the 1920 lynching of Isaac McGhie, Elmer Jackson, and Elias Clayton in Duluth, Minnesota (Fig. 5). Three innocent men ceremonially hang as the mob celebrates their sadistic act. I imagine Jesus' persecutors would have posed in the same way if cameras were available two thousand years ago.

Figure 5. *The Duluth Lynchings*, June 15, 1920. Minnesota Historical Society. https://www.mnhs.org/duluthlynchings/documents/Postcard_Image_of_the_lynching_of_Elias_Clayton_Elmer_Jackson_and_Isaac_McGhie-45.001.php.

The following is a short account of the events based on Michael Fedo's book, *The Lynchings in Duluth*. According to Fedo's research, on Monday, June 14, 1920, the John Robinson Circus visited Duluth, Minnesota. The circus came to town for a 9 a.m. parade and a 7 p.m. show under the big top. Approximately one hundred twenty Black

[96] "History of Lynching in America," NAACP, accessed July 19, 2021, https://naacp.org/find-resources/history-explained/history-lynching-america.

[97] Saint-Jean, *The Spiritual Work of Racial Justice*, 269.

employees worked as cooks and laborers for the circus. Irene Tusken, a nineteen-year-old stenographer, and James Sullivan, her eighteen-year-old boyfriend, attended the show. Sometime that evening, they walked into the field, about fifty yards behind the cook tent. No one knows what happened that night, but James told his father the following morning that six Black men held them at gunpoint and raped Irene. James' father called police chief John Murphy. The police immediately arrested six Black men in the vicinity of the alleged rape. Authorities claimed five men were involved in the rape: Elias Clayton, Elmer Jackson, Nate Green, Loney Williams, and John Thomas. Chief Murphy also detained Isaac McGhie as a material witness. All these men were between the ages of nineteen and twenty-two. The police took the prisoners downtown to the city jail for further questioning.

The local newspaper reported the alleged rape, and the news quickly spread throughout the town. By the evening of June 15, 1920, a mob estimated between five thousand and ten thousand gathered and stormed the jail. Townspeople held a mock trial for all six prisoners. They declared three men guilty: Isaac McGhie, Elmer Jackson, and Elias Clayton. The mob then severely beat and lynched all three on a nearby street lamppost. No evidence emerged at the time or since to indicate any of the circus employees raped Irene Tusken. Dr. David Graham, the family physician who examined Irene, reported no physical signs of rape or assault.

These events provoked widespread discrimination against the Duluth Black community for two generations. Duluth Blacks could not buy homes in desirable residential areas until the 1960s. Although Black students could enroll in the local teachers' college, the school board forbade them from teaching in the Duluth public

schools. At the time of the lynchings, the local U.S. Post Office had eighteen Black employees. The Post Office hired no new Black employees until the 1960s.[98] This story is one of thousands that have left the stain of innocent blood on our nation's soul.

When we preach racial justice to a predominantly white audience, the challenge is to help the listeners understand "the black experience in America, which is a history of servitude and resistance, of survival in the land of death."[99] Even though lynching is no longer legal or practiced in the United States, Black people still carry the generational trauma inflicted by lynching and other heinous acts of physical and mental abuse.

For example, Rev. Dr. Luke Powery, Dean of Duke University Chapel and Professor of Homiletics and African and African American Studies, graphically describes the traumatic transatlantic journey of enslaved Africans, which resulted in many choosing death by starvation or drowning over enslavement. Mothers decided to kill their unborn children rather than allow them to be born into slavery. Upon reaching America, Blacks were subject to more than a century of lynching.[100] Regardless of how the preacher decides to speak about the historical development of racism in the United States, the homily must help the assembly understand that the "tragedy, pain, struggles, and death felt by the Black community, is felt by the entire community."[101] If one person in the Body of Christ suffers, all suffer (ref. 1 Cor. 12:26).

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[98] Michael Fedo, *The Lynchings in Duluth* (1979; rep., St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 2016), 172-173.

[99] Luke Powery, *Dem Dry Bones: Preaching Death and Hope* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 29.

[100] Ibid., 29-30.

[101] Ibid., 44.

In addition, homilies about systemic and historic racism should not strive to make the congregation feel guilty but should aim for "the conversion of hearts rather than the hardening of hearts."[102] The preacher should challenge, encourage, and help people find hope despite society's historical failings or present challenges. Brown Douglas reminds us that the cross is not the end of the story but a new beginning:

> Fortunately, the gospel story that Jesus preaches and incarnates does not stop with the cross. Inasmuch as the cross *does* indicate Jesus' utter identification with the oppressed, it is not a static identification. In other words, the fact that Jesus identifies with the oppressed is not a sanctification of oppression, as if it is only in being oppressed that one can find God. Rather, Jesus' identification with the oppressed is an identification with them in their struggle to survive and thrive in the face of the crucifying realities that threaten and destroy their lives. Thus, the cross is not the end, but a revelatory point on the way to new life, new reality. It reveals where the movement toward God's just future begins. And if it must begin in crucifying realities, it does not end there. For again, the cross was not the end of Jesus' story, and therefore it did not defeat God's promise for a more just future.[103]

Through prayerful reflection, each of us must discern an appropriate ethical response to the racial injustice that exists within our community. The preached word should help the congregation understand the issues and inspire them to act and remember. The path to reconciliation requires us to remember by naming the truth. Remembering honors the victims of racial injustice and helps ensure that past injustices will never happen again.

On October 10, 2003, Duluth city officials took action by dedicating a memorial to honor Elias Clayton, Elmer Jackson, and Isaac McGhie near the lynching site. Across the top of the monument is the inscription, "An event has happened upon which it is

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[102] Archbishop Shelton Fabre, interview by author, September 11, 2023.

[103] Brown Douglas, *Resurrection Hope*, 187.

difficult to speak and impossible to remain silent (Fig. 6).” Thanks to the grassroots committee that built this shrine, we will never forget the story of these three men. The legacy continues through the work of the Clayton Jackson McGhie Memorial Corporation, which promotes racial justice, healing, and reconciliation within the Duluth community.

Figure 6. *The Victims of the 1920 Duluth Lynchings*, accessed July 25, 2021. Clayton Jackson McGhie Memorial. http://zenithcity.com/archive/legendary-tales/the-victims-of-the-1920-duluth-lynchings/4/.

Racism is a complex and challenging homiletic topic. Reflecting on societal and personal sins against others simply because of their skin color is painful. However, if history has taught us anything, avoidance and indifference are not options for Christians. Therefore, the question of where we stand at the foot of the cross is a call to examine our hearts. Are we standing at a safe distance, indifferent to the effects of racial injustice within our communities? Or are we standing at the foot of the cross, willing to enter the suffering and trauma of others? Chapter four will advise preachers on preparing and organizing a trauma-informed racial justice homily.

Theodicy

We often find ourselves asking the disturbing question: Why does God allow racism and the heinous actions that flow from it? If God is all-powerful, just, and merciful, and we are all beloved children of God, why are some discriminated against,

violated, and murdered solely based on the color of their skin? Is God indifferent or impotent toward human suffering? Can we place our faith and trust in a God who allows injustice and innocent suffering within God's creation?

These questions are challenging and complex. We will never fully understand why there is innocent suffering in this world, but Scripture provides some clues to unraveling the mystery. For centuries of Jewish thought, the prevailing wisdom was that the person who suffers, or their family, must have done something to deserve it. In the Book of Job, however, the unknown author rejects this belief about God's judgment. Job, a righteous man, helps us begin to understand the complex relationship between innocent suffering and a loving, merciful God.

After Job loses everything in a series of calamities, he sits, covered in boils, scratching himself. Job's wife implores him to curse God, yet he responds, "We accept good things from God; should we not accept evil?" (Job 2:10b). Thus, Job starts from the same perspective as many people today: God permits evil.

Job's three friends place the blame for his misfortune squarely on Job's shoulders. Eliphaz reiterates the prevailing wisdom of the time. God wields just punishment on the sinner. "Reflect now, what innocent person perishes? Where are the upright destroyed? As I see it, those who plow mischief and sow trouble will reap them" (Job 4:7-8). He then suggests to Job the only way out of this mess is to pray and reconcile with God. Bildad blames Job's children and encourages him to pray for God's mercy. Zophar shares his friends' perspective of sin and punishment's cause-and-effect relationship. He asserts that Job does not realize that he is a sinner. In response, Job proclaims his innocence and declares God unjust, "Know then that it is God who has dealt unfairly with me and

compassed me round with his net. If I cry out 'Violence!' I am not answered. I shout for help, but there is no justice" (Job 19:6-7). Based on his traumatic experience, Job rejects the prevailing wisdom of the age that there is a cause-and-effect relationship between sin and suffering.

Finally, God speaks to Job, challenging his understanding of divine justice. God explains that He did not divide the world between good and evil; all is under God's dominion. Therefore, we must respond with faith, trust, and humility. Homelitician Thomas Long writes: "Do we want to be God, or are we willing to move toward being the kind of human being who, even in the midst of inexplicable pain, trusts the One who is God?"[104] Job's response amid unimaginable suffering is love. He loves God more than holding on to the rules and regulations of his religious tradition. This revelation transforms Job and leads us to a deeper understanding of innocent suffering revealed in Jesus Christ.

Job, a righteous man, experienced loss and suffering through no fault of his own. Yet, he remained steadfast in his faith and trust in God, sustained by God's presence. While Job's story does not entirely answer why God allows innocent suffering, it leads us to contemplate Jesus' passion and death. Jesus, also an innocent victim, allowed himself to die for the salvation of the world. He transformed suffering into a redemptive act through self-sacrificial love. In this love, Jesus remained faithful to his mission of building God's reign of justice, peace, and love. He did not run but remained present to humanity. Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection give trauma survivors hope that God

[104] Thomas Long, *What Shall We Say?*, 109.

can also transform their suffering for good and assure them of God's faithful presence in the midst of suffering.

This Old Testament story is highly relevant for African Americans. Biblical scholar Rodney Sadler, Jr. writes: "Having been stolen from their lands and brought to a new land where they experienced unimaginable brutality, enslaved Africans' narratives are often inspired by and beholders to the Job story."[105] Like Job, those enslaved lost everything. Their masters treated them as property and regarded them as less than human. Their bodies experienced unimaginable pain. With a shattered worldview, they turned to God for answers. They may have screamed into the whirlwind as Job did. Although Job's story helps break the myth that sin is responsible for all human suffering, many questions remain. While God did not give Job a definitive answer, God did give him his presence. For some, that is comforting enough.

The Parable of the Weeds (Matt. 13:24-30) helps us further explain why God allows innocent suffering. In the parable, Jesus explains the origin of good and evil and divine justice. A farmer, representing Jesus, plants wheat in his field. While everyone slept, the farmer's enemy, Satan, plants weeds among the wheat. When the plants mature, the farmer's servants discover the weeds and ask the farmer if he planted them. He responds, "An enemy has done this (Matt. 13:28a)." The servants then ask if they should pull the weeds. The farmer declares: "No, if you pull up the weeds, you might uproot the wheat along with them. Let them grow together until harvest; then, at harvest time I will say to the harvesters, 'First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles for burning, but

[105] Rodney S. Sadler, Jr., *The African Bible: Reading Israel's Scriptures from Africa and the African Diaspora*, gen. ed. Hug R. Page, Jr. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 241.

gather the wheat into my barn' (Matt.13:29-30)." This parable helps answer two fundamental questions concerning theodicy and racial justice: Did God plant the seeds of racism? Can we root out the moral evil of racism among us?[106]

The answer to the first question is no. God did not create humans predisposed to racial sin. Racism is God's enemy born from humanity's fears, ignorance, and thirst for power. Just as the workers immediately questioned the farmer in shock and disbelief, the preacher must loudly express anger for racial injustice. University of South Africa biblical scholar Madipoane Masenya encourages us to go further: "While we have the courage to yell at God and pour out our frustrations about the injustices suffered in our midst, we should also do the same toward the pillars of the evil structures that, in most cases, are directly or indirectly responsible for the inequities in our midst."[107] The preacher must address both personal and structural racial sin.

The answer to the second question is also "no." We will never fully root out racism in this life. Good and evil are intertwined. Like the weeds in the parable, evil is often hidden and unnoticed until the damage is visible. Wherever there is good, evil lurks in the shadows. Sometimes, evil is barely perceptible, as in the case of microaggressions, and sometimes, it is so blatant that it corrupts an entire nation, as in the case of slavery. Sometimes, it is under the guise of good, as when preachers relied on the Bible to justify slavery or racial superiority.

[106] Long, *What Shall We Say?*, 137.

[107] Ibid., 240.

Fundamentally, though, "Why doesn't God stop moral evil?"[108] Because God, in the person of Jesus Christ, overcomes evil through love, not through force. Long summarizes why God does not eradicate corruption: "God is indeed all-powerful, but God's power is not like raw human power but is instead a love that takes the form of weakness, a power expressed most dramatically on the cross. We think we want God to plunge into creation with a machete and to slash away at evil. It is not that this is somehow out of God's range; it is that this kind of use of power is out of God's range of character."[109] God often transforms those who suffer unjustly through divine love amid their pain rather than through miraculous healing. Divine love also empowers the sinner to accompany survivors, testify against evil, and fight for justice.

We also know from the parable that the world will not always be as it is today. A day will come when evil will no longer exist among us. "Just as the weeds are collected and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all who cause others to sin and all evildoers. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth. Then, the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of the Father (Matt. 13:39b-43a)." Yes, there will come a day when perfect justice reigns.

Meanwhile, racism seems inextricably woven within the fabric of society. We know the moral evil of racism did not come from God but rather through fear, ignorance, or an obsession for power. Individuals make a conscious act of will, contrary to moral

[108] Ibid., 141.

[109] Long, *What Shall We Say?*, 142.

law and God's will, to do wrong or harm others. The fact that God will destroy evil at the end of time gives little consolation to those who are traumatized by racial injustice.

There are no easy answers for racism's innocent victims. Jesus' suffering on the cross defines the Black theodicy experience. Brown Douglas writes, "My grandmother witnessed to a faith that was born at the foot of the cross. Black faith is, therefore, a paradox. Even as it was born in the cauldron of slavery, it testifies to the justice of God, and witnesses to the day when 'all God's children,' even God's Black children, will have shoes. In this sense, Black faith is, in and of itself, a theodicy. It resists any notion that the evil that oppresses Black bodies will have the last word."[110] Our cries for justice will not go unanswered. Jesus Christ united himself with human suffering when he allowed himself to die on the cross. We may never fully resolve the theodicy question, but preachers can give racial trauma survivors hope that they need not wait for a miracle. Jesus' wounds can heal them because, by his resurrection, he is victorious over all sin and death, including racism.

Conclusion

Trauma-informed theology gives preachers a solid foundation to speak out against racial injustice in this age of breathlessness. Trauma is a bodily experience. The preached word must honor the body's sanctity, deserving equal respect and nourishment as mind and soul. If preachers intend to heal the woundedness caused by racism, they should fully accept racial trauma survivors' stories because they need to know they are safe and believed. Trauma survivors harbor competing desires and emotions within the mind and heart. Despite these challenges, they are resilient. The journey toward healing is not

[110] Brown Douglas, *Resurrection Hope*, 183.

linear or straightforward, but transformation within their pain is possible through God's grace. Trauma-informed preaching can help those caught between death and resurrection encounter divine love.

Hans Urs von Balthasar's Holy Saturday theology is a pathway of understanding and empathy toward those who have experienced racial injustice because they often feel the same isolation, loneliness, and abandonment that our Lord felt in hell. Yet, this middle state is where God's love can be the strongest. The Spirit penetrates the abyss and transforms from within. Although complete healing may not be possible in this life, God transfigures our brokenness even though the wounds remain.

The Holy Saturday story connects closely with liturgical kneeling and the cross. Jesus' kneeling in the Garden of Gethsemane, his death on the cross, and his walking alone in hell—leaving no footprints, without seeing where he is going or from where he came—are all closely associated with racial trauma experiences. These three symbols can be powerful homiletic images to help the preacher capture the relationship between the Scripture passage and racial justice. They also will help those who have never experienced racism or who are indifferent to develop empathy and, hopefully, the desire to work toward a more just society.

Finally, trauma-informed preaching helps answer the theodicy question within the context of racial justice. The sin of racism is God's enemy. Although God will not wholly root out racial injustice on this side of eternity, God overcomes its inherent evil through weakness. Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection unleashed divine love with such ferocity that there is nothing it cannot overcome. Divine love empowers us to work with our Sisters and Brothers of Color to build a more just society. Divine love also gives

preachers the courage and strength to zealously implore their congregations to break the cycle of generational racial trauma through personal and communal action. We may never understand God's way, but like Job, we can kneel before the living God with steadfast faith and humility, knowing that the day will come when "God will wipe every tear from our eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, [for] the old order has passed away" (Rev. 21:4).

Chapter 4

Preaching and Racial Justice

"Silence in the face of evil is itself evil: God will not hold us guiltless. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act."

—Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Preaching on racial justice is a challenging and complex topic. Many preachers in my diocese avoid the subject altogether. There are various reasons for this, including fear, indifference, avoidance, and discomfort. Even though People of Color represent a significant and growing population in the diocese, clergy rarely mention racism as a fundamental life issue. This chapter will help preachers prepare to speak on racial justice using a trauma-informed pedagogy.

The chapter starts with descriptions of lament and witness preaching, which are homiletic structures that are appropriate for trauma-informed preaching and racial justice. A homiletic structure is the internal construction of a homily.

Then, I will offer excerpts from a sermon by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. as an example of lament preaching, in addition to excerpts from a homily by Fr. Ryan Lerner, pastor of Blessed Michael McGivney Parish in New Haven, Connecticut, as representative of witness preaching. Finally, I will discuss two methods for trauma-informed preaching and racial justice. A method is the process of formulating a homily.

Homiletician Rev. Dr. Leah D. Schade developed the first method, titled *sermon—dialogue—sermon*. I derived the second from my research and interviews with trauma survivors. I call this method *prepare—preach—engage*.

Trauma-Informed Preaching Structures

Lament and witness preaching are appropriate structures for homilies that address racial injustice through a trauma-informed pedagogy. Both approaches center on Dr. Judith Herman's model for traumatic recovery, as discussed in Chapter 2. Herman practiced psychiatry, taught at Harvard Medical School, and conducted extensive research with incest survivors. She proposed a three-step recovery process that entailed "establishing safety, reconstructing the trauma story, and restoring the connection between survivors and their community."[111] Lament and witness preaching support this process while promoting better awareness, understanding, and action for racial justice.

Lament

Songs of lament comprise one-third of the psalms in the Book of Psalms. These compositions represent individual and communal cries to God amid suffering and traumatic events. They also express feelings of abandonment, pleas for divine intervention, and affirmation of God's steadfast fidelity to God's people.

The psalms of lament pose the same questions asked by many racial trauma survivors: Has God forsaken me? Why is God silent to my cries for help? Where can I find hope as I struggle to carry on? Lament preaching aims to unite the congregation so that they walk along with those suffering from racial injustice and searching for healing while maintaining complete trust that God will act justly as God has done so often throughout salvation history.

[111] Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 2.

Rev. Dr. Luke Powery, Dean of Duke University Chapel and Professor of Homiletics, defines lament preaching by the following six criteria: 1) we name the trauma and injustice, 2) we speak directly, 3) we include ourselves, 4) we profess our faith in Jesus Christ, 5) we move toward praising God, and 6) we use heightened rhetoric.[112] These elements are evident in the Psalms, except for the fourth criterion, which broadly defines faith in Jesus Christ as faith in God. The following breaks down Psalm 44 against these criteria to provide a representative example of Powery's definition.

- **We name the trauma and injustice in direct language:** "You have made us like sheep for the slaughter and have scattered us among the nations. You have sold your people for a trifle, demanding no high price for them. You have made us the taunt of our neighbors, the derision and scorn of those about us. You have made us a byword among the nations, a laughingstock among the peoples" (Ps. 44: 11-14).

- **We include ourselves:** "All day long my disgrace is before me, and shame has covered my face, at the words of the taunters and revilers, at the sight of the enemy and the avenger" (Ps. 44:15-16).

- **We profess our faith in God:** "All this has come upon us, though we have not forgotten you, or been false to your covenant. Our heart has not turned back, nor have our steps departed from your way, that you should have broken us in the place of jackals and covered us with deep darkness" (Ps. 44: 17-19).

- **We move toward praising God:** "If we had forgotten the name of God, or spread forth our hands to a strange God, would not God discover this? For he knows the secrets of the heart" (Ps. 44: 20-21).

- **We use heightened rhetoric:** "Rouse yourself! Why do you sleep, O Lord? Awake! Do not cast us off forever! Why do you hide your face? Why do you forget our affliction and oppression? For our soul is bowed down to the dust; our body clings to the ground. Rise up, come to our help! Deliver us for the sake of your merciful love!" (Ps. 44: 23-26).

[112] Sarah Travis, *Unspeakable: Preaching and Trauma-Informed Theology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Press, 2021), 115.

Using Powery's criteria, a preacher can construct a trauma-informed homily on racial justice. The homilist begins by naming racial trauma in direct language through a personal or communal event.

Based on my own experience, I would use the following or a similar example. Two years ago, a nurse at one of our local hospitals told me an elderly Black woman and her daughter came to the Emergency Department. While the doctor examined the mother, the daughter disclosed to the nurse that when she told her mother that she needed to go to the hospital, her mother said, "Before we go, I need to put on my Sunday best." When asked why, the mother replied, "Because they might not treat me if they think I am a poor Black woman."

I find it impossible not to cry out in lament to God about the hidden racism that still exists so close to my home. My heart breaks that a woman of color would delay seeking medical help because she fears the hospital would not admit her. I am confident that each of us has witnessed or heard a story of racial injustice that could get the congregation's attention and open their hearts to new possibilities.

Next, I would speak in the first person, including myself, as I preach about racial injustice. The preacher must be an empathetic witness and not a dispassionate observer. For many years, I was either oblivious or indifferent to hidden and structural racism. The self-inclusive nature of lament allows the preacher to speak about their own journey from awareness to understanding. The preacher must not make the congregation feel guilty but encourage each person to discern their own knowledge, understanding, and ethical response to the issue.

Next, the preacher must express faith in Jesus Christ—faith that he will answer our prayers to eradicate the hidden and structural racial injustices that plague our community. Homilists can use many supporting scriptural passages, such as the Canaanite woman's faith (Matt. 15:21-18). With respect and reverence, the woman cries out, lamenting, "Lord, help me!" Jesus denies her petition, but she persists, "Please, Lord, for even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the table of their masters." Jesus commends the woman for her deep faith and grants her petition.

Rev. Dr. Sarah Travis, Associate Professor of Preaching, Worship, and Christian Ministry at Knox College, University of Toronto, encourages the preacher to "express profound faith and confidence that God will act, that God will not remain silent."[113] This "expression of faith" unites the congregation to "the covenant faithfulness of Yahweh."[114] Throughout salvation history, God heard the cries of his people, especially with the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt and their return after the Babylonian Captivity. This history reaches its culmination in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, the most eloquent expression of God's faithfulness and the gift of the Spirit, who never leaves us. Professing unwavering confidence in God encourages us to remember that God has kept God's promises and plants the seeds of hope. Even if some congregation members view their situation as hopeless, "the community can be the ones to hope on behalf of the others who cannot."[115]

[113] Travis, *Unspeakable*, 113.

[114] Ibid., 109.

[115] Ibid., 110.

Preachers can draw from Psalm 44 as a model for closing with heightened rhetoric, which is intense or emotionally charged language: "Rouse yourself! Why do you sleep, O Lord? Awake! . . . Rise up, come to our help! Deliver us for the sake of your merciful love!" (Ps. 44: 23-26). The psalmist pleads for God's intervention with passion and conviction. The final words, "merciful love," provide a fitting and compelling ending. The phrase *merciful love,* in Hebrew *hesed*, has many different meanings, such as "loyalty, fidelity, mercy, and loving-kindness."[116] The root meaning implies a commitment to one another, an obligation to do good and maintain loyalty to one's family." In dealing with those who are disinterested or indifferent, the preacher must help them understand that we must walk with our sisters and brothers of color in the fight for racial justice. For those traumatized by racism, God's *hesed* reminds them that God remains faithful, even if we are not, and promises mercy and deliverance from evil for those who remain faithful to God.

Lament preaching is an appropriate way to speak about the atrocities and devastating effects of racial injustice. Through its use, the homilist gives a voice to those who are traumatized by talking to God about unimaginable atrocities and imploring God to respond. The preacher weeps, wails, witnesses, and waits with the people.[117] Lament also allows the preacher to maintain a tension between despair and hope.

Equally important, lament helps the congregation understand that "if one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it" (1 Cor. 12:26a). No one is immune to suffering, which

[116] Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, *Ignatian Catholic Study Bible, Exodus: Commentary, Notes, & Study Questions* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), 62.

[117] Travis, *Unspeakable,* 106.

is why trauma-informed preaching is an effective way to speak about racial justice. Although we may experience life's disappointments and cruelty in different ways, through lament preaching, we name injustice and profess our faith in the only One who can heal our suffering and enact perfect justice.

Witness

Witness preaching, like lament preaching, is an effective method to name the sin of racism and promote recovery and healing for survivors and the congregation. Travis summarizes the preacher's role in this method as follows: "The preacher serves as a witness to name out loud the presence of traumatic wounding due to racial divisiveness, whether they approach it from the perspective of perpetrator or victim. The preacher's role is to bear witness to the wounding, allowing its presence to disturb and unsettle the existing frameworks of understanding that exist within the congregation."[118] The preacher is not a neutral observer but stands in solidarity with our sisters and brothers of color.

I describe witness preaching by the following four criteria: 1) The preacher creates a safe space by telling a trauma-informed story from personal experience or retelling a trauma survivor's story (with their permission). 2) The preacher bears witness to the Gospel and its relationship to traumatic healing, recovery, or justice. 3) The preacher names God's presence and action within traumatic experiences. 4) Together with survivors and the congregation, the preacher helps reimagine a new future that places hope and confidence in God, our salvation.

[118] Travis, *Unspeakable*, 73.

These criteria align with inductive and narrative homiletic structures. I recommend beginning the racial justice homily by testifying to an example of racial injustice experienced by the preacher or a trauma survivor. If the preacher chooses to testify on behalf of another, the preacher should be required to obtain that person's permission. The following are two examples of witness testimonies I heard from different cultural racist experiences—the first from the perspective of a Catholic Latino woman and the second from a Catholic white woman.

As the woman told me the story about her husband, Carl, she fought to hide her anger and disappointment. She is Latino, and her husband is African American. As Carl drove through a wealthy area, a state trooper stopped him and asked, "Is this your truck?" The truck was high-end in its class and fully loaded. Carl responded that it was his truck and asked why the officer stopped him. He received no answer, only a request to see his driver's license and registration. Carl firmly held the wheel, afraid to make any sudden movements. Each time the officer asked for something, he repeated his request and then narrated each movement: "Now, I am going to take my hands off the wheel and open the glove box. Inside the glove box is my registration. I will take it out and hand it to you. I will now reach into my back pocket, take out my driver's license, and hand it to you." After fulfilling each request, Carl immediately placed his hands back on the wheel. The officer asked him where he came from, what he was doing, and where he was going. Carl patiently answered each question and continued to ask why the state trooper detained him. He never got an answer. After holding Carl for thirty minutes on the side of the road, the officer finally let him go with a warning that he must leave the immediate area.

Both Carl and wife live in a heightened state of anxiety every time they get behind the wheel.[119]

When Meghan was in the eighth grade, her family woke up one morning with a cross burning in their front yard. A few days earlier, her family of white Catholic Irish descent had taken in a Black teenage foster child. Living in a wealthy Pittsburgh suburb, she had never experienced racism. At first, she thought the cross burned because they were Catholic. Her parents explained that there were other Catholics on the street. The cross burned because her new brother was Black. From that day forward, their neighbors no longer invited them to community events, she lost friends at school, and some of her classmates lectured her about how her family was ruining the neighborhood. This experience still haunts Meghan to this day.[120]

These are just two of the many stories I heard during my research. Travis writes, "Stories are a powerful tool. Putting traumatic memories into words is a way to ease their power, to tell the struggle out loud, and to name before others the pain that has been experienced."[121] As painful as this is, preachers must spend time with trauma survivors so they may testify to the atrocities that have been committed and assist in the healing process.

Bearing witness for survivors of racial injustice is an essential dimension of trauma-informed witness preaching. Racial injustice can take many hidden forms, from microaggressions to structural racism embedded within the fabric of society. Retelling

[119] Interview with a racial trauma survivor, October 3, 2023.

[120] Interview with a racial trauma survivor, October 10, 2023.

[121] Travis, *Unspeakable*, 56.

these stories of injustice gives language to the incomprehensible nature of racism. As painful as these stories are to hear, bringing them out from the often distant and hidden recesses of our collective memory legitimizes trauma survivors' experiences. It also leads the congregation to confront the reality of injustice.

The preacher must also bear witness to the Gospel and its relationship to traumatic healing, recovery, or justice. The homilist accomplishes this by reminding the congregation that God is with us during our most challenging trials and feels our pain amidst our suffering. One of the most moving lines in scripture is Jesus' reaction to his friend Lazarus' death: "And Jesus wept (John 11:35)." According to Travis, "The divine suffers with humanity, sheds the first tear, and grieves trauma as much as we do."[122] I believe Jesus is the first to grieve with our sisters and brothers of color whenever they face the horrific trauma of racial injustice.

Naming justice within the Gospel narrative is also essential. The story of Zacchaeus, the tax collector, is one appropriate example. Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus but was too short to see over the crowd, so he climbed a sycamore tree. As Jesus passed by, he looked at Zacchaeus and said, "Zacchaeus, come down quickly, for today I must stay at your house" (Luke 19:5). After Zacchaeus meets Jesus, he repents and promises restitution: "Behold, half of my possessions, Lord, I shall give to the poor, and if I have extorted anything from anyone, I shall repay it four times over" (Luke 19:8b). Zacchaeus acknowledges his participation in the unjust social structure of the time and makes amends for any personal transgressions.

[122] Travis, *Unspeakable*, 41.

Perhaps the most challenging issue for preachers to address is reparation. Some people feel they are not responsible for past injustice, so they have no obligation to correct past wrongs. From their perspective, anti-discrimination and equal-opportunity laws have already addressed the fundamental issues of racism. Yet, we need not look far to see that problems still exist. Black parents still must have *the talk* with their teenage children, explicitly stating how they should behave and answer questions if pulled over by law enforcement. Many Black people experience extreme anxiety and fear when stopped by police. Although we may not hear explicit racial slurs, Black people feel pressure to be "white." A Latino woman who is married to a Black man told me she took her infant to the pediatrician for a routine checkup. The pediatrician looked at the child and said, "Don't worry. Your baby will get lighter." Our prison system has a disproportionate number of minorities. Economic and educational data testify to the disparity between people of color and their white counterparts. The preacher need not solve all these issues or offer prescriptive advice. The goal is to motivate the congregation to respond as Zacchaeus did by discerning their role in perpetuating injustice and determining an appropriate ethical response.

Next, the preacher witnesses God's presence and action in our lives. I recently met Maria, an immigrant from Latin America with limited English skills. Through an interpreter, she gave some examples of how she's experienced racism. Despite life's challenges, she spoke extensively about receiving God's grace through her faith community. She referred to the parish as her church family and her sanctuary. When Maria attends Mass, she says all her concerns and stress disappear. She is at peace.

In his book *Seeing with the Heart: A Guide to Navigating Life's Adventures*, Kevin O'Brien, S.J., writes about the essential nature of God's presence amid suffering and how God's presence manifests itself through faith communities:

> There are Sundays when I really need to go to church: it's been a tough week, and I need to be around others who can comfort me and help me feel less alone. Or I need the help of others to put my faith into action, such as taking steps to forgive someone. Even if we do not talk to one another in church, we are standing beside one another, our presence speaking volumes.[123]

Christian congregations must be a place of refuge for racial trauma survivors, a place to experience God's presence through our sisters and brothers in Christ.

Finally, the preacher must provide hope for a better, more just future. The great reformers throughout history have had one thing in common. Despite the embodied pain, suffering, exploitation, and oppression they experienced, they imagined a future free of injustice. They painted a picture of a future reality so inspiring and compelling that people no longer stared at the ground but rather turned their gaze toward the heavens. O'Brien writes, "While we cannot avoid suffering, we retain the spiritual freedom to choose how to respond to it."[124] Through their prophetic imagination, preaches can help people choose hope.

On April 26, 2018, Rev. Greg Holston, Senior Advisor for Policy and Advocacy to the Philadelphia District Attorney, preached hope at the National Memorial for Peace and Justice dedication. The memorial in Montgomery, Alabama, remembers and honors the more than 4,400 Black people lynched in the United States between 1877 and 1950.

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[123] Kevin O'Brien, *Seeing with the Heart: A Guide to Navigating Life's Adventures* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2023), 54-55.

[124] Ibid., 148.

The victims' names are engraved on more than 800 monuments, which hang from the ceiling. Each monument represents a county that recorded lynchings.[125] Holston imagined a future far different from today's reality:

> Every time you look at one of these people [the engraved names], they're not just crying out to be remembered for the lynching that took place. They're crying out to say to you, "You can do better." We can do better. We can create the beloved community. We can create a place where all of us can thrive. We can create that world if we stand together, work together, and hope together, and dream together for the very day when all justice rolls down like a body of rivers and righteousness like a mighty stream.[126]

The preacher stands with the assembly in witnessing racial injustice while offering a word of healing and hope aimed to move hearts and create a better future.

Examples from Racial Justice Preachers

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was born in 1929 in Atlanta, Georgia. His birth name was Michael, but he later changed it to Martin. His father and grandfather were pastors of the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta. King had a distinguished academic career. He graduated from a Black-segregated high school at fifteen, received his BA from Morehouse College, a BD from Crozer Theological Seminary, and a doctorate from Boston University. King became pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1954.[127] He launched the first African American nonviolent demonstration boycotting bus segregation a year later. The United States Supreme Court

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[125] "The National Memorial for Peace and Justice," The Legacy Sites, accessed November 3, 2023, https://legacysites.eji.org/about/memorial/.

[126] "Dedication of the National Memorial for Peace and Justice," YouTube, accessed October 25, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1pUNPAsI6zc.

[127] "Martin Luther King, Jr. Biographical," The Nobel Prize, Accessed April 17, 2022, https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1964/king/biographical/.

declared the laws that segregated people on buses by race unconstitutional in 1956 because of his efforts.[128] Thus began the Civil Rights Movement, which King led until James Earl Ray assassinated him on the balcony of a Memphis motel in 1968. King worked tirelessly for racial justice. He traveled more than six million miles, wrote five books, and gave more than twenty-five hundred speeches worldwide.[129]

Although I was only six years old when King died, I still remember that day. Those years were turbulent times as the United States struggled with the Vietnam War and racial tension. When the news of King's death reached my home, I recall my parents crying. They admired him for all he accomplished and understood that his death represented a significant setback for racial equity in the United States. His oratory skills were exceptional, evidenced by his "I Have a Dream" speech delivered to more than two hundred and fifty thousand people gathered before the Lincoln Memorial in 1963. He is one of history's most influential and iconic racial justice preachers.

King's exceptional preaching was born from his personal and generational trauma. His father witnessed a lynching as a child when a Black man hung from a tree simply because he smiled at a group of white men as he passed by. The men were angry because they were losing their jobs to Black people.[130] King faced constant threats to his life and family. The first was in 1956, when he became a leader in the Civil Rights Movement. At midnight, he received a "phone call threatening to blow up his house if he

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[128] "Martin Luther King, Jr. Biographical," The Nobel Prize, Accessed April 17, 2022, https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1964/king/biographical/.

[129] "Martin Luther King, Jr. Biographical," The Nobel Prize, Accessed April 17, 2022, https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1964/king/biographical/.

[130] James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013), 116-117.

did not leave Montgomery in three days."[131] He chose not to leave, and three days later, someone threw a bomb on his front porch. Fortunately, the bomb did not injure anyone.

In June 1967, King delivered a sermon titled *A Knock at Midnight* at Mt. Zion Baptist Church in Cincinnati, Ohio. The sermon is based on Luke 11:5-6, which says: "Suppose one of you has a friend to whom he goes at midnight and says, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, for a friend of mine has arrived at my house from a journey and I have nothing to offer him.'" King uses the controlling image of midnight to address the many social injustices of his time, including racism and the church's inadequate response. The sermon is an excellent example of lament trauma-informed preaching and racial justice. He masterfully weaves in his own witness testimony by recalling the days when he and others boycotted segregated busing in Montgomery, Alabama.

In the following excerpts from his sermon, he names trauma and injustice using direct language:

> Millions of American Negroes, starving for the want of the bread of freedom, have knocked again and again at the door of so-called white churches, but they have usually been greeted by a cold indifference or a blatant hypocrisy. Even the white religious leaders, who have a heartfelt desire to open the door and provide the bread, are often more cautious than courteous and more prone to follow the expedient than the ethical path. One of the shameful tragedies of history is that the very institution which should remove man from the midnight of racial segregation participates in creating and perpetuating the midnight.
>
> While speaking of the laxity of the church, I must not overlook the fact that the so-called Negro church has also left men disappointed at midnight. I say "so-called Negro church" because ideally there can be no Negro or white church. It is to their everlasting shame that white Christians developed a system of racial segregation within the church and inflicted so many indignities upon its Negro worshippers that they had to organize their own churches.

[131] Martin Luther King, Jr., *A Knock at Midnight: Inspiration from the Great Sermons of Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr*. (New York: Warner Books, Inc., 1998), 117-118.

> Two types of Negro churches have failed to provide bread. One burns with emotionalism, and the other freezes with classism. The former, reducing worship to entertainment, places more emphasis on volume than on content and confuses spirituality with muscularity. The danger in such a church is that the members may have more religion in their hands and feet than in their hearts and souls. At midnight this type of church has neither the vitality nor the relevant gospel to feed hungry souls.
>
> The other type of Negro church that feeds no midnight traveler has developed a class system and boasts of its dignity, its membership of professional people, and its exclusiveness. In such a church the worship service is cold and meaningless, the music dull and uninspiring, and the sermon little more than a homily on current events. If the pastor says too much about Jesus Christ, the members feel that he is robbing the pulpit of dignity. If the choir sings a Negro spiritual, the members claim an affront to their class status. This type of church tragically fails to recognize that worship at its best is a social experience in which people from all levels of life come together to affirm their oneness and unity under God.[132]

King then professes the faith of his ancestors amid unspeakable violence and praises God:

> Our eternal message of hope is that dawn will come. Our slave foreparents realized this. They were unmindful of the fact of midnight, for always there was the rawhide whip of the overseer and the auction block where families were torn asunder to remind them of its reality. When they thought of the agonizing darkness of midnight, they sang: "Oh, nobody knows de trouble I've seen, Glory Hallelujah! Sometimes I'm up, sometimes I'm down, Oh yes, Lord, Sometimes I'm almost to de groun', Oh yes, Lord, Oh, nobody knows de trouble I've seen, Glory Hallelujah!" Encompassed by a staggering midnight but believing that morning would come, they sang: "I'm so glad trouble don't last always. Oh my Lord, what shall I do?" Their positive belief in the dawn was the growing edge of hope that kept the slaves faithful amid the most barren and tragic circumstances.
>
> Faith in the dawn arises from the faith that God is good and just. When one believes this, he knows that the contradictions of life are neither final nor ultimate. He can walk through the dark night with the radiant conviction that all things work together for good for those that love God. Even the most starless midnight may herald the dawn of some great fulfillment.[133]

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[132] King, *A Knock at Midnight*, 71-74.

[133] Ibid., 75-76.

Finally, he uses heightened rhetoric to encourage and inspire the congregation:

> The dawn will come. Disappointment, sorrow, and despair are born at midnight, but morning follows. "Weeping may endure for a night," says the Psalmist, "but joy cometh in the morning." This faith adjourns the assemblies of hopelessness and brings new light into the dark chambers of pessimism.

King's lived experience, personally and communally, provided unique insight into the complex issues surrounding racial justice in his time. By preaching with lament, his sermon brought to light the injustices people were afraid to talk about. He bore witness to their ancestors' steadfast faith and firm belief that God hears the cries of the afflicted. King proclaimed hope and helped the congregation imagine a future free from the sin of racism. His preached word is a fitting example of trauma-informed racial justice preaching.

Rev. Ryan Lerner

Rev. Ryan Lerner was born in Manchester, Connecticut, to a Jewish father and a Catholic mother in 1981. He and his twin sister went to a Catholic elementary school run by the Sisters of Mercy, but his parents did not force them to become Jewish or Catholic. When he and his sister were twelve, they decided to become Catholic. He attended a public high school and then Trinity College in Hartford, receiving a bachelor's degree in history and religion and a master's degree in public policy.

The attack on the Twin Towers in New York City on September 11, 2001, along with the clergy abuse scandal, tested his faith. Although he continued to practice Catholicism, he struggled with the decision to stay in a Church that perpetuated such heinous crimes against minors.

After college, Lerner worked in a nursing home as an administrator responsible for ninety residents. In this setting, he witnessed faith's power by encountering Jesus

Christ in the people he served. His experience in the home compelled him to discern a priestly vocation. Lerner googled "vocations in Hartford, Connecticut," and filled out an application to enter the seminary. After six years in formation, including moments of doubt, he was ordained a Catholic priest in 2014. He served as the archbishop's priest secretary, chancellor, and chaplain at St. Thomas More Chapel at Yale University. Lerner is now the pastor of Blessed Michael McGivney Parish in New Haven, Connecticut.

After George Floyd's death, while Lerner was chaplain at Yale University, he heard a student passionately implore his classmates to "show up" at Black Lives Matter (BLM) demonstrations. Lerner began to discern the question, "Have I shown up?" He further pondered why the Catholic Church expends considerable resources on the March for Life but is mostly silent on racism. "Is not racial injustice a life issue?" he thought. He decided that racial justice is one of the most important life issues and that he needs to show up and seek change. Lerner acknowledges that the Catholic Church struggles to find concrete steps to work on this issue, partly because facing the ugly truth of our past sins is difficult.

On January 6, 2021, more than two thousand supporters of President Donald Trump stormed the US Capitol to prevent Congress from ratifying the Electoral College vote. They aimed to overturn the 2020 presidential election and keep Trump in power. Four days later, on the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, Lerner delivered a courageous homily that exemplifies trauma-informed witness preaching and racial justice. The following are excerpts from that homily.[134]

[134] Ryan Lerner, "Homily: STM Sunday Mass 011021," St. Thomas More: The Catholic Chapel & Center at Yale University, January 11,2021, https://stmchapel.wistia.com/medias/6qc9o2n8d7.

Lerner begins with a trauma-informed story based on his personal experience of antisemitism:

> In one of the units of my high school Western Civ class, our teacher, Mr. Armstrong, showed us images of Nazi propaganda, the Holocaust, and ultimately the liberation of the Auschwitz concentration camp. Aside from the obvious, two impressions really stood out and remain with me. The first, one of my classmates, a friend, pointed at a figure on the screen and said, "Hey, it's Lerner." Sure enough, there among the gaunt, starved, and tortured men in striped pajamas was one who stood out, whose Semitic features totally resembled my own. The second, watching the slightly callous but otherwise expressionless, mechanical way that uniformed Nazi officers, men, and women handled the naked, broken bodies of Jewish people, tossing them like garbage into pits that would be their mass grave. I remembered thinking that those bodies could have belonged to my Bubbe Molly, my great aunt Natalie, or Uncle Jack.

Then, he bears witness to the evil that permeated society in Nazi Germany:

> Now, consider the fact that most of those who either worked in this camp and committed these atrocities or lived in town on the other side of the fence and complacently permitted this to take place or feigned ignorance would have dinner with their families, read stories to their children, go to the opera, listen to Wagner and go to Sunday Mass. I was baptized just a couple of years before, so seeing this footage and learning about this stuff, the most horrifying and disturbing thing for me was hearing that Christians presided over and permitted this to happen, compartmentalizing and directly or indirectly cooperating with grave evil while living otherwise comfortable, respectful, simple and faithful lives.

And the grave evil of antisemitism and racism that still exists today, as evidenced by the protest at the Capitol, he said:

> One of the most disturbing images for me was not the unsurprising violence and destruction of the mob. It was not the half-naked man donning a Davey Crockett hat with antlers and the American flag painted on his face while sitting in the vice president's and speaker's chairs. Nor was it the waving of the Confederate and Nazi flags, both symbols of hate, anti-blackness, antisemitism, white supremacy, and genocidal hatred. By now, these images and actions should come as no surprise in light of what we have seen and heard and experienced in our country throughout her history up to this point, but especially for the past four years. No, what was most disturbing for me was what a colleague at the First Congregational Church had pointed out that the symbols of Christianity were widely apparent among the Insurrectionists.

Lerner transitions to bearing witness to the Gospel and its relationship to traumatic healing and recovery.

> Today, we celebrate the baptism of the Lord by which God in Jesus Christ entered into solidarity with our human condition, with its inherent dignity and blessedness, and having been created by God, but also with its brokenness and ugliness due to our sinful nature. Jesus submitted to a baptism for the forgiveness of sins, to save what is dead in our twisted humanity, to pour new life into it, to restore its sacred dignity and to mark it indelibly with God's own divinity.

He then names God's presence and action in a trauma-filled world.

> As we pray in the baptismal ritual and in the funeral ritual, in the waters of baptism, you have died with Christ and rose with him to new life. May the Holy Spirit open your ears so that you may hear God's word and open your lips to proclaim it. At the moment of our baptism, just like Jesus's baptism, God rent the heavens and sent down God's spirit love like a dove. It was a moment of supreme rejoicing for God. God rejoiced in that moment, saying, "Here is my beloved son. Here is my beloved daughter." And in the words of the prophet, "Here is my servant, whom I will uphold my Chosen One with whom I am well pleased, who will bring forth justice to the nations. I, the Lord, have called you. I have grasped you by the hand, loved you, and set you as a light to the nations, to open the eyes of the blind, to bring out prisoners from confinement and from the dungeon those who live in darkness."
>
> God looks upon each and every one of us and says, "You are my beloved son or daughter. With you, I am well pleased." Let us never doubt that core fact of our sacred identity, our dignity in God through Jesus Christ. In Christ, we have received grace upon grace, blessings without number, and new life destined for glory.

Finally, in solidarity with survivors and the congregation, Lerner reimagines a new future that places hope and confidence in God, our salvation.

> We have been blessed indeed, but we have also been entrusted with a grave responsibility in these divisive and challenging times to seek, embrace, and live in the truth. To work for justice fearlessly, to love without partiality and without holding back, and as God has done in Jesus Christ, to live in solidarity with every human person. This is what it means to be a Christian. The flag we wave is not one of hatred or terror or intimidation, but the name of Jesus Christ and his loving presence in the world, and the cross—there is the light to the nations. A beacon of courageous, self-sacrificing, all-embracing love that is not complacent but unafraid to take a stand and to get messy as Jesus did, and

> entering into solidarity with us, to not be afraid to get messy for the sake of love and the pursuit of justice, mercy, and redemption.

Lerner gives us a passionate example of witness preaching that demonstrates his commitment to "show up," accompany survivors of racial injustice, and inspire the next generation to act and continue the pursuit of justice and equity for all.

Preaching Methods

Sermon—Dialogue—Sermon

In her book *Preaching in the Purple Zone,* Rev. Dr. Leah D. Schade develops a method to help homilists courageously preach on politically charged topics. Her process allows preachers to speak the truth in love without fear of reprisal as a prophetic witness. Schade writes, "We are called to listen with hospitality, engage with integrity and prayer, and learn with intellectual rigor in order to speak God's Word that addresses the powers, casts out demons, and proclaims the crucified and risen Christ."[135] She names her method *sermon—dialogue—sermon*.

The initial sermon begins with an invitation for the community to discuss racial justice but does not take a position. The preacher should analyze the congregation to determine the appropriate foundation for this opening sermon. Some congregations may be mature enough for a direct approach aimed at action, while others may have never discussed the topic and need to begin with awareness. The sermon concludes with a call for parish discernment about racial justice and an invitation to participate in group discussions.

[135] Leah D. Schade, *Preaching in the Purple Zone: Ministry in the Red-Blue Divide* (Lanham, MD: Rowman Littlefield, 2019), 6.

The dialogue step brings together small groups to discuss the issue within the context of faith. The preacher should ensure that the participants mirror the parish's diversity. The dialogue must include diverse voices so that the final sermon accurately represents the congregation's various viewpoints. During this phase, the preacher encourages an open, honest, and respectful conversation as they walk together toward a better understanding of racial justice and the necessary actions to build a just and equitable society.

The final sermon represents and respects the different viewpoints and creates a new foundation for the parish to build upon. The preacher must not express personal views but speak on behalf of the community, sharing insights from the group discernment. This final sermon is an opportunity to witness what remained unspoken in the first sermon, to offer hope, and to inspire parishioners to take personal and communal action.

Schade also recommends the sermon include several of her five paths of preaching: rooting, fruiting, flowering, pollinating, and leafing. *Rooting* means grounding the sermon in biblical principles. She warns, however, that preachers must not twist the text to support their own political views. *Fruiting* invites conversation on the issue and points to transformational change. *Flowering* asks questions and raises awareness. *Pollinating* recognizes that societal issues are complicated, with diverse and sometimes conflicting answers to problems. The preacher respectfully brings these different voices into dialogue as the assembly struggles to formulate solutions. Finally, *leafing* brings the sermon to a conclusion by asking what the next steps are, along with suggestions for action.

Schade's process applies to a broad range of politically controversial topics but is especially relevant to trauma-informed racial justice preaching. Her methodology creates a safe space, allows the congregation to share their stories and bear witness, and invites everyone into communion through a new shared vision. For preachers concerned about dividing the parish community or being perceived as too political, Schade's sermon—dialogue—sermon process offers an apolitical, scripturally centric approach.

Prepare—Preach—Engage

The first step in this method is for preachers to prepare themselves to speak about racial justice. An essential part of preparation is to spend time with racial trauma survivors. Preachers must listen attentively to their stories and walk with them for understanding. We can only speak authentically about trauma if we build meaningful relationships with those suffering from trauma. The more we understand, the more we as "religious leaders can create spaces and communities of safety and care."[136] Once we establish safety, the process of remembering and witnessing can begin.

Another vital preparation element is education. There are many sources that will help preachers become better informed, including books, articles, podcasts, conferences, courses, and videos. I found the podcast *Seeing White* from the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University, hosted and directed by journalist John Biewen, profoundly helpful.[137] In this fourteen-part series, Biewen examines racism's historical origins, the

[136] Jennifer Baldwin, *Trauma-Sensitive Theology: Thinking Theologically in the Era of Trauma* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018), 55.

[137]"Seeing White" at https://www.sceneonradio.org/seeing-white/ (14 episodes totaling 9.5 hours, also available as *Scene on Radio* podcast, Season 2, a program of the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University.

structural nature of racism woven into the fabric of the American justice system, and what it means to be white in America.

I had not realized, for example, that the definition of race did not exist before the sixteenth century. Until then, if you asked someone to describe themselves, they would name their nationality: English, Greek, Japanese, etc. Then, in the 1500s, Portuguese slave traders began to develop the concept of race to justify the enslavement of Africans. From the eighteenth through twentieth centuries, anthropologists tried to prove that white people, Caucasians, were more intelligent than other races. It was not until the 1940s that scientists discovered no biological basis for race.[138] The series gave me numerous insights into the horrific evolution and impact of racism in America.

The final preparation element is prayer. Patrick Saint-Jean, S.J., wrote the following examination of consciousness that preachers can use to discern their level of awareness and understanding of racial justice:

> Imagine yourself at the foot of the cross, watching as Jesus gasps for breath. He is seeking to be treated not as a threat but as a fellow human being, just as your Black sisters and brothers are seeking. Now, in light of this experience, ask yourself:
>
> - Have I fully loved God and fully loved my neighbor as myself?
> - Have I caused pain to others by my actions or my words that offended my brother or sister?
> - Have I done enough to inform myself about the sin of racism, its roots, and its historical and contemporary manifestations? Have I opened my heart to see how unequal access to economic opportunity, jobs, housing, and education on the basis of skin color, race, or ethnicity has denied and continues to deny the equal dignity of others?
> - Is there a root of racism within me that blurs my vision of Jesus in those who may seem different from me?
> - Have I ever witnessed an occasion when someone was a victim of personal, institutional, systematic, or social racism and I did or said nothing?

[138] John Biewen, "Seeing White: Part 8," Scene on Radio, May 17, 2017, https://sceneonradio.org/episode-38-skulls-and-skins-seeing-white-part-8/.

- Have I ever been the one to inflict the pain of personal, institutional, systematic, or social racism?
- Am I willing to align myself with the presence of Christ in the Black community?[139]

If a preacher would like a more structured and in-depth approach, I recommend Saint-Jean's book, *The Spiritual Work of Racial Justice: A Month of Meditations with Ignatius of Loyola*. Saint-Jean provides thirty days of study and prayer, using Saint Ignatius of Loyola's four-week spiritual exercises. Using scripture, stories, facts, and journal exercises, Saint-Jean helps the reader connect mind to heart on the complex topic of racial justice.

Following adequate preparation, the next step is preaching. There are a few points the preacher should consider. First, words matter. For example, there are examples in scripture that equate white with good and black with evil:

- "However, you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; they will walk with me dressed in white, because they are worthy" (Rev. 3:4).
- "Though your sins be like scarlet, they may become white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they may become white as wool" (Isa. 1:18).
- "Do not stare at me because I am so black, because the sun has burned me; they charged me with the care of the vineyards: my own vineyard I did not take care of" (Song of Sol. 1:6).
- "When he broke open the third seal, I heard the third living creature cry out, 'Come forward.' I looked, and there was a black horse, and its rider held a scale in his hand" (Rev. 6:5).

Implying "white" is righteous or using "black" as a metaphor for evil could cause emotional harm to people with darker skin.

Also, it is important to remember that preachers do not need to have all the answers. Sometimes, it is enough to encourage people to find God within their trauma.

[139] Patrick Saint-Jean, *The Crucible of Racism: Ignatian Spirituality and the Power of Hope* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2022), 152.

As one survivor eloquently stated, "Teardrops must be embraced, and it is up to each of us how we choose to embrace them because they always have a specific meaning attached to them, and it is for us to figure out what they mean." The questions that emerge from trauma do not have simple answers. The ways of God are mysterious, and although we may not have definitive answers regarding innocent suffering, our faith tradition offers a helpful perspective.[140]

Preachers should close their homilies with hope. In almost all cases, the survivors I interviewed clung to the possibility of a better future. They expect preachers to be honest about the reality of the situation but give people hope. Ashley Theuring, Assistant Professor in Theology at Xavier University, proposes the following definition of hope: "Hope is a prophetic two-fold action, including a denouncing of present suffering and evil, along with the announcement of the promised future."[141] Preach with prophetic imagination by naming the evil in our midst, then give them hope by painting a picture of new possibilities.

In addition to delivering racial justice homilies, preachers must engage the faithful by preaching with their lives. The congregation must believe what they hear from the pulpit is more than empty words. Homilies that are born from lived experience and substantiated through engagement inspire and motivate others to action.

What a preacher decides to do is a matter of individual discernment. In my case, I expanded my circle of friends to include more diversity and then engaged in substantial

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[140] James Martin, *The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything: A Spirituality for Real Life* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2009), 286.

[141] Ashley E. Theuring, *Fragile Resurrection: Practicing Hope After Domestic Violence* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2021), 72.

conversations on racial issues. I decided to become involved in providing pathways to higher education. Over the past few years, I worked with Fairfield University to launch a new academic program called Fairfield Bellarmine for low-income and first-generation students. Fairfield Bellarmine, an associate degree division of Fairfield University, opened its doors to its first class in August 2023. Over 90 percent of the students are from the local Black and Latino communities (https://www.fairfield.edu/bellarmine/).

Some of my colleagues have led racial justice adult education programs at their parishes or facilitated small group discussions. Others participated in peaceful demonstrations advocating for racial equity. Regardless of what preachers decide to do, first and foremost, they must "show up." What we say from the pulpit must go beyond moral platitudes and manifest itself in meaningful engagement for a just society.

Conclusion

Although preaching on racial justice is challenging and complicated, trauma-informed preaching assists preachers in finding their voice. It gives them the confidence to raise awareness, foster understanding, and inspire action. Lament and witness homiletic structures provide a safe environment, offering testimony and inviting the congregation to imagine a hopeful future. Finally, methods such as *sermon—dialogue—sermon* and *prepare—preach—engage* assist preachers with developing a scripturally based homily that is not political but represents the preacher's and the community's lived experience.

In closing, I recommend preachers who are preparing a racial justice homily to pray the following:

> God, we recognize that racism is a social sin that has taken root in the garden of our hearts. We need you to convert us and purify our hearts, so that we

can become agents of care, walking by faith in justice, hope, love, healing, and reconciliation for your greater glory. We know that racism harms your creation. Guard our hearts against it and move us forward to enact change. Empower us to be people of hope. Amen.[142]

—Patrick Saint-Jean, S.J.

[142] Saint-Jean, *The Crucible of Racism*, 16.

Chapter 5

Trauma-Informed Preaching and Racial Justice: A Training Program to Find Our Voice in the Age of Breathlessness

Introduction

During the summer of 2023, I designed a ten-week training program to test my hypothesis that when clergy study racism through trauma-informed instruction, it will prepare and motivate them to preach on racial justice. Trauma-informed instruction is based on an understanding of trauma through psychological, historical, theological, and homiletic perspectives.

I designed my program for a maximum of twelve participants (priests and deacons) who attended ninety-minute classroom sessions for four consecutive weeks. Bishop Frank J. Caggiano and I selected the participants from primarily white suburban parishes. After completing the four classes, they prepared a practice homily on racial justice and posted a video of their preaching on a private website. Two classmates and I gave them feedback. After receiving this feedback, each participant prepared a homily and preached on racial justice to their respective congregations. After posting videos of these homilies, the participants received feedback from me and three to six parishioners who heard them preach.

This chapter describes the ministerial intervention in detail. First, I discuss the preparation required for the training program, including course development, speaker selection, and the participant invitation process. Then, I describe the classroom

presentation content and subsequent preaching exercises. Finally, I will discuss the data collection methods, data analysis, and ethical procedures.

The Ministerial Intervention

Before conducting the training program, I developed a course outline, selected four speakers, picked two observers, conducted two focus groups, and invited seventeen participants (priests and deacons), eleven of whom accepted my invitation. The following describes each step in more detail.

Course Outline

I designed the training program to include my four trauma-informed instruction perspectives: psychological, historical, theological, and homiletic. One class was dedicated to each trauma-informed perspective. The psychological module helped the participants understand racial trauma psychologically and neurologically. The historical session presented racial trauma as experienced by Black religious in America during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The theological module discussed trauma-informed theology and its application to racial justice. Finally, the homiletic session provided practical advice for preachers from the two focus groups and presented two homiletic structures for trauma-informed preaching and racial justice.

After defining the four classroom sessions, I invited the following experts to teach the four trauma-informed instruction perspectives. Appendix 11 gives a brief biography of each speaker.

- Theological: Dr. Ashley Theuring, Assistant Professor in Theology and Co-Director of the Institute for Spirituality and Social Justice at Xavier University. Cincinnati, Ohio
- Historical: Dr. Shannen Dee Williams, Associate Professor of History at the University of Dayton, Dayton, Ohio

- Psychological: Erin Neil, Director of Safe Environments, Diocese of Bridgeport, Connecticut

- Homiletic: Fr. Reggie Norman, pastor of Our Lady of Fatima Church in Wilton, Connecticut, and President of the National Association of Black Catholic Administrators

I met with each presenter via Zoom before the training program began to provide an overview of my thesis and discuss their individual presentations. I also determined each presenter's availability and cost. Two presenters waived their fees, and two charged $2,000 each plus travel expenses. Foundations in Faith, a not-for-profit corporation that funds pastoral ministries within the Diocese of Bridgeport, awarded me a $2,000 grant towards the speaker fees (https://www.foundationsinfaith.org). The Diocese of Bridgeport provided lunch after each session. The total cost of the program was $8,432.17.

Upon completing the classroom sessions, participants put what they learned into practice. I asked each one to deliver a practice homily and then to preach publicly on racial justice. The participants received feedback from two classmates and me after their practice homilies. Then, after their public preaching, they received feedback from me and three to six people who observed them.

The following is the course outline:

- Session 1: Trauma-informed Theology and Racial Justice
    - Title: "The Cross: Fragile Resurrection"
    - Presenter: Dr. Ashley Theuring, Assistant Professor in Theology at Xavier University
    - Date: October 5, 2023

- Session 2: Racial Trauma—A Historical Perspective in the Catholic Church
    - Title: “The Struggle for Racial Justice: Finding Our Voice Through the Experience of Black Catholic Nuns”
    - Presenter: Dr. Shannen Dee Williams, Associate Professor of History at the University of Dayton
    - Date: October 12, 2023

- Session 3: Trauma-informed Psychology and Racial Justice
    - Title: “Trauma and Graced Recovery in the Age of Breathlessness”
    - Presenter: Erin Neil, Director of Safe Environments, Diocese of Bridgeport
    - Date: October 19, 2023

- Session 4: Trauma-informed Preaching and Racial Justice
    - Title: “Context: Racial Justice Preaching in Your Parish”
    - Presenter: Fr. Reggie Norman, President of the National Association of Black Catholic Administrators
    - Date: October 26, 2023

- Practice Homily
    - Date: October 27, 2023 – November 10, 2023

- Practice Homily Feedback
    - Date: November 11, 2023 – November 17, 2023

- Public Homily
    - Date: November 18, 2023 – December 8, 2023

- Public Homily Feedback
    - Date: December 4, 2023 – December 10, 2023

Each classroom session followed the same format. The classes occurred on subsequent Thursday mornings beginning on October 5, 2023, per the following agenda:

10:30 a.m. – 10:35 a.m.: Opening Meditative Prayer
10:35 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.: First Presentation
11:00 a.m. – 11:15 a.m.: Group Discussion
11:15 a.m. – 11:40 a.m.: Second Presentation
11:40 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.: Discussion and Contemplative Exercise
12:00 p.m. – 12:30 p.m.: Optional Lunch

I led the opening and closing prayer exercises at the speakers’ request. Each speaker gave two presentations and led the discussions.

Venue

All in-person sessions occurred at The Catholic Center, 238 Jewett Avenue, Bridgeport, Connecticut, in a large conference room that seats twenty-five. The room has a large-screen television for Zoom videoconferencing. I also used a smaller conference room nearby with videoconferencing capability for the observers. There was no charge for the use of the facilities.

Observers

I asked two observers to assist me with my ministerial intervention: Astrid Alvarez, Program Manager, Diocese of Bridgeport, and Valerie Bien-Amie, Diversity Program Manager, Diocese of Bridgeport. Alvarez coordinates and manages several major programs in the chancellor's office. She previously worked in the diocesan safe environment office. Bien-Amie coordinates multicultural diversity programs in collaboration with the episcopal vicars of the national communities within the diocese. She previously worked in the diversity office at Fairfield University.

I chose Alvarez and Bien-Aime because of their experience working with the clergy in our diocese, their ability to respect confidentiality, and their genuine interest in the topic. They both also have extensive experience observing meetings, taking notes, and summarizing proceedings.

The two observers watched all the in-person sessions from a small conference room close to the primary classroom, including the two focus group meetings and four classroom presentations. I introduced the observers before each session started. Then, the observers took their place in the remote room. The participants could not see or hear the observers during the sessions.

Focus Groups

I organized two focus groups to discuss their thoughts on racial justice preaching. Each focus group met once for ninety minutes. One group represented the local People of Color in the Catholic community, and the other represented the white Catholic community. These groups aimed to provide preaching advice to the training program participants. I presented their advice during session four: "Context: Racial Justice Preaching in Your Parish."

The People of Color Catholic focus group from urban parishes consisted of nine women and two men. The following is the focus group demographic data (Fig. 7 and 8):

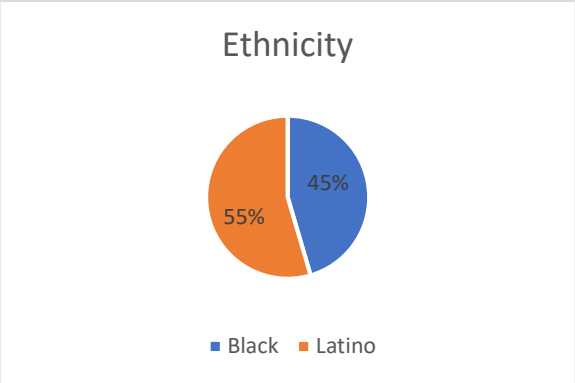

Figure 7. Focus group members' ethnicity.

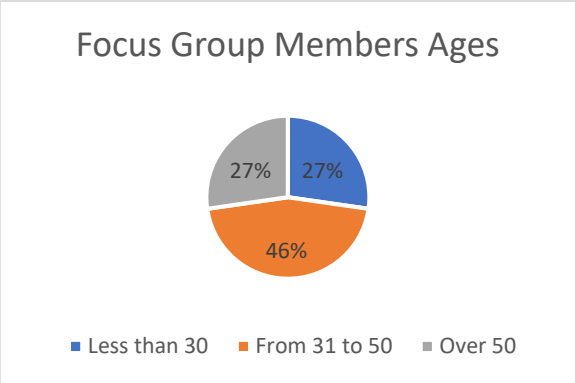

Figure 8. Focus group members' ages.

The People of Color Catholic focus group met on October 3, 2023, at The Catholic Center in Bridgeport, Connecticut, from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. Participants received dinner from 6 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. Pejay Lucky, Assistant Dean for Student Success, Fairfield Bellarmine, Fairfield University, facilitated this session. Lucky was formerly the Director of Student Diversity and Multicultural Affairs at Fairfield University. He is African American and a native of Bridgeport, Connecticut. Lucky has extensive experience leading group discussions and is a highly respected community member.

Lucky asked the group to voluntarily discuss their experiences of racism, how their faith helps them cope with racial violence, what they have found helpful and hurtful in homilies, and what advice they have for preachers. The questions Lucky asked are in Appendix 5.

Three participants spoke Spanish with limited English skills, so I provided an interpreter. The Spanish-speaking members actively participated throughout the session.

Although sharing personal stories about racism was voluntary, everyone discussed an individual incident. The examples they shared covered a broad spectrum of racist experiences. All agreed that racism is a significant problem within the Diocese of Bridgeport. Out of the entire group, only one person had heard a homily on racial justice at their parish. The others could not recall a preacher speaking about the topic during Mass. The meeting concluded with the following advice for preachers:

- Spend time with People of Color.
    - "Open yourself to the community and be available."
- Communication is critical.
- Be aware of triggers.
    - For example, using the words "black" or "dark" to represent evil.
- Connect your preaching on racial justice to everyday life.
- Be a human being. Don't be afraid to be vulnerable.
    - The preacher does not have to have all the answers.
- Don't just preach about it once, but don't preach about it every week.
- Provide adult education on racial justice to parishioners.

The white Catholic focus group from suburban parishes consisted of two women and five men. Three additional women and one man agreed to come but did not attend because of conflicts. The following is the demographic data for this focus group (Fig. 9).

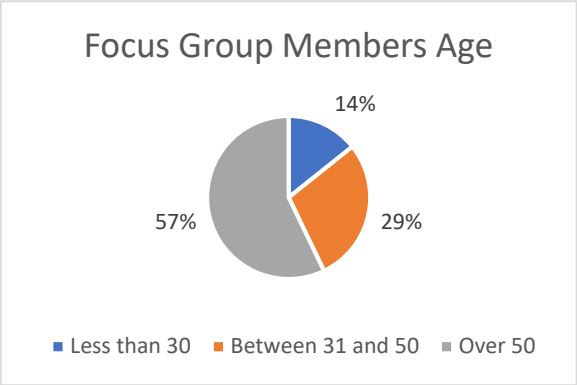

Figure 9. The age of each white Catholic focus group member.

The white Catholic focus group met on October 10, 2023, at The Catholic Center in Bridgeport, Connecticut, from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. Participants received dinner from 6 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. The facilitator for the white focus group canceled at the last minute, so I facilitated this group. I asked the participants to discuss their views on racism, what they thought preachers should speak about or avoid from the ambo, and what advice they have for preachers. The questions are in Appendix 6.

Each person voluntarily shared a personal story of an occasion when they witnessed racism. There was general agreement that racism is an issue within the Diocese of Bridgeport. However, the group had a lengthy discussion on whether People of Color are experiencing racism or classism. Some thought that social class structures play a significant role in structural discrimination within the community (classism). The focus group also felt that since many parishes lack diversity, this may be the reason most preachers and parish communities in the diocese do not see racism as a serious local issue. One participant said, “The only Black people you see are waiting on you.” Only one person said their pastor had preached on racial justice. The session concluded with the following advice for preachers:

- Talk about racial justice as a life issue.
    - Avoid words that trigger people, such as white supremacy or white privilege.
    - Call out the sin of racism against humanity.
- Talk about racism in current everyday situations rather than historical context.
    - Name the hidden racism that exists within our cities.
- Preach about racial justice because if you do not, we will lose our young people.
- People need to experience and become comfortable with others.
- Don't politicize from the pulpit.
    - Be careful not to offend people so you do not adversely affect the parish financially.
- The clergy must get involved in the community and advocate for racial justice.
- Provide education on the topic.
    - Small group discussions
    - Parish book clubs

Training Program Participants

I met with the Most Rev. Frank J. Caggiano, Bishop of Bridgeport, to select ten clerics (priests and deacons) to participate in the training program. Bishop Caggiano recommended that the cohort consist of five priests and five deacons. We chose a representative cross-section of clergy who serve at predominately white parishes. Based on our discussion, I invited seventeen clergy to participate, knowing that all would not be able to accept the invitation. Six priests and five deacons accepted my invitation.

I held an informational meeting on Zoom for all participants on October 3, 2023. During the video call, I presented an overview of my thesis project and the training program content, briefly described the presenters, and answered questions. The call lasted one hour. No one expressed any reservations or concerns.

The following is the demographic data for the participants and the parishes at which they regularly preach (Fig. 10 through Fig. 13).

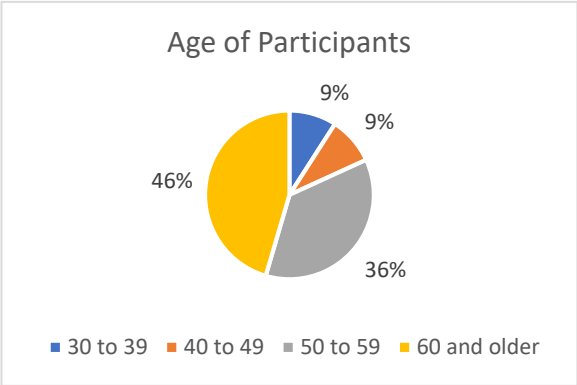

Figure 10. Participants' ages in years.

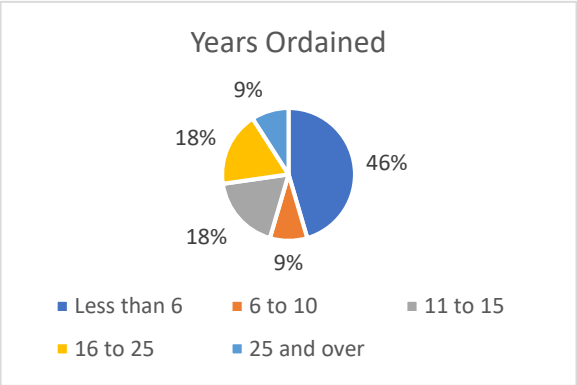

Figure 11. Participants' years ordained.

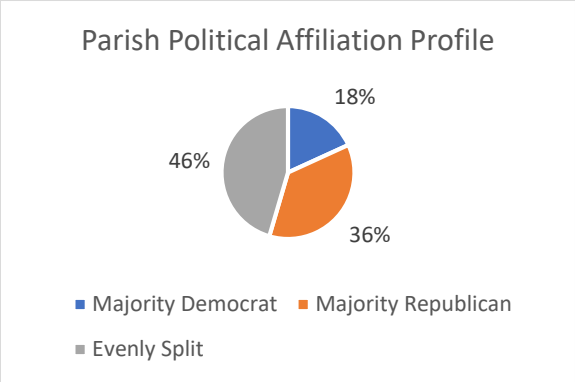

Figure 12. Parishioners' political affiliation.

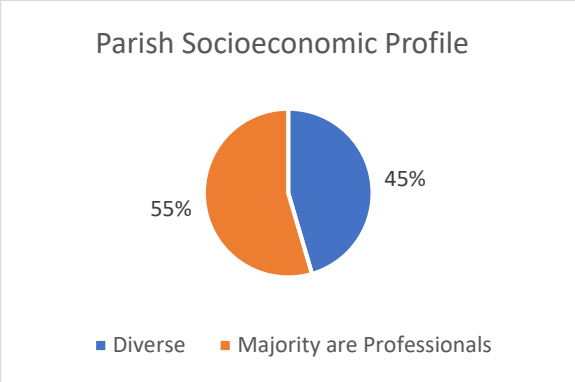

Figure 13. Parishes' socioeconomic profile.

All participants were white except for one person who was South Asian. All preach regularly at suburban parishes.

The Classroom Sessions

Session One—"The Cross: Fragile Resurrection." Trauma theologian Dr. Ashley Theuring, Assistant Professor of Theology at Xavier University, led the class. The session opened with prayerful meditation on Mark's account of Jesus' resurrection (Mark 16:1-8). I gave each participant a copy of the text and an image of the gospel passage (Fig. 7).

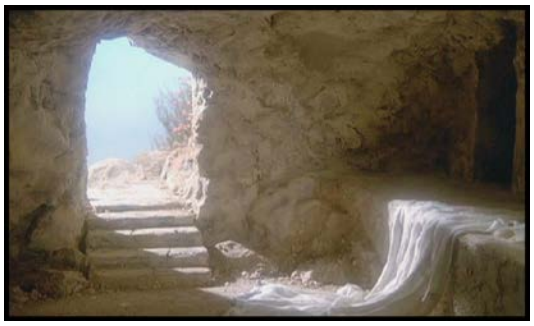

Figure 14. *Finding God in everyday life*, franthony.com, accessed October 4, 2023. Clayton Jackson McGhie Memorial. http://www.franthony.com/blog/the-power-of-an-empty-tomb.

The participants could pray with the text or image of the empty tomb. The prayerful meditation lasted five minutes. I chose this passage because of its relationship to Theuring's trauma-informed theological research and her presentation.

In the first presentation, Theuring gave a brief background on trauma from a psychological perspective. She opened with a quote from Dr. Judith Herman, Professor of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School: "Traumatic events are extraordinary, not because they occur rarely, but rather because they overwhelm the ordinary human adaptations to life." Then, she explained the differences between a person under stress, traumatized, and in crisis. Theuring also listed traumatic experience symptoms.

After this brief introduction, Theuring presented a trauma-informed theological perspective based on the writings of theologians Hans Urs von Balthasar and Dr. Shelly Rambo. Balthasar and Rambo use the image of Holy Saturday to describe life for a person recovering from a traumatic experience (as discussed in Chapter 3). Theuring discussed the dangers of preaching to trauma survivors about redemption by imitating Jesus' self-sacrificial death on the cross. Instead, she advocated using Jesus' experience of Holy Saturday, as described by Balthasar and Rambo, as an aid for trauma survivors to

find hope amid anxiety, depression, doubt, or despair. Again, quoting Rambo, "The rescue from the abyss is not being spared from the death; it is not escaping the experience of death's finality but emerging out of it, knowing that this death is pulled into life as we now know it."[143]

After the first presentation, Theuring engaged the class in a discussion. First, she asked the participants: "If redemptive love is not about sacrifice or victory but about a love that remains, how does this reshape our understanding of Christ's sacrifice, especially in the context of trauma and suffering?" Then, she asked, "How can the Church offer a more nuanced narrative of redemption that includes experiences of racial trauma?" Finally, Theuring proposed the question: "How can pastoral strategies be adapted or developed to provide care for those who feel trapped in a space between trauma (death) and healing (life) due to racial injustices?" An open discussion followed. The participants offered various viewpoints and appropriately challenged each other.

Theuring's second presentation, "Fragile Resurrection," focused on her model of the empty tomb narrative to help explain the racial trauma healing process. The empty tomb exemplifies "fragile resurrection," acknowledging "the reality that life is a series of crosses and resurrections, leaving room for both these experiences."[144] She shared a quote from a trauma survivor she met while visiting the House of Peace, a residential program for women recovering from domestic violence: "I realized that God was giving

[143] Shelly Rambo, *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 79.

[144] Ashley E. Theuring, *Fragile Resurrection: Practicing Hope after Domestic Violence* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2021), 9.

me an opportunity to live in a place full of love and the presence of the Divine. I have learned to value myself as a woman and understand that God has never abandoned us."

Then, we discussed Mark's empty tomb narrative (Mark 16:1-8) from a trauma survivor's perspective. Mark's original account ends with the women fleeing the empty tomb, saying nothing because they were afraid (Mark 16:8). Even though an angel told them that Jesus rose from the dead and would meet them in Galilee (Mark 16:6-7), the women were not ready to experience the hope and joy embodied in the resurrection. Thus, Theuring asserted that Mark's *fragile resurrection* narrative exemplifies the recovery process for many trauma survivors.

Theuring further defined the trauma recovery process as "embodied imaginative hope." Within this context, a preacher names the moral evil responsible for innocent suffering and explores possible actions the survivor can take in the present. The preacher then helps trauma survivors imagine a hopeful future while acknowledging that the trauma may return. Finally, the community plays a vital role in supporting trauma survivors by establishing supportive and healthy relationships within life's mundane tasks.

Theuring concluded by leading a discussion about the empty tomb as a symbol of hope. She posed the following questions to the group:

- How have you witnessed the manifestations of racism, and how do you name and confront these evils in the diocese?
- How can the Church use imagination to envision a more just and hopeful world while preparing for missteps or resistance?
- How can healthy relationships within the congregation act as a bridge toward racial reconciliation and healing?
- How can we foster a Church environment where relationships are built on mutual respect, understanding, and a shared commitment toward racial justice?

The participants discussed each question in depth.

After the discussion, I led the final contemplative prayer exercise. I gave each participant a copy of the following two images: the 1920 Duluth lynchings and the 2020 killing of George Floyd (Fig. 15 and Fig. 16):

Figure 15. *The Duluth Lynchings*, June 15, 1920. Minnesota Historical Society. https://www.mnhs.org/duluthlynchings/documents/Postcard_Image_of_the_lynching_of_Elias_Clayton_Elmer_Jackson_and_Isaac_McGhie-45.001.php.

Figure 16. *Prosecutor says he won't 'rush' to charge cops in George Floyd death*, May 28, 2020. New York Post. https://nypost.com/2020/05/28/prosecutor-says-he-will-not-rush-to-charge-officers-in-george-floyd-death/.

I asked them to reflect on a series of questions I modified from Dr. Resmaa Menakem's book, *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathways to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies*.[145] Appendix 11 lists the questions. The participants had

[145] Resmaa Menakem, *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies* (Las Vegas: Central Recovery Press, 2017), 200-202.

the option to use either the image of the Duluth lynchings or George Floyd's murder. After the mediation, some shared their thoughts. One person said, "We need to be moved by racial injustice." Another added that we must act: "The collar gives us a license to act because we represent Christ." Someone summed up his mediation by discussing the moral injury caused by racism and its effect on all of us. The exercise helped the participants apply trauma-informed theology to racial justice through silent prayer.

Session Two—"The Struggle for Racial Justice: Finding Our Voice through the Experience of Black Catholic Nuns." Dr. Shannen Dee Williams, Associate Professor of History at the University of Dayton, led this session. The participants began by meditating on the Canaanite woman's faith (Matt. 15:21-28) as an example of Jesus' pastoral response to those marginalized in society. I handed out a copy of the scriptural text and the following painting depicting the scene (Fig. 17):

Figure 17. *20th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A Gospel Commentary: "O Woman, Great is Your Faith*!" *(Mt 15:21-28)*. Catholics Striving for Holiness, August 16, 2020. https://catholicsstrivingforholiness.org/20th-sunday-in-ordinary-time-year-a-mass-gospel-and-commentary-o-woman-great-is-your-faith-mt-1521-28/.

Williams presented two modules on the struggle against racial injustice within the United States and the Church through the prophetic witness of Black Catholic nuns.

Williams based her presentations on her recent book, *Subversive Habits: Black Catholic Nuns in the Long African American Freedom Struggle*.

Williams began the session by describing her motivation for writing about the history of Black sisters in America. While attending graduate school at Rutgers University, she needed to select a topic for her paper in an African American history seminar. During her research, Williams came across a story in the Pittsburg Courier written in 1960, titled "Black Sisters Weigh Contradictions in Christian and Secular Community: 200 Negro Nuns Attend First Nat'l Meet." Although the article interested her, the accompanying picture of four smiling Black Catholic sisters left a lasting impression. Until then, Williams had never seen a Black nun, except for Whoopi Goldberg's character in the 1992 comedic film "Sister Act," in which she pretends to be a religious and adopts the name of Sr. Mary Clarence.

Williams began studying the history of the Black Sisters Conference, which led her to meet Dr. Patricia Grey, the conference's founding president. Grey was among the four nuns in the Pittsburgh Courier article who inspired Williams' research. Grey left religious life in 1974 but kept detailed records about the conference, which she shared with Williams. Grey persuaded Williams to expand her research beyond the Black Sisters Conference and write the history of Black sisters in America.

Williams began by recounting the relatively unknown influence Black Catholics had in the American Catholic Church's early history. For example, Catholicism in the United States started in the states of Florida, Maryland, Louisiana, Kentucky, and Missouri, which are states with a significant Black population. In St. Augustine, Florida, the first Catholic marriage took place between a free Black Catholic woman from Seville,

Spain, and a Spanish conquistador of African descent. In 1829, Mother Mary Elizabeth Lange and Fr. James Nicolaus Joubert founded the first Black Catholic religious congregation, the Oblate Sisters of Providence, to educate girls of African descent. The school they opened in Baltimore continues to educate Black children to this day. Despite America's participation in slavery from its earliest beginnings, Black Catholics courageously participated in and contributed to the growth of the US Catholic Church.

Williams then discussed the challenges Black women faced when entering religious life in the nineteenth century. In 1819, free Women of Color in New Orleans desired to become nuns, but no religious congregations would take them. St. Rose Philippine Duchesne recommended to her superior in France that they accept the women as third-class sisters below their choir sisters and the sisters who performed manual labor. Duchesne's community did not receive its first African American member until after World War II. Williams also mentioned that two other Catholic saints, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton and St. Katharine Drexel, also refused to allow Black women to take religious vows within their religious communities.

Williams discussed the many challenges Women of Color faced when entering a religious congregation. When the Afro-Creole Sisters of the Holy Family (SSF) formed in New Orleans (1842), Church authorities would not allow them to wear a religious habit signifying their vocation as a bride of Christ. In Baltimore, the Oblate Sisters of Providence had to wear a habit of lesser status than their white counterparts in other religious communities. Black women and white women took their vows in separate ceremonies. Williams showed a picture of white sisters taking their vows while the Black

sisters sat in the back of the church. Black sisters lived in different quarters, dined apart from white sisters, and prayed separately.

After the first presentation, Williams asked the participants if they had any reaction to what they heard. One person commented, “If the sisters did not do what they did, where would we be today?” Another said, “The sisters were not silent. They were silenced.” The lecture challenged the group to come to terms with historical racism within the Catholic Church and the brave women who forced the Church to embrace the gospel’s preference for those marginalized by society.

In her second presentation, Williams focused on Black sisters in the twentieth century. She told the story of Sr. Thea Bowman, the first Black sister to join the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Help. At age fifteen, Bowman left her home in Yazoo City, Mississippi, and entered the convent in La Crosse, Wisconsin, where she was the first Black person in the town. Bowman eventually earned a PhD in English from the Catholic University of America and was the university’s first African American department chair. A brilliant musician and inspiring speaker, Bowman spent the latter part of her life traveling the world to spread the gospel message of God’s love for all races.

Williams also mentioned Sr. Frances Douglass, the first African American member of the Daughters of the Heart of Mary. Douglass became the first African American to earn a PhD in psychology from Fordham University and become a department chair at a predominantly white university. In 1956, Douglass chaired the psychology department at DePaul University; in the same year and month, Dr. John Hope Franklin became chair at Brooklyn College. Williams showed a newspaper headline

celebrating Franklin's appointment as the first African American to chair a department at a predominantly white college with no awareness of Douglass' appointment. Williams pointed out that the stories of many Black sisters remained untold until she wrote her book. She still receives letters and emails with many more untold stories to tell.

Williams ended her presentation with a personal reflection. She said she had "one foot out the door" of the Catholic Church before she came across the Pittsburgh Courier article about the first Black Sisters Conference. The religious women she met during her thirteen years researching her book inspired her and convinced her that her home was within the Catholic Church. Williams saw the essential need for her work and its relevance in the broader ecclesial community through their stories. She ended with a 2009 quote from Mother Loretta Theresa Richards, Superior of the Franciscan Handmaids of Mary, summarizing the Black sisters' enduring impact: "The Catholic Church wouldn't be Catholic if it weren't for us."

The session ended without a contemplative prayer exercise. Almost all participants stayed to speak with Williams during the optional lunch.

Session Three— "Trauma and Graced Recovery in the Age of Breathlessness." Erin Neil, diocesan Director of Safe Environments, gave a presentation on trauma and graced recovery. The participants began by meditating on the story of Zacchaeus, the Tax Collector (Luke 19:1-10). I gave the participants the text and an image for meditative prayers (Fig. 18).

Figure 18. James Tissot, “Brooklyn Museum – Zacchaeus in the Sycamore Awaiting the Passing of Jesus,” accessed October 18, 20023, Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Brooklyn_Museum_-_Zacchaeus_in_the_Sycamore_Awaiting_the_Passage_of_Jesus_%28Zachée_sur_le_sycomore_attendant_le_passage_de_Jésus%29_-_James_Tissot.jpg.

Some shared their thoughts. One person said they imagined themselves as Zacchaeus coming down from the tree to help others, such as trauma survivors. Someone else envisioned Zacchaeus as a trauma survivor. Jesus gave Zacchaeus hope as he accompanied him. This scriptural passage helped the participants contemplate how Jesus encounters and walks with those who carry heavy burdens.

Neil discussed racial trauma within a broader traumatic framework based on her experience working with sexual abuse survivors. Her first presentation focused on trauma from an individual’s perspective. She began by explaining our body’s limbic system, which controls our emotional response to trauma. She asserted that we do not know how we will react until we experience or witness a traumatic event.

She then discussed how trauma rewires our brains. Neil shared a quote from Harvard psychiatrist Dr. Bessel van der Kolk: “Neuroscience research has shown that traumatized individuals are prone to activate brain areas involved in fear perception, and to have deficits in the areas involved in filtering out relevant from irrelevant information,

as well as in the perception of bodily sensations. These changes do not occur in the rational part of the brain and do not really seem to benefit merely from being aware of the error of one's ways." Neil then showed brain scan comparisons between people who have posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and those who do not. The images helped the participants visualize trauma's impact on the body. Neil concluded by saying, "Trauma is a physical wound."

Following the physical and psychological descriptions of trauma, Neil presented Harvard psychiatrist Judith Herman's trauma recovery model: "Establishing safety, reconstructing the trauma story, and restoring the connection between survivors and their community."[146] Regarding establishing safety, Neil mentioned that physical spaces can help make trauma survivors feel safe. One participant commented, "We call it a sanctuary for a reason." Neil said we can help reconstruct the trauma story by listening to and believing survivors' stories. Finally, she noted that preachers can help survivors restore their connection with the community through Jesus' wounds that remained visible but transformed after the resurrection. Neil concluded her first presentation by discussing some treatment options available, including Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) and Neurofeedback.

Neil's second presentation focused on healing caused by communal traumatic events. She began by saying that we are part of a community that has experienced generational racial trauma. Then, Neil presented statistics from a 2018 research study that calculated the likelihood of a child experiencing trauma by race. The study showed that

[146] Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 2.

"Black, Hispanic, and multiracial individuals were more likely to experience parental separation or divorce and the incarnation of a family member than white individuals."[147] For example, Black and multiracial children are twice as likely to have a household family member incarcerated than white children.

Neil then advised the participants what to say and not to say after a traumatic communal event. The worst thing you can say is: "You will get over it. Time heals all wounds." When a person is dealing with a traumatic injury, they are not ready to move on and pretend that life is back to normal. They need time to process what happened and heal on their own terms. She also said the following phrases should be avoided:

- Pull yourself up by your bootstraps.
- When do you think you might feel better?
- You just have to be more positive.
- Stop harping on this.
- Things could always be worse.
- You need to try to stop thinking about this.

Neil recommended using the following phrases when meeting with trauma survivors:

- You are not alone.
- Do you want to talk?
- This was not your fault.
- I am here to offer support.
- How can I be helpful to you?
- What do you want me to know about your journey/story?
- That was a courageous conversation.
- Thank you for being so open to talking and listening.

Neil closed her second presentation by encouraging the participants to help trauma survivors believe and say one of the following:

- I'm not crazy!
- I didn't imagine this.

[147] "The Link Between Adverse Childhood and Later-Life Health," Baylor University, September 16, 2019, Experiences and https://onlinegrad.baylor.edu/resources/adverse-childhood-experiences-health/.

- It happened to me.
- It's not my fault.
- I can do something about this.
- I'm not alone. God is with me.
- Hope is possible.

Neil concluded her session by asking the participants to learn to listen more deeply. Then she presented a prayer exercise from the book *Take Five: On-The-Job Meditations with St. Ignatius*: "When Ignatius began speaking with someone, at first he would let the man speak as in such a way that, even if the person were very imperfect, he would not be scandalized. When he would get to know the person better, and the person felt more at ease, the Father would slowly proceed and, without any violence, change the whole game."[148]

Session Four— "Context: Racial Justice Preaching in Your Parish." This class focused on developing trauma-informed racial justice homilies within the participant's congregational context. Fr. Reggie Norman, President of the National Association of Black Catholic Administrators, and I led this session. We began by prayerfully reflecting on the Ascension of Jesus (Acts 1:6-12). I handed out the scriptural text and the following image (Fig. 19).

[148] Mike Aquilina and Kris D. Stubna, *Take Five: On-The-Job Meditations with St. Ignatius* (Pittsburgh: Lambing Press, 2008), 58.

Figure 19. S.G. Rudl, "The fresco of the Ascension of Jesus in Kostel Svatého Václava in Prague," 1900, Knights of Columbus, https://www.kofc.org/en/news-room/knightline/special-edition/week-of-may-18/5-takeaways-christs-taken-up.html.

I asked the participants to imagine what they plan to do after completing this training program. Just as the Apostles discerned their actions after Jesus' ascension, they must determine what they will say from the ambo.

I reviewed the advice for preachers from the two focus groups outlined earlier in this chapter. Norman then shared his experience preaching on racial justice in a predominantly white suburban parish. He said that the words we use are critical. Norman said some words have different connotations, depending on where you are from. For example, growing up in North Carolina, the word "picnic" in the Black community brought back horrific memories of white people gathering for picnics while they lynched Black people. Also, as a child, relatives told him that picnic meant "pick a N—." We also discussed avoiding using words such as "black" and "dark" to represent evil.

Norman said we must choose our words carefully based on the congregation. He preaches about racial justice quite differently when he is addressing a predominantly Black congregation. In these situations, Norman is much more direct. With a white congregation, he encourages personal conversion while addressing the structural racism that exists within his community. Norman gave several examples of racial injustice that he experienced within the diocese. When asked about reparation, Norman said there is not enough money in the world to make full reparation, but we can have compassion and work together to fight against racial injustice.

After the discussion, I asked the participants to share their thoughts on the focus groups' comments and urged them to speculate on what advice they would receive from

their own congregations. Then, I presented two homiletic structures for trauma-informed racial justice preaching: lament and witness preaching, as discussed in Chapter 4. I used Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s sermon "A Knock at Midnight" as an example of lament preaching. I showed a video of Fr. Ryan Lerner's homily after the January 6, 2021, attack on the US Capitol as an example of witness preaching (https://stmchapel.wistia.com/medias/6qc9o2n8d7). After Lerner's homily, I asked the participants to share their thoughts on lament and witness preaching. All thought these were two suitable structures for preaching about racial justice.

After this presentation, I put the participants into three groups of three and one group with two people to discuss their plans for preaching about racial justice in their communities. The small group discussions lasted for fifteen minutes. I then asked them to share their initial preaching plans if they were comfortable.

I concluded the session by asking them to pray on St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians titled *You Are the Body of Christ* (1 Cor 12:12-27).

> As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit. Now the body is not a single part, but many. But as it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I do not need you," nor again the head to the feet, "I do not need you." Indeed, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are all the more necessary, but God has so constructed the body as to give greater honor to a part that is without it, so that there may be no division in the body, but that the parts may have the same concern for one another. If [one] part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy. Now you are Christ's body, and individually parts of it.

After the four classroom sessions concluded, one of the priest participants had to withdraw because of a health issue, leaving five priests and five deacons to complete the training program.

Practice Homily

I asked the remaining ten participants to post a practice racial justice homily video online, without a congregation, by November 8, 2023. I instructed them that the homily could be three to seven minutes long. I allowed the preachers to choose the readings for their practice homilies. Once each participant posted their video, they provided feedback to two classmates within one week. I assigned each person two classmates to provide feedback. The participants stated what they liked about the homily and suggested ways to make a good homily better. I provided feedback to each participant using the rubric in Appendix 7. We used a private website on Wistia (wistia.com) for the participants to post their homilies online and give feedback to their classmates.

Public Homily

Participants then preached publicly on racial justice using the material presented in class and the practice homily feedback. I allowed the participants to refine their practice homily or write a new one. Five chose to modify their practice homily, and five decided to write a new homily. The public homilies were seven to ten minutes, with the option to preach during Mass, Holy Hour, or a regularly scheduled parish meeting. Seven chose to preach during Mass, and three decided to preach at a parish meeting (two at a men's group and one at a parish leadership team meeting). After they preached, I asked each participant to meet with three to six people who witnessed the homily for feedback. The preachers used the questions in Appendix 10 to guide the feedback conversations. I received a summary from each feedback session.

The participants posted their homilies on the same private website they used for the practice homilies (wistia.com). I used the same preaching rubric as the practice homilies and sent my feedback to each preacher. Two examples of these homilies are in Appendices 12 and 13.

Members of the original focus groups and I watched the homilies filmed at public Masses. I chose not to show the homilies preached at private parish meetings since these sessions were not open to the public. On December 5, 2023, six members of the white Catholic focus group and on December 6, 2023, six members of the People of Color Catholic focus group met with me. I played each video and then asked them what they liked and what advice they had for the preacher. I subsequently shared the focus group feedback with the preachers. My ministerial intervention concluded on December 9, 2023.

Data Collection

I collected data through triangulation as described by Dr. Tim Sensing, Professor of Practical Theology at Abilene Christian University. Sensing writes: "Triangulation (multiple data-collection tools designed to measure a single concept or construct) provides a complex view of the intervention enabling a 'thicker' interpretation. It is a way to cross-check your data that provides breadth and depth to your analysis and increases the trustworthiness of your research."[149] I collected data through questionnaires, interviews, feedback from focus groups, independent observer notes, and research notes.

[149] Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Mininstry Disertations*, 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2022), 172.

The pre- and post-training program questionnaires collected quantitative data using a five-point Likert scale. "A **Likert scale** is a rating scale used to measure opinions, attitudes, or behaviors. It consists of a statement or a question, followed by a series of five or seven answer statements. Respondents choose the option that best corresponds with how they feel about the statement or question."[150] The questionnaires contained a series of questions that quantitatively measured the participants in three categories: preparedness, attitude and experience, and motivation. The interviews, focus group sessions, observer notes, and my research notes provided qualitative *data*.

I also followed Sensing's three angles approach, collecting data throughout the process from "outsiders, insiders, and the researcher (myself)."[151] The outsiders were focus group members, parishioners who witnessed the participants' homilies, and my two observers. The insiders were the participants (priests and deacons) in the training program. I served as the researcher. The following describes the data collection process in more detail.

Pre-Training Program Clergy Questionnaire and Interviews

All participants took a pre-training program questionnaire, which contained four sections: general information (age, years ordained, ethnicity, etc.), level of preparedness, attitude and experience preaching about racial justice, and motivation to preach about racial justice. Participants accessed the questionnaire online through SharePoint, a secure online intranet site managed by the diocese. The complete questionnaire is in

[150] Pritha Bhandrari and Kassiani Nikolopoulou, "What is a Likert Scale? Guide & Examples," Scribbr, June 22, 2023, https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/likert-scale/.

[151] Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 174.

Appendix 1.

I also conducted individual interviews with each participant to cross-check the responses I received from the pre-training program questionnaire. Each interview lasted approximately thirty minutes. These interviews proved invaluable because they gave me greater insight into the participants' experience and concerns about racial justice preaching. The interview questions are in Appendix 2.

Focus Group Data Collection

I gave the People of Color Catholic focus group facilitator the list of questions in Appendix 4 and the white Catholic focus group facilitator the list of questions in Appendix 5 to help guide the discussions.

The two observers and I took field notes during the focus group meetings and then met within one week of each session to compare notes. We discussed the conversation specifics, participant body language, and level of engagement in the conversation. I then added to my field notes based on these discussions.

Training Program Classroom Data Collection

The two observers and I took field notes during each classroom session. We then met to discuss each session and compare notes and observations. Each of us wrote down the major points the presenters made, significant questions and comments, the participants' engagement level, and body language. I recorded a summary of our conversations.

Homily Feedback Data Collection

Each cleric received feedback on their practice homily from two classmates and me. The feedback provided by the classmates gave the preacher insight into what their

classmates thought they did well and what they could do to make their homily better. I provided each participant with a scored preaching rubric (Appendix 7). I then compared the feedback provided by the class with my feedback.

The participants then preached a trauma-informed racial justice homily in public. After they preached, each participant met with three to six people who witnessed the homily and led a feedback discussion using the questions provided in Appendix 8. I also provided feedback using the same rubric that I used for the practice homily (Appendix 7). I compared their parishioners' input and mine.

I showed the videos of those who preached at a public Mass to members from the two original focus groups. After viewing each homily, I led a discussion using the questions in Appendix 8. These comments gave me additional data to compare with the previous feedback data I collected. The conversations also gave me further insight into what resonated with people within the different racial justice homilies.

Post-Training Program Clergy Questionnaires

The participants completed a post-training program questionnaire to measure preparedness and motivation (Appendix 3). I also interviewed each preacher to cross-check the data collected in the post-training program questionnaire. The individual interview questions are in Appendix 2. I provided a training program evaluation questionnaire that allowed the participants to give me feedback on the four classes and the two homilies each preached (Appendix 9). They also were able to suggest improvements for future training programs. The participants accessed both questionnaires through our SharePoint diocesan intranet website.

Data Analysis

I analyzed data collected from questionnaires, participant interviews, input from focus groups, homiletic feedback, the observers' field notes, and my field notes. I will report on my observations and conclusions in Chapter 6. The primary focus of my analysis was to measure the training program's objective: to help clergy better prepare and to motivate them to preach on racial justice.

Preparedness Data Analysis

Using the pre- and post-training program clergy questionnaires (Appendixes 1 and 3), I quantitatively analyzed preparedness using data provided in Part II of the questionnaires. There are eight questions in this section. Participants rated their level of preparedness in each question on a scale from one to five. A score of one signifies someone least prepared, and a score of five demonstrates someone most prepared. I added the participants' responses to these eight questions to calculate a total preparedness score. A score of thirty-two points or above in this section indicates that the participant is prepared to preach racial justice. I compared each participant's preparedness scores from the pre-and post-surveys to help assess the training program's effectiveness.

Motivation Data Analysis

Two categories comprise a person's motivation in the classroom: personal relevance and engagement.[152] The questions in *Part IV: Motivation* of the post-training program questionnaire measured the program's personal relevance and engagement level for each participant (Appendix 3). There were seventeen questions in this section.

[152] Donna L. Sundre, "Motivation Scale Background and Scoring Guide," Center for Assessment and Research Studies, James Madison University, accessed June 25, 2023, https://www.jmu.edu/assessment/_files/pdf/sos_scoring_guide.pdf.

Questions 1, 2, 4, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, and 14 measured personal relevance, and 3, 5, 6, 10, 15, 16, and 17 measured engagement. By structuring the questions in these two categories, I calculated how relevant the training program was to the participants and how much effort they put into it.

I added the results from these seventeen questions to determine an individual's total motivation score. However, I had to reverse the scores on questions 6, 7, and 10 because these questions measure negative motivation. For example, question 6 asks: "While taking this program, I could have paid more attention." If a participant checked box "5," strongly agree, I transposed this to a "1" before totaling their final score. After transposing these three questions, I added the scores from the seventeen questions to calculate a total score. A person with a total score of sixty-eight or above in this section indicates that the training program successfully motivated them to preach on racial justice. After calculating the scores from the post-training program questionnaire, I compared these results to the scores the participants submitted in the pre-training program questionnaire to help me understand the impact the training program had on motivation.

Finally, I compared the quantitative results to the qualitative findings recorded throughout the training program from the observers and my field notes, along with the qualitative data I received directly from the participants in their individual interviews.

Ethical Procedures

I followed the ethical principles and guidelines for protecting human subjects who participate in research studies as published in The Belmont Report by the United States

Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (April 18, 1979).[153] Training program and focus group participants signed an informed consent form before the sessions began. The form clearly stated that participation is voluntary, and they can refuse to participate or withdraw from the program without any negative consequence. I anonymized all data collected to protect privacy. There was no monetary compensation for the participants. The informed consent form included statements on purpose, procedures, risks, benefits, and confidentiality. The consent forms for clergy and focus group participants are in Appendix 6. My diocesan General Counsel and the Director of Safe Environments approved the consent forms.

Conclusion

The Trauma-Informed Preaching and Racial Justice training program concluded without significant issues or complications. The presenters spoke with conviction and passion. The people who participated in the two focus groups were grateful for the opportunity to share their thoughts on racial justice. All participants actively engaged in the discussions and were genuinely interested in the presentations. In addition, the observers and I saw minimal mobile phone checking during the classroom sessions. All the participants respected one another's comments, even when they disagreed. Overall, the format and structure of the training program allowed the priests and deacons to wrestle with a complex, controversial topic in a safe, supportive environment. The preachers found their voice. The next chapter presents the results of this research project, insights, and future opportunities.

[153] "The Belmont Report," Office for Human Research Protections, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, https://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/regulations-and-policy/belmont-report/index.html.

Chapter 6

Results, Insights, and Future Opportunities

Introduction

I conducted a trauma-informed preaching and racial justice training program for ten priests and deacons from October 5, 2023, through December 15, 2023. During the first class, a deacon told a story about an old acquaintance he had recently met at a high school basketball game. His friend emailed him the following day and asked, “Is your daughter still dating that BLACK student? Forgive me, Deacon, but I don’t agree with that.” He did not know how to respond, so he chose not to write back and has not spoken to the person since. His daughter was still dating the young African American man, and they were engaged to be married. Following the deacon’s story, a priest mentioned that a third-grader told him, “I can’t be a priest. I’m not white.” Throughout the program, participants shared their witness testimonies of racism that exists within our diocese. Our ten-week journey together was remarkable. This chapter details the results of that journey.

The training program I developed aimed to help preachers become more prepared and motivated to speak about racial justice through trauma-informed instruction. I will present quantitative and qualitative data demonstrating that the program achieved this goal. The participants strongly endorsed the training program, giving it an overall rating of 9.4 out of 10. I will share the participants’ detailed assessments, including comments

about the individual program elements, what they thought was done well, and their suggested improvements.

Then, I will offer my insights based on participant feedback, observer notes, focus group comments, and personal observations. These insights will be used to improve the training program and develop new opportunities to help preachers find their voices so they can speak out against racial injustice.

Finally, I will share my future plans, which include offering this program again in 2024, publishing portions of this paper, developing an online training program, and continuing to help People of Color gain access to educational and professional opportunities.

Results

Preparedness

One of the ministerial intervention's primary goals was to prepare clergy to preach about racial justice. After finishing the program, each participant completed a post-training program questionnaire that contained eight statements to measure preparedness (Appendix 3). Using a five-point Likert scale, participants who answered four or five on a particular statement demonstrated they felt prepared regarding that dimension of racial justice preaching. A total of thirty-two points or more, equivalent to 80 percent or more, means the participant is prepared to give a homily on racial justice. All participants reported that they were prepared after completing the training program. The following graph represents the total preparedness scores based on percentages achieved by each participant (Fig. 20).

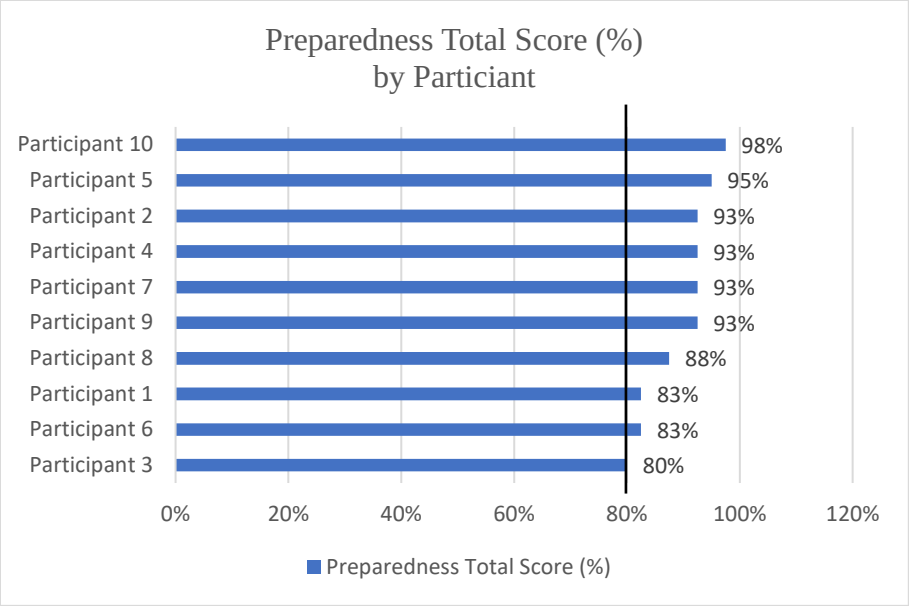

Figure 20. Post-training Program Preparedness total scores for each participant.

The participants also showed significant improvement in all preparedness dimensions before and after the training program. The following chart demonstrates the level of improvement based on the average response for the five common criteria in the pre- and post-training program questionnaires (Fig. 21).

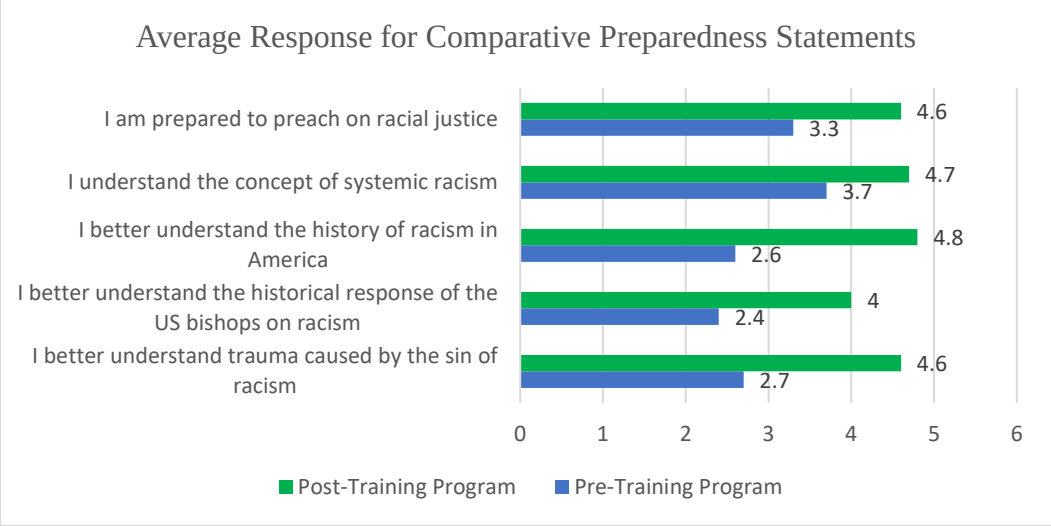

Figure 21. Participants' average response on preparedness statements.

There are several other important data points to note from the quantitative data. All participants responded "5," strongly agree with the statement: "I am better prepared to preach on racial justice because of this training program." Two questions showed a willingness to change behavior. When asked in the pre-training program questionnaire to rate the statement, "I study books about preaching on racial justice," the average was "2.0," disagree. In the post-training program questionnaire, the response to "I plan to study books about preaching on racial justice" was "4.1," agree. Likewise, there was a similar behavioral change in the rating for listening to homilies on racial justice. The average pre-training program rating for listening to homilies or sermons on racial justice was "2.2," disagree. In the post-training program questionnaire, the average was "4.0," with eight out of ten participants claiming they planned to listen to racial justice homilies.

The qualitative data substantiated the quantitative results. All participants told me in the post-training program interviews that the program prepared them to preach on racial justice. For example, before the program started, one participant stated that he never preached about racial justice because he lacked knowledge. After the program, he said that he plans to address the topic from the pulpit, especially whenever there is a national or regional event, such as George Floyd's murder, or an occasion like National Black Catholic History Month in November.

Attitude Toward Racial Justice Preaching

Another area I tested was the participants' attitudes toward preaching on racial justice, specifically what concerned them or prohibited them from preaching on the topic. Six participants expressed no concerns upon entering the program. One person indicated that all statements in the questionnaire that measured attitude concerned him. Three were

concerned about one or two of the questionnaire statements. The most common concern was the fear of offending people. In the post-training program questionnaire, the person concerned about everything was only worried about offending people. One person became slightly more concerned about losing parishioners and impacting the weekly offertory. All other participants expressed no major concerns after the training program. The following chart represents the change for the statement with the greatest pre- and post-training program attitudinal change: “I am not concerned with losing parishioners if I preach on racial justice (Fig. 22).” After completing the program, most participants were not concerned about losing parishioners as several moved from neutral to unconcerned. All other statements concerning attitudes had minimal variance.

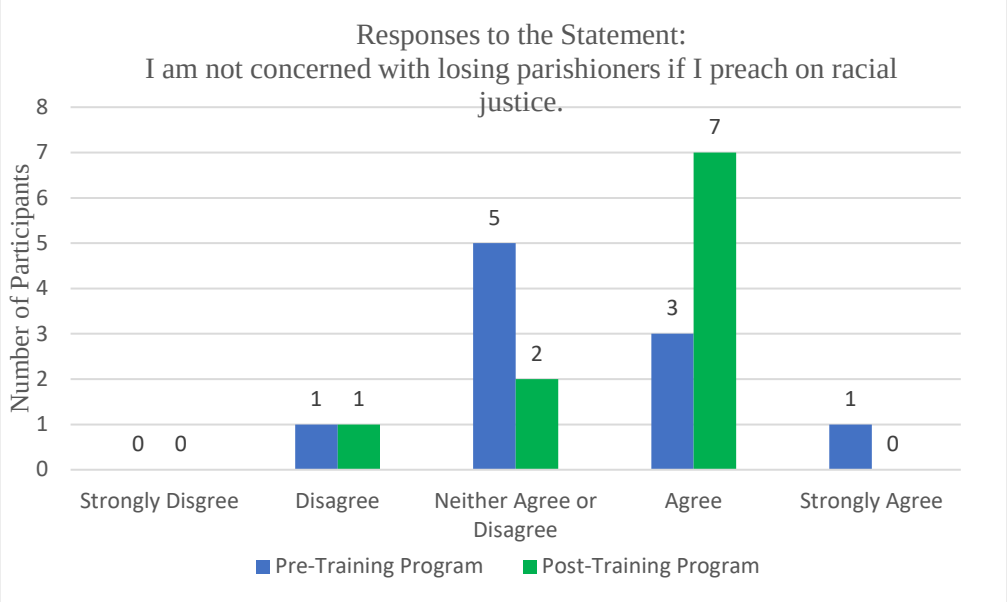

Figure 22. Participants’ rating for the statement: I am not concerned with losing parishioners if I preach on racial justice.

After completing the program, I also investigated the participants' previous preaching experience on racial justice and their future plans. The following is a summary of the comparison results (Fig. 23):

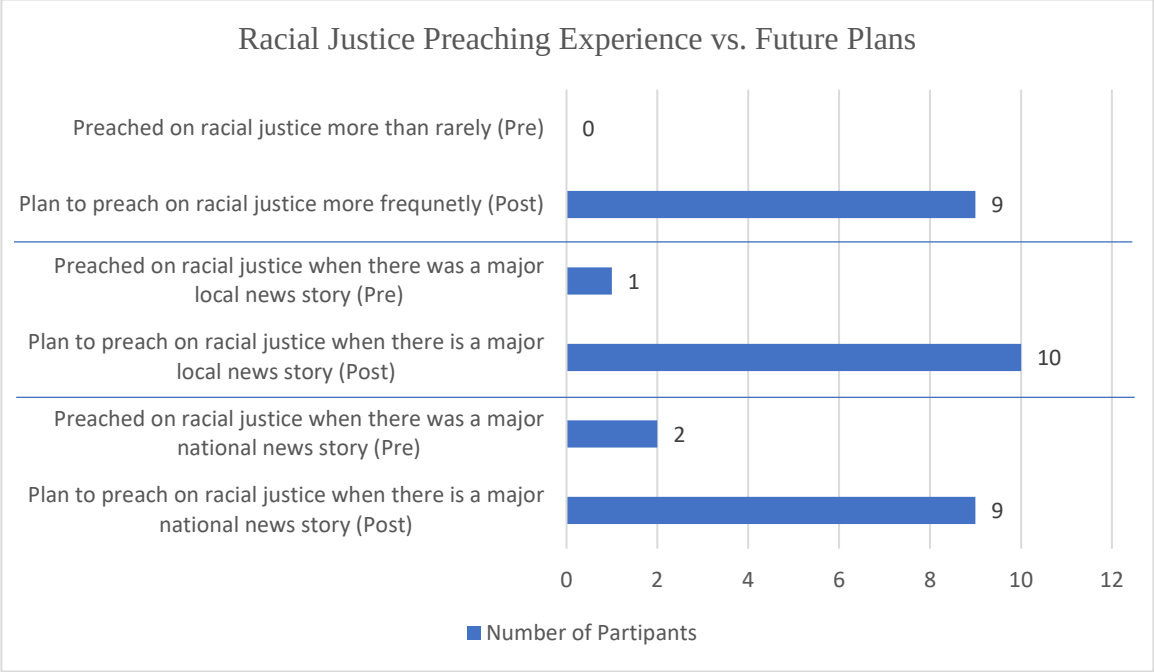

Figure 23. Participants' previous experience preaching on racial justice vs. their future plans.

The participants demonstrated a significant shift in attitude, from not preaching on racial justice regardless of the circumstances to planning to preach on racial justice more than once a year and when there is a major national or local news story. The qualitative data also supports this conclusion. All participants stated in the post-training program interview that they plan to preach on racial justice because they understand the issues better and have the confidence to speak on the subject. One participant scheduled himself to preach on Martin Luther King Jr. Day. Another said that he would preach on racial justice not only at times when people expect it, such as Black Catholic History Month in

November, but also when least expected. I plan to meet with the group in April or May to discuss their success in achieving their plans.

Motivation

Another primary goal of the training program was to motivate clergy to preach on racial justice. To determine a participant's motivation level, I measured two factors: personal relevance and engagement.[154] Personal relevance indicates how important racial justice is to the preacher and the community in which they exercise their ministry. Engagement refers to how much effort the preacher put into the training program. In the post-training program questionnaire (Appendix 3), ten statements measured personal relevance (Part IV: statements 1, 2, 4, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, and 14) and seven statements measured engagement (Part IV: statements 3, 5, 6, 10, 15, 16, and 17) for each participant. Using a five-point Likert scale and reversing the responses for negative statements as described in Chapter 5, participants who answered four or five on a particular statement demonstrated positive motivation. An 80 percent or above score indicates that racial justice was relevant to the participants and that they were engaged in the training program. The following chart reports the scores of each participant (Fig. 24).

[154] Donna L. Sundre, "Motivation Scale Background and Scoring Guide," Center for Assessment and Research Studies, James Madison University, accessed June 25, 2023, https://www.jmu.edu/assessment/_files/pdf/sos_scoring_guide.pdf.

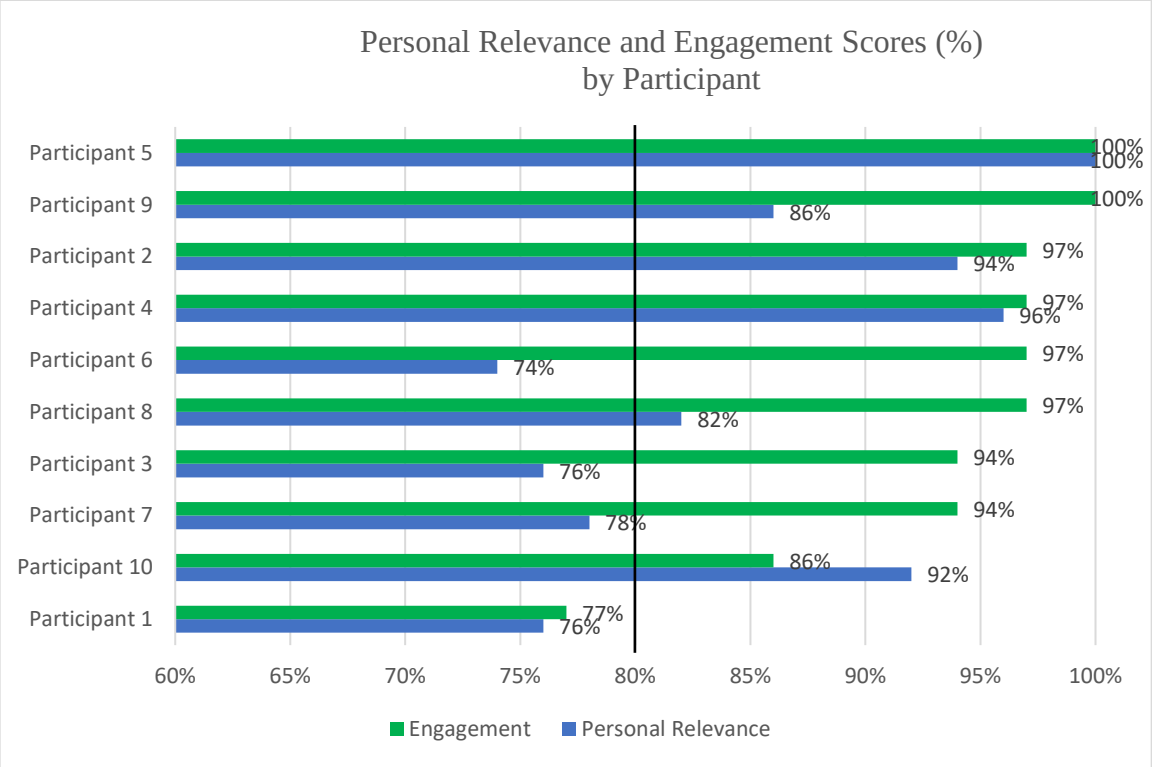

Figure 24. Personal relevance and engagement scores by participant.

Four participants scored less than 80 percent for personal relevance. The primary driver for their scores is that they do not believe racism is an issue in their parish. Almost all the participants scored this statement low. Only three participants agreed that racism is an issue in their parish. The one participant who did not achieve 80 percent in engagement was dealing with a death in his family, which he believed affected his score. Although he felt he could have been more engaged, he remained committed to the training program and completed all his assignments.

I added the results from the seventeen questions to determine an individual's total motivation score. A person with a total score of sixty-eight, which equals 80 percent or above, indicates that the training program successfully motivated them to preach on racial justice. Nine out of ten participants reported the training program motivated them. The

following graph represents the total motivation scores in percentages achieved by each participant (Fig. 25).

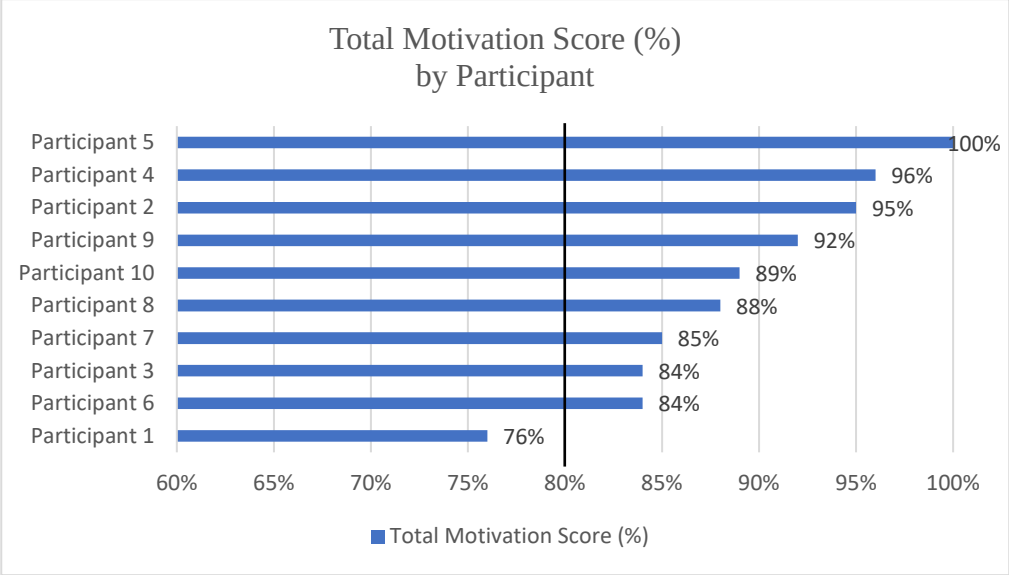

Figure 25. Total motivation score by participant.

I also assessed the motivational improvement generated by the training program. I added seven questions to the post-training program questionnaire that further helped measure motivation based on completing the program. For example: “I will apply what I learned in the training program to future homilies.” I compared pre- and post-motivation scores by percentages. A score of 80 percent or above signifies that participants were motivated to preach about racial justice. Three participants scored 80 percent or above in the pre-training program questionnaire compared with nine in the post-training program. The following chart shows each participant’s motivation scores as a percentage before and after the training program (Fig. 26).

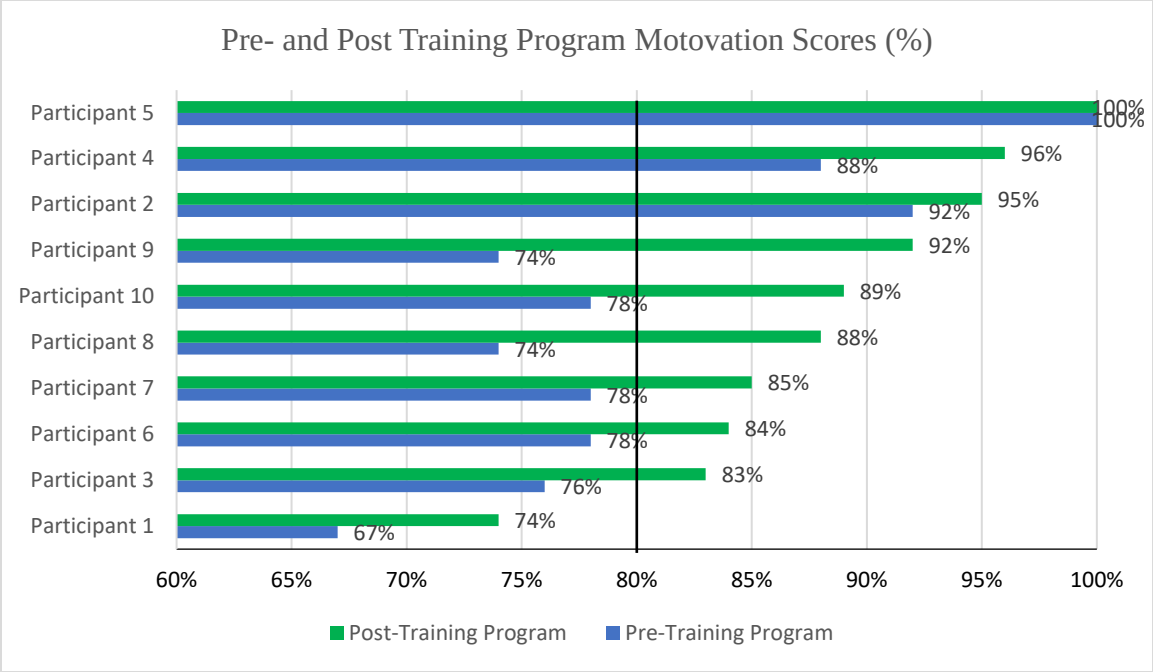

Figure 26. Comparison of pre-and post-training program motivation scores by the participant.

The participants' motivation scores improved from 0 percent to 24 percent. One of the participants scored himself 100 percent motivated before and after the training program, which resulted in a 0 percent improvement. The average improvement was 10.6 percent, with a median of 9.2 percent and a standard deviation of 7.1.

Three participants scored over 80 percent in motivation before the training program began. Given that they entered the training program with a high motivation level, I analyzed the motivational improvement for participants who did not score 80 percent or greater before the program. The following chart represents the motivational improvement probability distribution for those who lack motivation upon entering the training program based on these seven participants (Fig. 27). Their average improvement was 13.4 percent, the median was 10.4 percent, and the standard deviation was 6.2.

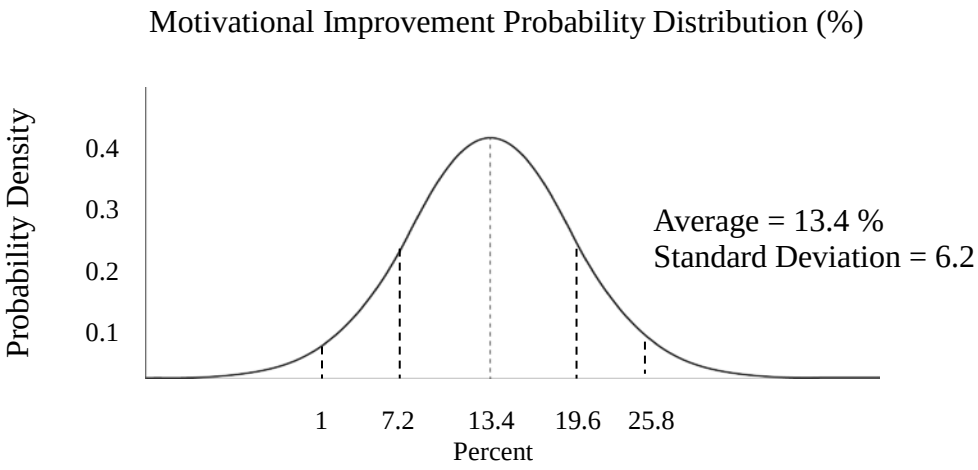

Figure 27. The probability distribution for motivational improvement after completion of the training program.

Training Program Evaluation

Overall, the training program received a positive evaluation from all participants. The following chart shows the average rating on a scale from 1 to 10 for each element of the training program (Fig. 28). A "1" rating represents extremely dissatisfied, and a "10" is extremely satisfied.

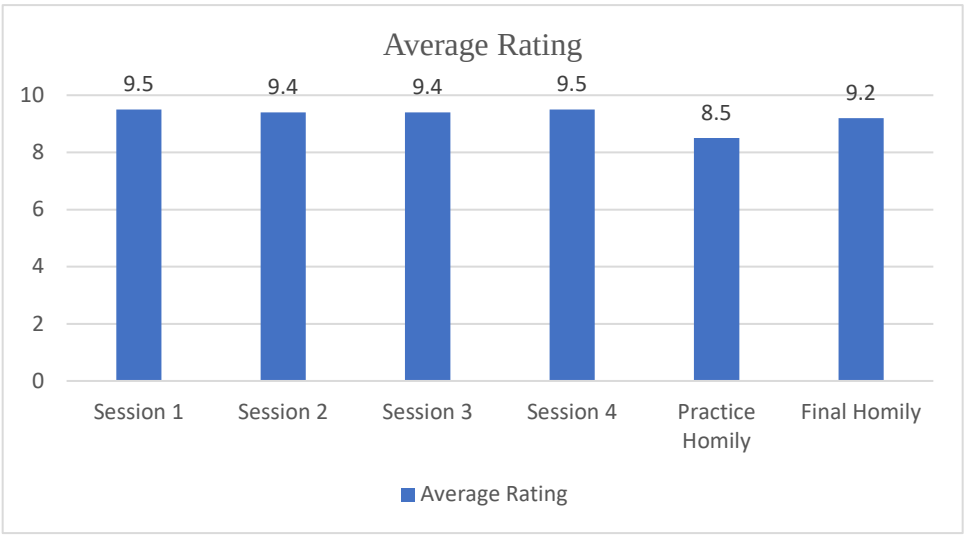

Figure 28. The average rating for each major element of the training program.

The overall rating for the training program was also high, achieving a 9.4 average. The following graph provides the detailed ratings determining this average (Fig. 29).

Figure 29. The overall training program participants' ratings.

The training program received a perfect Net Promoter Score (NPS), an industry-standard metric many corporations use to measure customer satisfaction and loyalty. According to Medallia, a global leader in helping companies measure NPS, "The Net Promoter Score is an index ranging from -100 to 100 that measures the willingness of customers to recommend a company's products or services to others."[155] The following question determined the NPS: "On a scale of 0 to 10, how likely are you to recommend this company's product or service to a friend or a colleague?"[156] Regarding this study, I

[155] "Net Promoter Score," Medallia, accessed December 26, 2023, https://www.medallia.com/net-promoter-score/?source=Marketing%20-%20Paid%20Search&utm_campaign=medallia_noram_customer-experience&utm_source=google&utm_medium=text-ad&utm_content=net-promoter-score&utm_term=net%20promoter%20score_e_g_c_651046686702&gad_source=1&gclid=EAIaIQobChMInZrYidKugwMVOFBHAR060A0qEAAYASAAEgInEvD_BwE.

[156] Ibid.

asked the question: “On a scale of 0 to 10, how likely are you to recommend this program to other preachers?” To calculate NPS, you subtract the percentage of customers who rate a product or service a 6 or less on a 10-point scale from the percentage of customers who rate a product or service a 9 or 10. Since all participants rated the training program a 9 or 10, NPS equals 100. The following chart provides the individual participant ratings for this statement (Fig. 30).

Figure 30. The participants’ overall rating of the program on a scale of 0 to 10.

The interviews after the program and write-in comments on the post-training program questionnaire substantiated this data. One participant said he loved the class and thought all the sessions were outstanding. Another wrote, “Thank you so much for this opportunity! I found it helpful and beneficial, and often find myself thinking about topics covered in this program as I think about and prepare homilies.” Several people said they looked forward to the weekly classes and thanked me for including them in the program.

The general feeling of gratitude and newfound knowledge was pervasive among all the participants.

Although the program met its stated goal, the participants helped me identify areas for improvement:

- **Add additional discussion time**: Several participants said they would have liked more discussion time. Although most felt the ninety-minute classroom sessions were appropriate, I will consider two-hour classroom sessions to allow more dialogue.

- **Cover racial justice preaching methods**: I covered lament and witness preaching in session four but did not cover racial justice preaching methods as described in Chapter 4. I will include these methods in future presentations.

- **Change classroom timing**: I will change the time of the classroom sessions to late afternoon or early evening. Running a preaching program for priests in the morning sometimes conflicts with funerals. Many deacons work full-time, so attending classes during regular workday hours is impossible.

- **Present more about triggers**: The participants expressed high interest in triggers, which are words or phrases that evoke positive or negative reactions from listeners. I will ask each presenter to discuss triggers in more detail.

- **Provide the latest research on the relationship between trauma and racism**: I will continue to study the latest research on the relationship between trauma and racism from a psychological perspective so that participants have the most recent information in this rapidly changing academic area.

In the following section, I share insights and success factors I hope to replicate in future programs.

Insights

I believe five attributes contributed to the program's success: A safe environment, trauma-informed instruction, exceptional speakers, a historical perspective, and preaching with feedback.

A Safe Environment

The four classes met in a private conference room, and there was no video or audio taping of the conversations. Participants could leave the program anytime or choose not to participate in discussions or exercises. The presenters and I did everything we could to ensure confidentiality and provide a safe environment for the priests and deacons to discuss trauma and racial justice openly and respectfully. Creating and maintaining a safe environment was essential to the program's success.

Trauma-Informed Instruction

In Chapter 5, I defined trauma-informed instruction as "giving participants an understanding of trauma through psychological, historical, theological, and homiletic perspectives." Discussing racial justice through these dimensions allowed the participants to relate to racial justice through our lived human experience. One participant said, "Trauma is something everyone can relate to on a certain level." Several others agreed that studying racial justice through trauma helped make the topic accessible and actionable.

Because of their religious vocations, all the participants were familiar with the concept of trauma. Priests and deacons deal with trauma survivors and their families regularly during hospital visits, meetings with grieving families as they make funeral arrangements, and pastoral care to parishioners traumatized by a myriad of life's unexpected tragedies. Many priests and deacons serve as chaplains in hospitals, prisons, emergency medical service centers, fire stations, and police units. Trauma is not an unfamiliar topic to this audience. Although none of the participants had previously made

the connection between trauma and racism, trauma-informed instruction made it easy for them to understand the relationship.

Exceptional Speakers

I carefully chose the speakers for each classroom session based on their subject matter expertise and engaging presentation skills. The participants gave all presenters high marks. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest rating, the four speakers earned between 9.4 and 9.5. Observer Astrid Alvarez said: “The speakers were truly experts on the topics they presented. They were able to convey from their very deep research and experience the topic at hand, and this was reflected in the quality of the sessions and how engaged the participants were during each gathering (Appendix 14).” Each speaker brought a unique perspective to preaching about racial justice through trauma-informed instruction, and together, the four perspectives created an engaging tapestry of thoughts and insights.

The speakers encouraged the priests and deacons to participate in meaningful conversations within a safe environment. All the speakers stayed for the optional lunch to continue the dialogue in a more informal setting. One participant commented that these informal discussions were among the most fruitful. High-quality instruction is essential for any training program, especially for subjects that can be controversial or polarizing.

Historical Perspective

Including a historical perspective on racism in the United States was essential. The story about the 1920 Duluth Lynchings had a powerful impact on the participants. Five people mentioned this incident in the post-training program interviews; two referenced the tragic event in their final homilies. One person said that he still sees the

image in his mind, which we meditated on (Fig. 2), especially the facial expressions of the people in the picture as the three Black men hung on the lamppost. The lack of remorse and shame on the faces in the crowd haunts him. Asking the participants to confront the historical trauma inflicted on innocent Black bodies made racism more than a theoretical theological exercise for them.

Six people said the second session on the history of Black sisters profoundly moved them. One participant commented, "It was shocking to learn of the racial injustice that existed in our Church." Another said that he never knew the degree to which "racism in the Catholic Church reared its ugly head for so many years." The stories about Black sisters overcoming trauma and racism to pursue a religious vocation moved the hearts of all participants. Most could not fathom the Church acting in such a discriminatory and unjust way. Yet, the Black sisters' perseverance in faith was inspiring and motivated many in the program to honor these courageous women in their preaching.

Preaching with Feedback

Although the presentations helped prepare and motivate the participants to preach on racial justice, the two homilies each participant prepared proved essential. The practice homily allowed each participant to put into practice what they learned and get feedback from their peers and me. Several participants said they found the feedback helpful in preparing their final homily. I observed material improvements between the practice and final homilies.

Observer Valerie Bien-Aime agreed: "The growth in the participants was remarkable, particularly considering that none had previously preached on racial justice.

Their ability to adapt their preaching to suit their congregations and effectively engage on the topic of racial justice was a testament to the program's effectiveness (Appendix 15)."

One participant said he most enjoyed giving his final homily and meeting with his parish focus group. Preaching about racial justice during Mass and getting feedback from people he trusts gave him the confidence he needed. The deacons especially appreciated the feedback from the parish focus groups since they typically only preach twice a month and receive minimal comments on their homilies. Two participants said they still use my rubric in preparing their Sunday homilies. They had never seen a rubric before and found it helpful as a general homiletic tool.

The feedback on the final homilies from the two original focus groups was also invaluable. In addition to giving the preachers additional feedback as they completed the training program, the focus group feedback helped me better understand what resonated with the listeners. I was pleased that the two focus groups appreciated preaching about racial justice from a trauma-informed perspective.

The two observers and I noted independently that the white focus group was more discerning and critical than the other focus group. For example, it ranked the homilies and commented on the preacher's presence and gestures. The People of Color focus group declined to offer suggestions for improvement to any of the preachers. The observers and I agreed on possible reasons for this behavior. Culturally, this group respects ecclesial authority and holds clergy in high esteem. They typically do not criticize their priests and deacons. An additional reason could be that the homilies moved the hearts of many in this focus group since most of them had never heard a homily about racial justice.

One African American woman in her seventies found something meaningful in each homily and expressed her gratitude. At the end of the session, she turned to me and asked when we would meet again. I explained that this was the final focus group session and thanked her for participating. The woman told me that she and her husband attended Mass at a suburban parish when she first moved to the diocese more than forty years ago. They sat in the back. The white people sitting in the pews around them stood up and moved further away. During the sign of peace, no one acknowledged their presence. She and her husband eventually found a welcoming urban parish and are still members there today. She wanted me to know how much this training program meant to her and was hopeful that she would have the opportunity to participate again one day.

Future Opportunities

Encouraged by the initial results and feedback, I plan to offer the training program again in 2024. Observer Valerie Bien-Aime endorsed the idea and said, “The program was well-executed, with the potential to be expanded to include the entire diocese. The invaluable information and the evident growth of the participants painted a vivid story of development and learning (Appendix 15).”

Based on comments from the participants, I will research words or triggers that preachers should use or avoid. Whenever we discussed what to say or not to say in a homily, I noticed the participants taking notes and actively engaging in the conversation. I also want to investigate more thoroughly the relationship between trauma and structural racism. Although we discussed this relationship in class, I believe I can present the material more compellingly. Only a few homilies specifically addressed structural racism. I will also explore the possibility of developing a virtual version of the class. Personal

interaction among participants is essential. Therefore, I will facilitate any online version of the training program through weekly videoconferencing sessions.

I plan to publish material from this paper in a book and give lectures on trauma-informed preaching and racial justice. I gave my first presentation to an advanced homiletics class at Saint Meinrad Seminary on November 16, 2023. This presentation gave the seminarians an overview of trauma-informed preaching structures, methods, and examples from my research.

In 2024, at the request of the Most Reverend Frank J. Caggiano, Bishop of Bridgeport, I will help launch and lead the St. Jerome Center for Preaching and Biblical Studies for priests and deacons. One of the center's goals is to help preachers develop homilies on challenging subjects such as racial justice. I will use the lessons learned in this research project to create additional training programs and workshops. Although Bishop Caggiano only recently announced his intention to launch this initiative, we have received 300,000 dollars in funding from two anonymous donors. The Center for Preaching will formally open in the fall of 2024.

Finally, I will continue my work in the Diocese of Bridgeport as Chancellor and as a board member on several non-profits to promote racial justice, advocate for structural reform, and provide witness testimony for those who do not have a voice at the table.

Conclusion

As the training program concluded, I recalled the following parable I heard many years ago: A man sitting on the beach early one morning noticed a woman in the distance picking something up from the sand and throwing it in the ocean. Curious to see what she

was doing, he rose from his chair and walked toward her. As he got closer, he saw the beach littered with thousands of starfish that had washed ashore during high tide. The woman bent down again, picked up a starfish, and tossed it back into the sea. The man approached her and said, “What are you doing? You cannot possibly help all these starfish. There are too many.” The woman looked at him, bent down, picked up another starfish, and tossed it into the ocean. Then, she told the man, “I just helped that one.”

The woman’s actions demonstrate that one person can make a difference. Likewise, preachers can make a difference in the fight for racial justice, even if the odds seem overwhelming. As one priest wrote in his evaluation: “During the session on the history of racism and the Church in America, it was surprising how often success came because of one person, often a white priest, who was willing to stand up for what was right. I don’t say that in a ‘savior’ kind of way, but in the importance of what one person can and must do, especially given how crucial anti-racism is to the dignity of the human person.”

Although this subject has an uncomfortable history and enormous complexity, preachers must not avoid it. When we remain silent, injustice becomes ingrained within the fabric of society, and innocent people suffer. If Fr. James Joubert, co-founder of the Oblate Sisters of Providence, remained silent, hundreds of Black women would not have entered religious life, and thousands of Black children would not have received an education. If Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. remained silent, Congress would not have abolished segregation in 1964. I developed this training program to prepare and motivate preachers to find their voice so they could join the courageous religious leaders from previous generations who made a difference. To that end, the program met its goal.

During late November and into early December, ten priests and deacons preached on racial justice in the Diocese of Bridgeport. They may have only moved one person to act, but I am proud they left their comfort zones and found their voices. Inspired by the program, observer Astrid Alvarez said: “As an immigrant in the USA, I lacked a vast understanding of the history and prevalence of the sin of racism in our communities. This research project was personally an eye-opener with a message of hope from the voice of our Church to accept the invitation to live in the loving unity of Christ (Appendix 14).” I am grateful for each priest’s and deacon’s progress during the training program, and I pray this is just the beginning. May these preachers continue to speak courageously through trauma-informed preaching and inspire others to work for justice and equity for all.

Appendix 1

Pre-Training Program Clergy Questionnaire

Part I: General Information

1. Age
    - 18 to 29
    - 30 to 39
    - 40 to 49
    - 50 to 59
    - 60 and older

2. Year Ordained
    - Less than 6
    - 6 to 10
    - 11 to 15
    - 16 to 25
    - 25 and over

3. Ethnicity
    - American Indian or Alaska Native
    - Asian
    - Black or African American
    - Hispanic or Latino
    - Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
    - White
    - Multiracial

4. Parish Currently Assigned
    - Urban
    - Suburban
    - Rural

5. Parish Congregational Political Views
    - The majority is Democrats.
    - The majority is Republicans.
    - Evenly split between Democrats and Republicans.
    - Other

6. Parish Congregational Socioeconomic Profile
    - The majority are professional workers.
    - The majority are manual workers.
    - Diverse congregation

Please use the following scale to answer the questions.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Part II: Preparedness

1. _____ I am prepared to preach on racial justice.
2. _____ I regularly study racial justice issues.
3. _____ I understand the concept of systemic racism.
4. _____ I have studied the history of racism in the United States of America.
5. _____ I have studied the historical response of the U.S. bishops on racism.
6. _____ I understand trauma from a neurological and psychological perspective.
7. _____ I have studied trauma-informed theology.
8. _____ I understand the trauma caused by the sin of racism.
9. _____ I know people who have experienced racial injustice.
10. _____ Some of my family and friends have experienced racial injustice.
11. _____ I study books about preaching on racial justice.
12. _____ I regularly listen to homilies or sermons on racial justice.

Part III: Attitude and Experience

1. _____ I am not concerned with creating controversy or conflict by preaching on racial justice.
2. _____ I am not concerned with losing parishioners if I preach on racial justice.
3. _____ I am not concerned about the weekly offertory if I preach on racial justice.
4. _____ I am not concerned that some parishioners may refuse to speak with me if I preach on racial justice.
5. _____ I am not concerned about offending people by preaching on racial justice.
6. _____ I am not concerned that some people write to the bishop if I preach on racial justice.
7. _____ I regularly preach on racial justice.
8. _____ I preach on racial justice when there is a major national news story.
9. _____ I preach on racial justice when there is a major local news story.
10. _____ I rarely or never preach on racial justice.

Part IV: Motivation

1. _____ I am participating in this training program because I am interested in the topic.
2. _____ Participating in this training program is important to me.

3. _____ After completing this program, I plan to preach more frequently on racial justice.
4. _____ I am only participating in this training program because I was invited.
5. _____ I believe preachers must preach on racial justice.
6. _____ Racial justice is an issue in my diocese.
7. _____ Racial justice is an issue in my parish.
8. _____ Jesus spoke about justice, so I must do the same.
9. _____ Preaching about racial justice is an opportunity for personal growth.
10. _____ This training program will better prepare me to preach on racial justice

Appendix 2

Training Program Clergy Interview Questions

Pre-Training Program

1. How well do you understand the history of racism in our country and the Catholic Church?
2. How well do you understand trauma and the trauma caused by racial injustice?
3. Have you experienced or witnessed racial injustice? If you feel comfortable, please give examples.
4. How large a problem is racial justice in our diocese? In your parish?
5. What are your biggest concerns about preaching about racial justice within your parish?
6. Why are you taking this training program?
7. How often do you preach on racial justice?

Post-Training Program

1. How well do you understand trauma and the trauma caused by racial injustice?
2. How large a problem is racial justice in our diocese? In your parish?
3. What are your biggest concerns about preaching about racial justice within your parish?
4. How engaged were you in the training program?
5. How often do you plan to preach on racial justice?
6. What did you like the best about the training program? Do you have any suggestions to improve the program?

Appendix 3

Post-Training Program Clergy Questionnaire

Part I: General Information

1. Age
    - 18 to 29
    - 30 to 39
    - 40 to 49
    - 50 to 59
    - 60 and older

2. Year Ordained
    - Less than 6
    - 6 to 10
    - 11 to 15
    - 16 to 25
    - 25 and over

3. Ethnicity
    - American Indian or Alaska Native
    - Asian
    - Black or African American
    - Hispanic or Latino
    - Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
    - White
    - Multiracial

4. Parish Currently Assigned
    - Urban
    - Suburban
    - Rural

5. Parish Congregational Political Views
    - The majority is Democrats.
    - The majority is Republicans.
    - Evenly split between Democrats and Republicans.
    - Other

6. Parish Congregational Socioeconomic Profile
    - The majority are professional workers.
    - The majority are manual workers.
    - Diverse congregation

Please use the following scale to answer the questions.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

Part II: Preparedness

1. _____ I am prepared to preach on racial justice.
2. _____ I am better prepared to preach on racial justice because of this training program.
3. _____ I understand the concept of systemic racism.
4. _____ I better understand the history of racism in the United States of America.
5. _____ I better understand the historical response of the U.S. bishops on racism.
6. _____ I better understand the trauma caused by the sin of racism.
7. _____ I plan to study books about preaching on racial justice.
8. _____ I plan to listen to homilies or sermons on racial justice.

Part III: Attitude and Experience

1. _____ I am not concerned with creating controversy or conflict by preaching on racial justice.
2. _____ I am not concerned with losing parishioners if I preach on racial justice.
3. _____ I am not concerned about the weekly offertory if I preach on racial justice.
4. _____ I am not concerned that some parishioners may refuse to speak with me if I preach on racial justice.
5. _____ I am not concerned about offending people by preaching on racial justice.
6. _____ I am not concerned that some people write to the bishop if I preach on racial justice.
7. _____ I will preach on racial justice at least twice per year.
8. _____ I will preach on racial justice when there is a major national news story.
9. _____ I will preach on racial justice when there is a major local news story.
10. _____ I will rarely or never preach on racial justice.

Part IV: Motivation

1. _____ I participated in this training program because I was interested in the topic.
2. _____ Participating in this training program was important to me.
3. _____ Completing this program was important to me.
4. _____ I plan to preach more frequently on racial justice.
5. _____ I engaged in good effort throughout this training program.
6. _____ While taking this program, I could have paid more attention.
7. _____ I only participated in this training program because I was invited.

8. _____ I believe preachers must preach on racial justice.
9. _____ Receiving feedback on my two homilies was important to me.
10. _____ I did not give this training program my full attention.
11. _____ Racial justice is an issue in my diocese.
12. _____ Racial justice is an issue in my parish.
13. _____ Jesus spoke about justice, so I must do the same.
14. _____ Preaching about racial justice is an opportunity for personal growth.
15. _____ While taking this program, I actively participated.
16. _____ This training program better prepared me to preach on racial justice.
17. _____ I will apply what I learned in the training program to future homilies.

Appendix 4

Focus Group Facilitator Questions – Catholic People of Color Community

1. Would anyone like to share a story about when you experienced racism?
2. Do you believe racism is a problem within Fairfield County?
3. Do you believe racism is a problem within your parish community?
4. How often have you heard a priest or deacon preach on racial justice?
5. Do you believe it is appropriate for a priest or deacon to preach on racial justice?
6. What have you heard preached on racial justice that gave you consolation? Desolation?
7. What advice do you have for preachers who preach on racial justice?

Appendix 5

Focus Group Facilitator Questions – Catholic White Community

1. Would anyone like to share a story about when you witnessed racism?
2. Do you believe racism is a problem within Fairfield County?
3. Do you believe racism is a problem within your parish community?
4. How often have you heard a priest or deacon preach on racial justice?
5. Do you believe it is appropriate for a priest or deacon to preach on racial justice?
6. What have you heard preached on racial justice that gave you consolation? Desolation?
7. What advice do you have for preachers who preach on racial justice?

Appendix 6

Consent Forms

Trauma-Informed Preaching and Racial Justice: Finding Our Voice in the Age of Breathlessness

Consent Form for Clergy Participants

Researcher: Deacon Patrick Toole, Doctor of Ministry in Preaching Candidate, Aquinas Institute of Theology, St. Louis, MO.

Purpose: I am conducting research to evaluate a preaching training program on trauma-informed preaching and racial justice. The training program's goal is to help clergy at predominantly white parishes become better prepared and motivated to preach on racial justice.

Duration and Procedures: The study will take approximately twenty-four hours of your time over eight weeks. Before starting the study, you will complete a pre-training program questionnaire and participate in a thirty-minute individual interview. Then, you will attend four weekly classes. Each class is ninety minutes. During the four weeks after the classes, you will preach a practice homily on racial justice, give feedback to two other preachers in the program, preach on racial justice in a congregational setting of your choosing, and post online about your experience. After the training program concludes, you will complete a post-training program questionnaire.

Risks: The foreseeable risks in participating in this research are minimal. A participant may feel uncomfortable discussing racism or working in a group environment. Any participant who feels uncomfortable may discontinue participating at any time without any negative consequences. If a participant discontinues participating, I will destroy his data.

Benefits, Incentives, and Costs: There are no financial benefits or incentives for participating in this study. The primary potential benefit of participating in this research is the opportunity to grow spiritually and become a better preacher on racial justice. Participants will also help contribute to our understanding of what is helpful for preachers to learn about this topic. There are no costs to participate in this study.

Alternatives: Participants may decline to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without consequence.

Confidentiality: The researcher will strongly encourage confidentiality in the training program. I will not videotape the classroom presentations and discussions to provide a safe environment to discuss a challenging preaching topic. All interviews, questionnaires, and assessments are confidential documents. The data analysis and written reports will not contain any personally identifiable information. I will destroy all participants' data after the research's conclusion and the written final report. However, existing laws require the researcher to report any individuals who are in clear and imminent danger of harm to themselves or others and any potential child or vulnerable adult abuse.

Contact: For information about this research and your rights as a research participant, please contact the researcher at dntoole@diobpt.org.

Consent: I have read this form, and the research study has been explained to me. I understand that I may ask questions and that if I have questions, I know who to contact. I understand that I can discontinue participation in the study at any time without consequence. I agree to participate in the research study described above by signing below.

_____	_____	_____
Date	Print Name	Signature

Trauma-Informed Preaching and Racial Justice:
Finding Our Voice in the Age of Breathlessness

Consent Form for Focus Group Participants

Researcher: Deacon Patrick Toole, Doctor of Ministry in Preaching Candidate, Aquinas Institute of Theology, St. Louis, MO.

Purpose: I am conducting research to evaluate a preaching training program on trauma-informed preaching and racial justice. The training program's goal is to help clergy at predominantly white parishes become better prepared and motivated to preach on racial justice.

Duration and Procedures: The study will take approximately three hours of your time. You will attend two ninety-minute focus group meetings with eight to ten participants. During the first session, a moderator will interview the group concerning your opinions about preaching and racial justice. Two people, including myself, will observe the session through videoconferencing. We will not be visible and will not contribute to the conversation. I will not record the session.

During the second ninety-minute focus group meeting, you and other people from your initial group will watch videos of five to six preachings on racial justice. After watching each video, the group will provide feedback.

Risks: The foreseeable risks in participating in this research are minimal. A participant may feel uncomfortable discussing racism or working in a group environment. Any participant who feels uncomfortable may discontinue participating at any time without any negative consequences. If a participant discontinues participating, I will destroy their data.

Benefits, Incentives, and Costs: There are no financial benefits or incentives for participating in this study. The primary potential benefit of participating in this research is the opportunity to help clergy preach about racial justice. There are no costs to participate in this study.

Alternatives: Participants may decline to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without consequence.

Confidentiality: The researcher will strongly encourage confidentiality. I will not videotape any session to provide a safe environment to discuss a challenging topic. All notes recorded from the sessions are confidential. The data analysis and written reports will not contain any personally identifiable information. I will destroy all participants' data after the research's conclusion and the written final report. However, existing laws require the researcher to report any individuals who are in clear and imminent danger of harm to themselves or others and any potential child or vulnerable adult abuse.

Contact: For information about this research and your rights as a research participant, please contact the researcher at dntoole@diobpt.org.

Consent: I have read this form, and the research study has been explained to me. I understand that I may ask questions and that if I have questions, I know who to contact. I understand that I can discontinue participation in the study at any time without consequence. By signing below, I confirm that I am at least eighteen years old and agree to participate in the research study described above.

_____	_____	_____
Date	Print Name	Signature

Appendix 7

Rubric for Practice and Congregational Preaching

Grade Values: A ≥ 45, B ≥ 35, C ≥ 25

Total /50 points	**A 10-9 points**	**B 8-7 points**	**C 6-5 points**
Preaching appropriate to context	• Good knowledge of audience, especially their current attitude on racial justice • Good and appropriate use of language, images, and symbols to capture the assembly's imagination • Addresses real struggles and needs of the assembly concerning racial justice	• Relatively good knowledge of audience • Appropriate use of language • Addresses less adequately the struggles and needs of the assembly concerning racial justice	• Little knowledge of audience • Inappropriate use of language • Abstract message with no grounding in people's lives • No imagination
Sound theological content	• Sound theological content in concert with the training program • One central point related to racial justice • Relates scripture/theological message well to life • Personal stake in what is being said	• Relatively sound theological content in concert with the training program • Some theological inaccuracies • Relates scripture fairly well to everyday life	• Poor theology without solid grounding in Tradition • No clear central message related to racial justice • Too many themes introduced • Retelling of Scripture story • Lacks spiritual depth
Ethical implications and call to discipleship	• Shows clear and concrete ethical response to racism • Calls for a response in discipleship to imitate Jesus' preference for social justice • Stimulates desire for growth in Christ • Goal: Conscience formation, strengthen character, and inspire virtue in a positive way • Calls assembly to responsibility for structural racism	• Gives some ethical implications of preaching on racial justice • Calls for a Christian action as a result of the gospel message • Less inspiring	• No ethical implications of preaching • No Christian response called forth • Heavy moralizing and guilt tripping • Expressed criticism, reproach, and complaints • Appears superior to the people in the assembly • Preaching the law rather than the acquisition of virtue
Performance	• Speaks to/with assembly • Good eye-contact and gestures • Style is clear and personal • Expresses conviction	• Some eye-contact and animation • Some connection with the assembly • Fairly clear and personal	• Verbose pontification • No eye-contact • Inarticulate, mumbling speech • Monotone speech • Nervous and ill at ease

	• Motivates and inspires • Good use of humor • As ease with self and assembly	• Expresses some conviction	• Appears above the people
Use of imagination within the context of trauma-informed preaching and racial justice	• Good use of imagination • Captures the human condition within the context of racial justice • Effective use of program material to craft a theological message	• Fair use of imagination • Partially captures the human condition within the context of racial justice • Fair use of the program material to craft a theological message	• Lacks imagination • No mention of the human condition within the context of racial justice • Fails to use the program material to craft a theological message

Appendix 8

Homily Congregational and Focus Group Feedback Questions

1. What did you experience while hearing this homily on racial justice?
2. How did the homily challenge or reinforce your perspective on racial justice?
3. What were the greatest strengths of the homily?
4. Are there ways in which today's preacher might have improved in communicating the message?

Appendix 9

Training Program Evaluation

Part I: Questionnaire

Please answer the questions using the following scale:

Extremely Dissatisfied									Extremely Satisfied
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

1. On a scale of 1 to 10, rate your level of satisfaction with session 1. _____
2. On a scale of 1 to 10, rate your level of satisfaction with session 2. _____
3. On a scale of 1 to 10, rate your level of satisfaction with session 3. _____
4. On a scale of 1 to 10, rate your level of satisfaction with session 4. _____
5. On a scale of 1 to 10, rate your level of satisfaction with your practice homily experience. _____
6. On a scale of 1 to 10, rate your level of satisfaction with your homily experience. _____
7. On a scale of 1 to 10, rate your level of satisfaction with the training program. _____
8. On a scale of 0 to 10, how likely are you to recommend this training program to other preachers? _____

Part II: Written Comments

1. What did you like the most about the training program?

2. What improvements do you recommend for the program?

3. What feedback do you have for the presenters?

4. Please comment on the training program's time requirements in total and per session.

5. What was your most significant learning from the program?

Appendix 10

Presenter Biographies

Dr. Shannen Dee Williams is Associate Professor of History at the University of Dayton. A historian of the African American experience with research and teaching specializations in women's, religious and Black freedom movement history, Williams is the author of *Subversive Habits: Black Catholic Nuns in the Long African American Freedom Struggle*, published by Duke University Press in April 2022.

Dr. Williams's research has been supported by a host of fellowships, grants, and awards, including a Scholar-in-Residence Fellowship at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in New York City, a Charlotte W. Newcombe Doctoral Fellowship in Religion and Ethics from the Woodrow Wilson National Foundation, an Albert J. Beveridge Grant from the American Historical Association and the John Tracy Ellis Dissertation Award from the American Catholic Historical Association. Her work has been published in the *Journal of African American History*, *American Catholic Studies*, the *Washington Post*, *America Magazine*, and the *National Catholic Reporter*.

Dr. Ashley Theuring is an Assistant Professor in Theology at Xavier University, specializing in constructive and practical theologies. She completed her doctorate in the Practical Theology program at the Boston University School of Theology. Her dissertation, entitled "Toward a Catholic Feminist Practical Theology of Hope After Domestic Violence," explored the question "What constitutes hope after domestic violence?" Her theological research is informed by her past work at a rape, crisis, and abuse center, Women Helping Women of Hamilton County, where she was as an advocate and educator. Her research continues to be informed by contemporary communities of trauma survivors and focuses on exploring religious practices, meaning making, and survival in response to trauma.

Mrs. Erin Neil is the Director of Safe Environments and the Victim Assistance Coordinator in the Diocese of Bridgeport. She received a Bachelor of Science degree in Clinical Psychology from Xavier University and a Master's Degree in Clinical Social Work from Southern CT State University with a specialization in Clinical Mental Health and Substance Abuse. She is a licensed clinical social worker in the State of CT. In 2003, Bishop William E. Lori appointed Mrs. Neil as the founding Director of the Safe Environment program, and in 2008 she began serving as the Victim Assistance Coordinator in addition to her Director position. Before serving the Diocese, Mrs. Neil worked in various counseling positions with adults and children diagnosed with cognitive and psychiatric disabilities.

Fr. Reggie Norman is the President of the National Association of Black Catholic Administrators. Headquartered in the Archdiocese of Washington, D.C., NABCA provides a forum for Black Catholic leaders to address the needs and concerns of their communities. Fr. Norman is also the Episcopal Vicar for Black Catholics in the Diocese of Bridgeport and the Pastor of Our Lady of Fatima Parish in Wilton, Connecticut. He regularly preaches and speaks on racial justice at a national and local level.

Appendix 11

Trauma is a Bodily Phenomenon

The following questions are from Resma Manaakem's book, *My Grandmother's Hands,* with some modifications to include George Floyd's arrest. The training program participants reflected on these questions at the conclusion of session 1.

- As you look at these pictures, what does your body experience? What does it want to do? What impulses, emotions, or images arise?

- Which parts of your body want to fight? Which parts want to flee or turn away? Which parts want to freeze?

- Does a part of you want to shut down and override what you're experiencing? Is a potentially soothing thought going through your head, such as, Hey, it's just history, or Thank God people don't do this anymore, or This is just bad people doing bad things?

- Now look at the two dozen or so white bodies that are posed around the lynched Black bodies, or the officer pinning George Floyd on the ground. Look at the expression on each man's face.

- What do you experience now in your body? What sensations do you feel? What impulses, emotions, or images arise?

- Now imagine you're one of those men, standing close to the three mutilated corpses that are being displayed for the camera, or one of the bystanders watching George Floyd's arrest. What do you imagine they experience in their bodies? What might that person be feeling and thinking? What might they be smelling, hearing, or seeing?

- Finally, imagine you live in Duluth, MN, in 1920, or Minneapolis, MN, in 2018. You turn the corner and see the scene in the picture. Now what does your body want to do?

- What would you want to say to men in Duluth, or the officers in Minneapolis? Would you confront them? Would you keep walking? Would you hurry to a police station? Would you bend over and throw up? Would you stay silent?

- What do you imagine any Black bodies in the vicinity would experience? What do you think would get passed down through their bodies to the bodies of their descendants?

Appendix 12

Sample Homily 1 from the Preaching Training Program

I remember growing up in the late sixties. As young boy, my grandfather introduced me to his favorite saint one night. I was down in the basement while he was babysitting. And that particular saint was a man of mixed race, an illegitimate child, son of a free woman's slave from Panama, and his father a Spanish knight from Lima. Because of this, he grew up with tremendous hardship as his parents weren't married, and his father, unfortunately, fled at a very early age. He tried to take care of himself by learning a trade. He tried to learn the medical field. He became a barber, but his heart was to do something with the faith. And this made me aware of Martin's hideous story and ridicule that people would make fun of him and try to keep him from following in Christ, and the trauma that I imagined that he had to deal with stemming from this.

So, I thought this would be an opportune time to preach about this particular topic, especially on the heels of Thanksgiving yesterday. Where families all came together. And it just so happened to be, Saint Martin de Porres' feast day. It was just in the rearview mirror, on November third. And most people have no idea of the racial injustice and the trauma associated with it over the years. And I just want to provide a couple of less than savory examples.

Back in the early nineteen hundreds, those who wished to be nuns of African American descent, the early sisters, if they were, in fact, African American, were referred to as house sisters or laborers. Many of the white nuns resisted to integrate and

persecuted black nuns. They weren't even allowed to wear habits, signifying their consecrated status. There was a conspiracy of silence, and many left the United States to go to Europe after multiple rejections. They even sought many different communities in America to try to become nuns.

Could you imagine exclusion to receive God's call? I certainly cannot. It was also around this particular time that black children were banned from the Catholic educational system. It's almost impossible to narrate the difficulty of their journey. And, you know, we've heard secular stories over the years of trying to break the color barrier in major league baseball with Jackie Robinson and Larry Dobie. But once that threshold was broken, scores of African American players entered major league baseball. It certainly wasn't so easy for the nuns and the students at that particular time. And believe it or not in our own diocese in the late sixties, Blacks were forced to sit in the back of our own cathedral. It's deplorable. We are all God's children. All made in the image and likeness of God.

You may be aware of the public lynchings in Duluth, Minnesota in the early nineteen twenties, and then fast forward to George Floyd in Minneapolis in twenty eighteen, almost a century later. And all those who have witnessed this manifestation of racism, how do we confront these evils in our own society, even in our own diocese? We must be privy to how healthy relationships within congregations act as a bridge toward racial reconciliation in healing. And we must continue to foster a church environmentwhere relationships are built on mutual respect, understanding, and a shared commitment to racial justice.

Now these are some valid questions to ask if someone that you are aware of has been affected by these horrible transgressions. Number one, you are not alone. Number two, do you want to talk? Number three, this was not your fault. Four, I am here to offer support. Number five, how can I be helpful to you? And number six, what do you want me to know about your journey or your story? We all need to be called into action.

You know, there's a significant biology of trauma as it relates. There is a hiding of emotions for some. Which can delay healing. And what do we need to totally unify our society and our country? Heaven forbid, it seems like the only time our country is totally one hundred percent united is when we have to deal with a 911, or the tragedy of Sandy Hook. But there is one shining beacon of light here, and that's that there is hope after trauma. There can be a united victory and healing.

So, we pray in earnest for that particular healing as there is nothing more grounded than prayer. I look at the love of the St. James' community of faith. We're a diverse parish in a diverse town, people with mixed ethnicities, and races working in unity and harmony. St. Paul stresses this in a passage such as Galatians: "There is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female. You are all one in Christ Jesus." And then I finish by using our mission statement, which is so appropriate: "See a face, learn a name, hear a story, and love one another."

Appendix 13

Sample Homily 2 from the Preaching Training Program

My friends. Today, I stand before you to address an issue that has long plagued our nation's conscience and still continues to do so. Racial justice in America is not just a political or a social concern. It is a moral imperative. It is a subject that touches the very core of our humanity and calls us to examine our hearts, and our actions, and our society in the light of God's love.

Racial injustice in America is not a new concept. It has deep historical roots in our country, stretching back to the days when our first Africans were brought to this land as slaves. Our history is marred, marred by the pain and suffering of marginalized communities who have endured discrimination, have endured prejudice, have endured violence for centuries. Today, we must recognize the fight for racial justice is not merely a political matter. But a spiritual one as well.

In the book of Micah, chapter six, verse eight, we read the words of the prophet: "You have been told, oh, man, what is good, and what the Lord requires of you, only to do the right and to love goodness and to walk humbly with our God." This verse encapsulates the very core of our faith, reminding us that justice, mercy, and humility are central to God's plan for humanity.

When we speak of racial justice, we are talking about justice for all. Irrespective of the color of their skin, or the place of their birth, or the circumstances of their upbringing. We are all called to recognize the inherent dignity of every person created in

the image and likeness of God and to work tirelessly to ensure that this dignity is upheld and protected. Racial justice is not a matter of preference or convenience. It is a matter of moral obligation. It is our duty, our duty to stand up against the systems and the structures that perpetuate racial inequality. Just as it is our duty to condemn the acts of discrimination and violence that continue to harm our brothers and sisters.

Pope Francis reminds us that if one member suffers, all suffer together. This interconnectedness is at the heart of our faith, and it means that we cannot turn a blind eye to the suffering of any of our brothers and sisters. Racial injustice is not just a problem for those who are directly affected by it. It is a problem for all of us, my friends, because it diminishes the dignity of all. It is important to acknowledge that the path to racial justice is long and challenging. It requires us to confront uncomfortable truths about our history and our society, it calls us to examine our own biases and prejudices. It demands that we be willing to listen to the stories and the experiences of those who have been marginalized and oppressed.

But my dear friends, it is a path, a path we must walk. The gospel of Matthew teaches us: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.” Our hunger for righteousness, our thirst for justice, should drive us to work for a more just and equitable society. Racial justice is not an abstract concept. It is a reality that affects the lives of real people every single day. It is the young child who’s afraid to walk to school because they fear the violence that may come their way. It is the teenager who wonders why, why are they treated differently because of the color of their skin. It is the parent who has to have “the talk” with their child warning them about how to navigate a world that is often unjust.

But we have reason to hope. Hope is the belief that with God's grace and our collective efforts, we can change the course of history. It is the belief that our nation, with its rich tapestry of cultures, can be a place of true equality and justice. The journey towards racial justice begins with self-examination. It requires us to confront our own biases and prejudices, to acknowledge the ways in which we have contributed to a system of racial inequality, even unknowingly. It means listening to the voices of those who have been oppressed and taking their stories to heart.

From self-examination, we moved then to solidarity. We stand with those who are marginalized and oppressed, not as saviors. No. But as fellow human beings, we seek to understand their experiences and support their struggle for justice. In the words of Martin Luther King, Jr.: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

Then comes the call to action. We must work to change the systems and the structures that perpetuate racial inequality. This may involve advocacy for policy changes, supporting organizations like Connect that work for Justice and engage in community dialogue and education, but we must also remember that the struggle for racial justice is a spiritual one. We must draw on the wellspring of our faith to find the strength to confront the injustices of our world. We must turn to prayer, seeking God's guidance and wisdom as we work for a more just society.

Friends, the pursuit of racial justice in America is a moral imperative rooted in the teaching of our faith. It is a call to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God. It is a call to recognize the dignity of every single person. To confront our own biases and to work tirelessly for a more just and equitable society. Let us be inspired by the words of Pope Francis, who said: "We need to recognize with humility that the way to social peace

is not a question of a few right intentions, but above all, a wealth of small daily gestures to promote a culture of encounter." May our small daily gestures, may our prayers, and may our actions be a source of hope and healing as we work towards racial justice in America.

Amen. Praise be to Jesus Christ.

Appendix 14

Observer Astrid Alvarez's Notes on the Doctoral Thesis Project: Trauma-Informed Preaching and Racial Justice: A Training Program to Find Our Voice in the Age of Breathlessness

In a divided society as 2023 United States the design of an instruction program that taught clergy through a trauma-informed perspective about Racial Justice was a successful experience.

The inclusion of the participation of two focus groups, one for white people and one with People of Color was highly valuable. Both groups attended before the training program to speak in general about experiences about racial justice in their lives and later, after the conclusion of the clergy training program, to watch the homily results and comment on it. The ability to transmit the observations from these groups to the clergy was considerably beneficial.

My observation of the clergymen who accepted the invitation to participate in this exercise is that their motivation varied from "personally vested" to "politely participating" and many in the middle. Regardless of this, clergy's commitment both in time and participation demonstrated that they recognize the value of bringing Christ's light on racial justice from the ambo. It was heart-warming to witness clergy engagement into the program, which was evident in the way that the messages in their homilies improved from the practice attempt to their final assignments. The homilies varied from inductive to deductive and some were very direct naming some of the biggest recent news

stories while others were more subtle, narrating the roots of their ancestors and the discrimination that they suffered.

The speakers were truly experts on the topics they presented. They were able to convey the topic at hand from their very deep research and experience, and this was reflected in the quality of the sessions and how engaged the participants were during each gathering. Every session included time either for prayerful meditation, personal reflection, and/or a group discussion, which was most valuable to internalizing the lessons, reflecting on the message at hand, and starting to craft the message for their own parish communities.

This project was a success for the clergy participants as well as the congregations that have witnessed the homilies so far; more importantly, it invites everyone to continue the conversation about racial justice. The development of this training locally opens the possibility of having a program such as this available for all clergy in our Diocese, which represents a huge value to everyone. It was an honor to be an observer in the program. As an immigrant in the USA, I lacked a vast understanding of the history and prevalence of the sin of racism in our communities. This research project was personally an eye-opener with a message of hope from the voice of our Church to accept the invitation to live in the loving Unity of Christ.

Appendix 15

Observer Valerie Bien-Aime's Notes on the Doctoral Thesis Project: Trauma-Informed Preaching and Racial Justice: A Training Program to Find Our Voice in the Age of Breathlessness

Deacon Patrick Toole's 6-week preaching program on trauma-informed racial justice was a meticulously planned and organized initiative, demonstrating a multifaceted and multilevel approach. This program was not only well-structured but also demonstrated a smooth flow, effectively breaking down the complex concept of trauma-informed racial justice preaching into four distinct categories: historical, theological, psychological, and homiletic. Each category was explored in depth, utilizing real-world examples to anchor the concepts firmly in reality. A notable feature of the program was the inclusion of focus groups, which played a crucial role in the sharing of thoughts and opinions among lay members and clergy.

The focus groups were thoughtfully divided into four sessions, catering to pre- and post-sessions for both white groups and People of Color. Deacon Toole's ability to create safe and brave spaces during these sessions allowed participants to freely share their genuine feedback. This feedback was then collected and summarized, providing valuable insights to all participants.

In the theological class sessions, led by Dr. Ashley Theuring, participants were introduced to the topic of trauma through the lens of the Catholic faith, with a special focus on the story of Holy Saturday. Initially, engagement levels varied, with some participants showing signs of disinterest. However, as the session progressed, there was a

notable shift in the participants' engagement, evidenced by changes in body language and increased attentiveness. The interactive nature of these sessions, which included discussions and personal experience sharing, contributed significantly to this shift.

The historical session, presented by Dr. Shannen Dee Williams, offered insightful perspectives on the history of Black Catholics, specifically Black Catholic Sisters. Although the session was predominantly lecture-based, Dr. Williams succeeded in maintaining the participants' attention, sparking further discussions post-session.

Similarly, Erin Neal's psychological session, which dived into the biological effects of trauma, was highly engaging and relevant to the clergy's ministry. Participants actively engaged with the content, applying the learned concepts to their work.

The program concluded with an impactful session led by Fr. Reginald Norman. This session stood out for its interactive discussions and the opportunity for participants to receive direct feedback on racial justice preaching. The level of excitement and engagement among the participants was evident, reflected in their vocal enthusiasm, expressive body language, and responsive attitudes.

Additionally, the program featured two homilies from each participant – one private and one public, post-feedback. The growth observed in the participants was remarkable, particularly considering that none had previously preached on racial justice. Their ability to adapt their preaching to suit their congregations and effectively engage on the topic of racial justice was a testament to the program's effectiveness.

In conclusion, Deacon Toole's program was well-executed, with the potential to be expanded to include the entire diocese. The invaluable information and the evident growth of the participants painted a vivid story of development and learning. Working

alongside Deacon Toole was an enriching experience, showcasing his dedication to trauma-informed preaching, racial justice, and the enhancement of clergy skills. His commitment was clearly visible throughout the project, and the framework he developed holds the potential to assist dioceses across the globe in addressing sensitive topics in a more effective and impactful manner.

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