Reflections and Resources:
The Catholic Worker and Anti-Racism Work

September 2015 Midwest CW Gathering

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Dismantling Racism in the Catholic Worker: Reflections from the 2015 Workshop
by Jenny Truax

For years, I figured that the radical values of the Catholic Worker movement exempted it from perpetuating oppression, whether it be racism, sexism, ableism or any other “-ism”. I didn’t have a language or framework for understanding the truth that because we reside in racist, sexist, and ableist society, we cannot help but reinforce these oppressions unless we do specific work to dismantle them in ourselves and in our communities. The 2015 Midwest Faith and Resistance Retreat - an Anti-Racism Workshop hosted by the St. Louis Catholic Worker (CW) - brought Catholic Workers from across the country together to do some dismantling.

The Workshop’s purpose was: 1) to provide a space for Catholic Workers (and fellow travellers in similar intentional communities) to better understand the ways in which we unwittingly replicate racist patterns, culture, and structures which we have internalized from the dominant, white-supremacist society, and 2) to provide tools towards building anti-racist communities. Crossroads Anti-Racism Organizing and Training, a 30 year-old group specializing in anti-racism transformation for organizations, provided a foundation and analysis for the workshop, and helped us with some of our blind spots. One of the more contentious concepts was our different understandings about whether the CW is an “institution” (and by implication, whether we can embody institutional racism). Our anarchism winces at the CW being labelled an institution; many folks are more comfortable with the word “movement.” Regardless of the word we use, the fact is that the CW has plenty of informal, often-unnamed structures, and a very specific culture - all of which can, indeed, unintentionally reinforce the injustice we seek to challenge.

The Crossroads trainers asked us: How would you describe the culture of your community, and in what ways does it reinforce the dominant culture? The group discussed the fact that the CW currently seems to almost exclusively attract middle-class white folks (a reality validated by the almost all-white demographic of those present), and considered some of the consequences of this phenomenon. Many white norms and patterns (including an emphasis on individual purity, entitlement to accessing the white power structure for property and donations, and an “either-or”rather than “both-and” mindset) are significant markers of the CW, and helpful to examine.

At its heart, anti-oppression work is about identity transformation - looking inward at ourselves and our groups to notice how society has shaped us, and to choose new, intentional ways of being. The work can be messy and painful. As Brenna Cussen Anglada noted, “For so many of us who have embraced the CW as our vocation, we did so by leaving behind the isolation and emptiness we experienced in the materialistic...culture of our largely white, middle class upbringing (sometimes at a great cost) in order to become a part of a community rooted in a deep and honorable tradition.” Critiquing the less ideal aspects of the CW - a new “family” for many of us - through an anti-racism lens felt threatening and uncomfortable at times. We noted, though, that growth typically occurs when we are less than comfortable. The Crossroads trainers suggested that we seek to become “critical lovers” of our movement - holding onto it’s gifts while we lovingly challenge the ways it reinforces oppression.

Following the analysis and framework provided by Crossroads, the Workshop turned specifically to look at the Catholic Worker through an anti-racism lens, with a panel conversation and RoundTable discussions. Racism is not emphasized the Aims and Means of the CW, which is the closest thing we have to an evolving mission statement. Looking specifically at these Aims and Means as an all-white group, we considered some very challenging questions: How do we as Catholic Workers promote the value of manual labor within the context of the US legacy of slavery? How do we talk about nonviolence within the US context of massive police violence against people of color, or the green revolution within the history of of white power’s theft of sustainably-used land from Native Americans? Broadly speaking, in what ways are the Aims and Means written by white people, for white people, and how do we begin a process of becoming a more anti-racist Catholic Worker movement?

Later, three women on the panel discussion recounted experiments in confronting racism in CW houses in Minneapolis, Chicago and St. Louis. We learned from Lincoln, a Milwaukee Catholic Worker, about Arthur Dent’s multi-racial Catholic Worker community in the 1930s, which challenged racial segregation through direct action and was, at times, ignored by Dorothy Day. Tom Cordaro, a friend of the CW and also a Crossroads Trainer, noted that one of our challenges is whether we can become inclusive of, and accountable to, communities of color: “More than just treating people of color as equals in our work, being in accountable relationships means that, because of the persistent legacy of white supremacy and privilege -- even in our social justice movements -- we create mechanisms that allow people of color to exercise a preferential option in our decision-making process."

The Roundtable (RT) discussions were incredibly rich - folks dug in to ask hard questions, share, and be vulnerable. Folks pondered how to prioritize anti-racism within the context of their other passions and life work. We
asked ourselves, “Is it possible to do this work (hospitality/farm life/organizing) and be anti-racist?” and also, “How can we do our work more fully, in an anti-racist way?” Rather than throwing out our CW values, we examined them through an anti-racism lens and explored ideas for manifesting them more fully. I’ll highlight just a few of the discussions.

In the Organizing and Activism RT, folks noted that at times, our activism can feel more like “tourism”: we learn about an issue, maybe visit the community it affects, and then become “experts”, doing actions, giving talks, etc. CW organizing seems at it’s best when we are committed to, connected to, and accountable to these communities. Folks also noted that “doing time” in jail can become a yardstick for how dedicated one is - a problematic idea, since people of color have exponentially more to risk when engaging the criminal justice system. Frank Bergh from the Chicago CW later reflected that, “Just as ‘necessity is the mother of invention,’ the CW tradition of nonviolent civil disobedience must recognize that oppression is the mother of creative direct action. ...The #BlackLivesMatter movement and the actions from Ferguson to Baltimore... are inspired because they arise from the oppressed themselves, mobilizing local communities. The CW has lost some of that authenticity both in the issues we select for our actions and in the lack of accountability to local people of color.” Folks in this RT also shared wisdom from participating in the Black Lives Matter movement as white people: Follow the lead of people of color. Don’t derail the focus on racism by saying it’s all about class. Be brave, challenge white racism (even when it’s uncomfortable), and engage with your people.

Folks discussed the challenges of doing CW-style Hospitality in an anti-racist way. We talked about the many layers of power dynamics: control of money, food and resources. We wondered how to involve volunteers to avoid the “tourism” phenomenon, and we explored the ways we might unwittingly reinforce racism in some of our rules, communal structures, and hospitality practices.

The Voluntary Poverty and Simple Living RT generated questions about identity and intention: for white folks, in what ways are our choices driven by a need to be morally pure, exempt from participation, or overly sacrificial in an attempt to remediate white guilt? We considered the common expectation that Catholic Workers will live in voluntary poverty within the US context of massive economic exploitation directed at communities of color. We also considered the ways is it a helpful and profound spiritual practice.

The Anarchism Roundtable touched on the intersection of race and anarchism, noting that white privilege might pave a smoother path for white folks to disengage from government programs and structures. Folks also discussed the ways that CW anarchism can frequently lead us to individual action rather than collaboration and alliance-building.

Great conversations also happened during the Pacifism and Nonviolence, Faith and Racism, Property and Donations, and Rural Issues discussions. Later in the Workshop, we spent time dreaming steps forward, and prayed over this issue in our communal Liturgy. We all will continue to ponder these questions as we move forward.

A few CWers shared their reflections in the weeks following the Workshop. Brenna Cussen Anglada said, “...I believe that it may be more possible for Catholic Workers to embrace an anti-racist lifestyle by going more deeply into our tradition, rather than by letting go of who we are and what we stand for.” Lincoln Rice said that “...As Catholic Workers, we need to learn and sit with this issue. We can’t just go hold a sign somewhere and get arrested and say we did all that we could do. I believe that we are in the infancy stage as a movement in adequately addressing racism.” White people (acting alone or in white-dominated movements) will not save the planet, end homelessness or stop war. Doing anti-racism work helps all people become more fully human, so that we can know ourselves better, understand how oppression operates in our communities, and build better connections and alliances with one another. As we continue this journey together as Catholic Workers, may we do the hard work of dismantling racism both publicly on the street, and also within ourselves and our communities.
An Anti-Racism Challenge to the Catholic Worker Movement
By Tom Cordaro
Midwest Catholic Worker Gathering, March 20-23, 2015, St. Louis MO

Yesterday during the Crossroads workshop you all spent a good deal of time reflecting on the anti-racism implications of doing hospitality within Catholic Worker (CW) Communities. It is clear that you have a good grasp of the challenges of offering hospitality that does not reinforce white power and privilege.

In my comments this morning about applying an anti-racism analysis of the CW I want to take you in a different direction. I am not going to talk about developing an anti-racist relationship with your guests. Instead I am going to address internal community dynamics and the relationship between CW Communities and the wider communities where they are located.

Crossroads anti-racism analysis speaks about three types of racism:

- **Personal Racism**: which is the expression of systemic racism through the actions of an individual.
- **Institutional Racism**: which occurs when the power of control and access in a society’s institutions are disproportionately and systematically determined by the dominant racial group, while other racial groups are systematically denied access to this power.
- **Cultural Racism**: which is the imposition of one racial group’s culture as dominant or normative while devaluing other cultural identities.

Everyone in this room has some degree of familiarity with Personal Racism and I am sure that within the CW Movement this form of racism is for the most part understood and rejected.

Institutional Racism may, on the face of it, seem unrelated to the CW Movement because of its embrace of Christian Anarchism and the general anti-institutional ethos of CW Communities. How could the CW movement be guilty of institutional racism if it has no institutional structures?

But isn't more true to say that CW communities tend to shun formal institutional structures? No matter how egalitarian the community ethos any new member of a CW community can, within a month, figure out the “unspoken rules of the community” and can get a good grasp of the community “power structure.”

### Institutional Racism & Informal Power Structures

The problem with informal institutional power structures is that because they are seldom if ever acknowledged they can become very difficult to change or challenge. And when it comes to engaging in an anti-racism analysis of a community that operates out of informal power structures; the task becomes extremely difficult if not impossible.

For those on the progressive/liberal wing of social movements, informal structures often appeal to our anti-authoritarian, anti-institutional sensibilities. But the problem with informal power structures is that they tend to form around unacknowledged and often poorly understood forms of social hierarchy.

For example, the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement’s general assemblies are an example of how informal power structures are meant to create opportunities to exercise direct democratic participation. Any individual can speak and put forward proposals and the whole group makes decisions.

In a homogeneous group of equally empowered individuals this would come close to the democratic ideal. But the 99% is not homogeneous nor are they equally empowered. This is especially true in regards to the power and privileges that come with race, class, gender, sexual orientation and age. In addition to the special entitlements and privileges created by these social constructs, those who are more articulate, who bring important skills to the work or have access to important resources will also be able to exert more influence, power and privilege in the group.

It is important to recognize the inherent class and racial privilege that has made OWS such a success. As Ivan Boothe wrote for the Fellowship of Reconciliation,

"Occupy encampments take an enormous amount of privilege; the privilege to take time off — from family, work or school — and participate in an overwhelming and sometimes confusing community. The privilege to,
in some cases, risk arrest simply by participating. But more than anything, the privilege to debate things like
‘an ideal community’ in the midst of life-or-death struggles going on the ground.”

An Occupy group may not have formally chosen leaders, but all of the social constructs that confer privileges
may be reflected in the decisions made at general assemblies. Those who participate in the OWS movement, no
matter how altruistic and enlighten, still carry within them all of the biases, stereotypes and social assumptions of the
dominant culture.

There is nothing necessarily sinister or conspiratory about the way these social dynamics play out in groups so
long as they are acknowledged and dealt with by appropriate counter-measures. But to act as if these biases and
assumptions can be checked at the door simply because the cause is just and motives are pure is naïve and
destructive to the struggle.

One of the challenges for the OWS and the CW movements is whether these inherently privileged social
movements can become inclusive of and accountable to communities of color. Accountable relationships are distinct
from many of the coalitions and collaborations between white progressive organizations and organizations of color.
More than just treating people of color as equals in our work, being in accountable relationships means that, because
of the persistent legacy of white supremacy and privilege --even in our social justice movements -- we create
mechanisms that allow people of color to exercise a preferential option in our decision-making process.

The questions posed to the CW movement regarding institutional racism center on how CW informal power
structures can allow for the creation of procedures and practices that can keep the unacknowledged assumptions
about white power and privileges in check.

Cultural Racism and Catholic Worker Culture

In terms of Cultural Racism the central question that needs to be raised within the CW movement is this: Is
Catholic Worker Culture actually White Catholic Worker Culture? This question may sound odd to many White CWs
because as the dominant racial group it is easy think that our way of organizing, our way of doing theology, and our
way of thinking about peacemaking, nonviolence, resistance and social justice are normative.

Trying to explain how white power and privilege works to White people is often like trying to explain water to
a fish. We swim in white power and privilege and no amount of downward mobility, volunteer poverty or solidarity
with the poor can ever erase or change that.

We don't choose this power and privilege and it does not require that we do so in order for it work for us. It
is conferred upon us by all of the social, economic, political & religious institutions we encounter throughout our lives.

While it may not be our personal choice; dealing with white power and privilege is still our responsibility and
this responsibility begins by developing personal and communal practices and habits that remind us of the
importance of acknowledging our social location. Because White CWers have made the powerful witness of changing
their physical location of privilege by choosing to live within poor communities; it can become easy to ignore or fail to
deal with other markers of social location like race, class, gender, sexual orientation and other social constructs.

In fact, part of white power and privilege is never having to think about being white. On the other hand POC
are keenly aware of their racial identity every minute of every day.

There is nothing wrong with operating out of a white perspective when doing our peace and justice work.
There have been many positive contributions made by white peace and justice activists in our country. The problem is
not having a white understanding; the problem is to fall into the trap of thinking that our white understanding is
normative and that the way we do things is “just the way things are done.” The problem is to assume that our white
way of thinking and doing is superior to other ways of thinking and doing. There are many tools and techniques to
help white groups deal with white power and privilege and I urge you to make use of them. In particular the St. Louis
Catholic Worker Community has provided many great resources on its webpage.

Anti-Racism Identity Transformation

At a fundamental level, anti-racism work is about identity transformation. While it is important to deal with
the many forms of racism within institutions and movements ultimately the aim of anti-racism is to transform groups
at the fundamental level of identity. For the CW movement this identity work begins with going back to the original
founding story of the CW in order to re-read it or re-vision it through an anti-racism lens.

I am no CW scholar, but even a casual reading of the story of Dorothy Day from an anti-racism perspective is
instructive. Here are a few things to consider:
Dorothy Day did not move into the immigrant tenement community of New York in order to open a Catholic Worker House. She moved there to become a part of the community and to share in the life of the people she came to know. In fact, her journey to Catholicism was an expression of her deep desire to share in the life of these immigrant people; many of whom were not considered white by the dominant culture.

It was only after being accepted as part of the community that her ministry of hospitality began to grow. Reading Dorothy’s account of this aspect of CW life one gets the sense that it came about quite organically. It grew from an informal desire to respond to the needs of her neighbors and it was a response that was based on what was already happening within these immigrant communities. Hospitality was not a foreign ethos imposed or brought in from the outside; it was a part of the life that Dorothy learned from the community where she lived.

For the CW movement of today what questions arise from this anti-racist reading of the CW story?

- In what ways are CW communities a part of the communities they are located in?
- How are CW communities accountable to the people in the communities where they live?
- Do CW communities have a first-hand knowledge of and are they in accountable relationships with the recognized leaders of the community where they live?
- What role do the locally recognized community leaders have in determining the mission and focus of CW communities? Who sets the agenda for CW communities?

I only pose questions to this group because I am smart enough to know that every CW community is unique and that it is impossible to make generalizations. Every community has a different answer to the questions I have posed. Every community has a different response to the challenges I have shared. Hopefully some these things I have shared with you will be fruitful for your community to pursue.
Arthur Falls (1901-2000) is best known as the person who suggested to Dorothy Day in November 1933 that she should change the *Catholic Worker* masthead to feature both a black and white worker instead of two white workers. The next issue of the paper incorporated his idea.

Falls, a black Catholic physician, founded the first Catholic Worker in Chicago in 1936. Unlike any other Catholic Worker at the time, it did not offer hospitality and had no intention of doing so. Falls founded a Catholic Worker school, which utilized the first tenet of Peter Maurin’s social vision, roundtable discussions. (The other two being houses of hospitality and farming communes.) Falls brought people together of different religious, racial, and socio-economic backgrounds to discuss solutions to the Great Depression and racism. Many who participated in the Chicago Catholic Worker stayed involved with racial justice projects later in life. For example, Edward Marciniak (d. 2004) served on Cardinal Samuel Stritch’s Catholic Interracial Council during the 1940s and served as the executive director for the City of Chicago’s Commission on Human (Race) Relations during the 1960s.

While happy that there was a Catholic Worker presence in Chicago, Dorothy Day was displeased that they lacked a house of hospitality. She also thought that their clarifications of thought were overly organized. The Chicago group had regular working committees on a variety of different topics, including race, liturgy, labor, cooperatives, Church, and schools. The groups met weekly and each group took turns giving public presentations on the fruit of their discussions as well as proposed actions. Non-Catholics were invited to participate and Catholics from the group also visited non-Catholic groups, including the local YMCA and Chicago Urban League to discuss solutions to social problems.

In May 1937, a couple of the young workers accompanied Dorothy to the bus depot as she was leaving Chicago. Before boarding the bus, she gave them the key to an apartment with the intent that they begin hospitality there. Though the apartment was unsuitable for hospitality, her actions did spur a contingent of Falls’s group to start a Catholic Worker house of hospitality in Chicago shortly afterward. In 1942, with the start of World War II, the house of hospitality closed and Falls’s only involvement with the Worker was supporting its credit union until it closed in 1948.

After playing a pivotal formational role in the early Catholic Worker movement, Falls integrated the all white Chicago suburb of Western Springs by moving there with his wife, Lillian, in 1953. He would live there until shortly after his wife died in 1988. But before he could break ground on his new home, a group of city residents persuaded the Park District to condemn Falls’s property to build a park. Falls prevailed against the Park District in county court and built his home. It was the first time that a black family successfully resisted a case of eminent domain that had the intention of protecting segregation. Falls did not succeed alone though; he had the support of groups like the Chicago Urban League. He and Lillian had also waited to move there until their only son had moved out their home. They did not want to subject him to danger.
In 1961, Falls and nine other black physicians sued almost every hospital corporation in Chicago (including almost every Catholic one) for excluding African Americans doctors from practicing in those institutions and harming their livelihood. By early 1964, all but two hospital corporations agreed to hire black doctors and allow them to admit black patients. The lawsuit was orchestrated by an interracial group of physicians who had already removed the color barrier in Chicago medical schools and passed local and state laws against race discrimination in hospitals.

Falls, who was raised Catholic, reframed the basic truths of the Christian faith in a way that unleashed their prophetic power. He referred to those Catholics who promoted segregation in Chicago as believers in the “mythical” body of Christ as opposed to the mystical body of Christ. The “mythical” body of Christ was a heretical doctrine that excluded African Americans and promoted the delusion that white people were the normative measure of the Catholic faith.

The life of Falls is an indictment of the Catholic Worker movement’s relative silence on racism. And even when Catholic Workers have spoken out on race, their words and actions have often lacked the passion and intellectual framework the movement is willing to dedicate against war and capitalism. Especially regarding resistance to the military, Catholic Worker communities have sacrificed time and resources that could have been utilized for the homeless. Rarely has racial justice been given the same urgency. This urgency against racism was one of the primary reasons that the Chicago Worker did not originally practice hospitality. Falls’s passion for racial justice led him to forgo hospitality and instead focus on education and organized actions to deconstruct America’s culture of racism. This is not to argue that Catholic Worker communities should quit hospitality, but only to urge them to dedicate themselves to racial justice to the same degree that they promote nonviolence. Additionally, since racism permeates American culture, one cannot adequately address poverty or war in the United States without incorporating an analysis of racism.

Falls utilized the Catholic Worker movement to form the intellectual and spiritual lives of many Chicago Catholics. He devoted his life to attacking racial injustice with direct actions that had clear goals. Sometimes he was successful and at other times he failed, but he was always hopeful. He was fond of saying, “if you are right, you don’t always lose.”

For more information on Falls, read Lincoln Rice’s Healing the Racial Divide: A Catholic Racial Justice Framework Inspired by Arthur Falls. Lincoln Rice earned his PhD in moral theology from Marquette University and is a member of the Milwaukee Catholic Worker.
Race and ‘a very white movement’

By SOLI SALGADO

When Lincoln Rice joined the Catholic Worker movement about 20 years ago in Milwaukee, his experience, in one sense, was basically the same as someone who joined 20 years before him: a white person joining a white movement, as he describes it.

Dedicated to social justice work, the Catholic Worker — co-founded by Dorothy Day in 1933 — is a collection of more than 200 communities throughout the U.S., all of which vary in their work to combat poverty, environmental degradation, and war, among other social ills.

But while the movement is highly critical of the country’s economic culture, it largely fails to act on the connection between poverty and racism, says Rice, who wrote Healing the Racial Divide: A Catholic Racial Justice Framework Inspired by Dr. Arthur Falls.

Catholic Worker already has the tools and theology that would allow it to address racial justice, he said, but “in its history, it lacks passion” for this cause.

“For reasons often having to do with the fact that [the Catholic Worker] is a very white movement, it very rarely applies the same notions of social responsibility and love for your neighbor to race the same way the Catholic Worker applies those notions to war and economics,” Rice said.

He added that this critique is not unique to the Catholic Worker, but is applicable to most Catholic organizations, theologians, religious and lay.

Economics and racial discrimination are intertwined, he said, noting that the unemployment rate at the height of the recession was 9 percent, but a striking 18 percent among African-Americans. Today the rate is 4.6 percent for the white population and 9.5 percent for the black population, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

While as a country we’ve made strides against blatant racism, Rice said, those unemployment numbers are proportional to the 1940s. Following World War II, black unemployment was double that of white unemployment.

Without addressing race, Catholic organizations cannot adequately address poverty, as it affects access to education, good housing and health care, and clean criminal records, Rice said.

“With race, we have to realize we’re novices,” Rice said. “The Catholic Worker needs to sit with this question a bit longer, because it’s not as simple as just going out to another protest.”

He pointed to Arthur Falls, a black man who founded the first Chicago Catholic Worker in 1936. Falls, who died in 2000, is an example of someone who effectively challenged the church’s stance on racial discrimination, Rice said.

Though best known for convincing D. to include a black worker in the organization’s masthead in 1933, Falls was also instrumental in integrating Western Springs, a white suburb of Chicago that forbade him and his wife to move there. When his father died, his home parish refused to allow his burial on its property until Falls threatened that his father would not have a Christian burial at all. Falls set up after-school remedial programs for black students who attended inadequate schools, offering stipends to those who had to sacrifice work to attend.

He also worked to integrate medical schools, such as Northwestern University. And to ensure they had somewhere to work, Falls, with nine fellow physicians, sued Chicago’s hospitals — including almost every Catholic one — in 1961 for excluding black patients and doctors. By 1964, the hospitals were integrated.

If you’re right, you don’t always lose, Falls would repeatedly tell people.

“He was very involved in trying to make the church stand up for itself and live up to its principles, and he saw that the Catholic Worker did that,” said Rosalie Riegel, who interviewed Falls at length in 1986 for her book Voices From the Catholic Worker.

He would hold discussions called “clarifications of thought” — still a central part of the movement’s philosophy, Riegel said — where he would invite both black and white, Catholic and non-Catholic people to talk about the role of the laity and justice in the church.

To illustrate how racism contradicts church teaching, Falls would contrast the concept of the “mythical” body of Christ to the “mythical.”

“Catholics who practiced racism or did nothing to prevent racism were believers in the heresy of the ‘mythical’ body of Christ, which they imagined was composed of only white Catholics,” Rice said. Falls “wanted to take it to another level. Like racism isn’t simply a sin, but it’s something that bordered on heresy, because it’s trying to exclude a whole group of people from a meaningful existence — not only in society, but in our church.”

Though the church no longer forces black people to go to the end of the line for confession and has integrated its institutions alongside society, Rice said the typically rigid Eurocentric format of most Catholic churches can be exclusionary in itself.

Falls was critical of Chicago having a so-called black church in the 1950s, because it became an excuse for Catholics not to reach out. He told Riegel that while racism was a white problem, the church regarded black Catholics as a missionary problem.

This attitude, Rice said, is not too different today.

“When there’s a black church for black Catholics, it easily becomes an excuse upon us for racism,” Rice said. “If you want to hear Gospel songs, go there. If you want to hear talks on..."
racial justice, that church is the expert on it. We don’t need to have anything here on that.”

“Blatant racism” may now be shunned, he added, but the Catholic Worker—like most organizations and Catholics in general—needs to acknowledge the “cultural blindness” it shares with the general public.

“In one sense, the movement often likes to see itself as countercultural, and to some extent, it is,” Rice said. “But the same things that are waking up the greater portion of the American public to the issues of race and racism are the same things that affect Catholic Workers.”

He said that viral videos of police brutality toward unarmed black men, for example, have recently garnered national attention to a reality that is nothing new for the black community.

The death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Mo., further convinced members of St. Louis’ Karen House Catholic Worker community where they stand in the #BlackLivesMatter movement. Both Riegel and Rice noted that the St. Louis community is a great example of an organization taking initiative in addressing racial issues.

Jenny Truax, a member of Karen House, said her community began explicit anti-racism work a few years ago. Noting that the Karen House community has been 98 percent white over its 38 years of existence, she said its first step was to take a critical look at internal practices and structures for “seeds of racism”: how its volunteering, fundraising or community members might be “unwittingly replicating white superiority through a white savior or charity model.”

The community analyzed the power dynamics that might affect that.

“It’s not something that has an ‘end point’ where we can say, ‘Yes, we are perfect allies, or anti-racists!’ ” Truax told NCR in an email. “It’s more of an attitude of openness, of admitting our own racism individually and collectively, and a willingness to make changes.”

Truax said community members were on the streets during the Ferguson uprising, tending to the teary-eyed and helping behind the scenes, organizing, marching and trying to mobilize the cause. They held local “Racism 101” educational workshops.

In March, Karen House also organized the “Midwest Faith Resistance Retreat: A Catholic Worker Anti-Racism Workshop,” an intensive two days devoted to addressing discrimination.

Rice, who attended the retreat, said it was helpful for self-examination, for finding weaknesses in their own communities and attitudes.

“No one likes to look at themselves and see they’re not pulling their own weight,” he said.

While Rice suggested paying particular attention to drug laws that disproportionately target African-Americans, Riegel said police militarization is another issue organizations could address. She also pointed to the community in Kalamazoo, Mich., that created afterschool programs in its poorer neighborhoods.

Truax recommended learning about oppression and getting organized as congregations, families or groups to take action to support the #BlackLivesMatter movement.

At the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ annual Spring General Assembly in St. Louis June 10, Archbishop Joseph Kurtz of Louisville, Ky., delivered a statement on race relations. He asked that the “rich cultural diversity of our local communities be woven together in charity, hospitality and service to one another.”

“A violent, sorrowful history of racial injustice, accompanied by a lack of educational, employment, and housing opportunities, has destroyed communities and broken down families, especially those who live in distressed urban communities,” Kurtz said.

He recommended that the Catholic community pray for peace, study the church’s social teaching, make an effort to encounter racially diverse people, create a welcoming environment within parishes, and respect local law enforcement.

Falls recommended persistent patience: “Hammering at [a] closed and bolted door is not a pleasant pastime, and yet the only way that the doors would be opened was constantly to hammer them. ... [There is] necessity for an unremitting attack on discrimination wherever it is found.”

If you’re right, you don’t always lose.
All too often when someone really annoys me, I realize that the very thing that irritates me about them is also a part of myself. This happened recently when I visited a rural, white eco-village; I cringed at the self-satisfied, triumphant way that they described their sustainable lifestyle without any mention of privilege. "Why does it bother me so much?" I questioned. The answer was obvious: It was all so white, and I had to admit, so familiar.

I too am a white radical, though of a slightly different school: the Catholic Worker. In the CW my lifestyle has been framed by the narrative of having the answer to society's problems, and of being a moral exemplar who is willing to make sacrifices in service to others. Though at one time I may have enjoyed seeing myself as such, looking deeply at racism and white superiority has fundamentally challenged this narrative. I no longer see myself as a moral exemplar, sacrificial helper, or friend of the poor; instead, I have begun to see myself and the CW through the lens of whiteness: the unique conditioning given to white people.

One of the marks of being raised white is an almost desperate search for identity to make up for the lack of inherent belonging within our families and communities and the lack of cultural heritage resulting from our ancestor's assimilation process from a variety of unique cultures into whiteness. Because of this loss, whites often use their relationships with people of color to create an identity for themselves. Since whites are also taught to see themselves as moral and superior, there is also a pull to take on the identity of saviors, or helpers who have all the answers. As a Catholic Worker, I have been positioned to further enforce this myth: I am the white savior for other whites to follow. You can have this identity too by supporting me and my community!

Though this critique is harsh, I remain committed to the Catholic Worker. I believe in our non-violent spirituality and our capacity to evolve by grappling with challenging questions. Nonetheless, looking at whiteness has challenged my identity and my self-righteousness. I, or the Catholic Worker, have all the answers. My question now is: How might an anti-racist identity frame the Catholic Worker differently? Here are a few of stabs at an answer:

Most fundamentally, a commitment to ending racism challenges whites and white-dominant communities to acknowledge white privilege. This is particularly important when talking about economics. Voluntary poverty, simple living, and the gift economy are generally made attractive and plausible because of white connections, familial financial security, and privileged access to education. Also, without acknowledging white privilege, white Catholic Workers, like me, can sound rather self-congratulatory when speaking of our chosen lifestyle: “Look at me and all the amazing things I am doing!” To maintain perspective, I sometimes ask myself, “How much have I really extended myself compared to the fast food or farm workers striving for a living wage?” That said, I am equally weary of the tendency of whites to over-extend themselves in acts of service, solidarity, or resistance because of white guilt, and then to expect others to admire us, or cater to us, because of our over-extensions. By neglecting self-care and acting as martyrs, whites both hurt themselves and fail to build a movement that is either healthy or attractive to people of color.

I also believe that an anti-racist lens challenges us to act in ways that are more committed and accountable to our local communities. This would include supporting and promoting the leadership for social change coming from people of color—even if these groups have different philosophical starting points. It would also compel us to be more connected to our neighbors and local communities and responsive to the inspirations and requests that flow out of established relationships—just the opposite of the cookie-cutter, “I'm going to start a CW community” approach. Lastly, I believe an anti-racist lens challenges us to shift our activism away from the paradigm of being the lone prophets acting in isolation, toward acting alongside others, often from our own communities, to address the issues that targeted populations deem important.

I write this just after the St. Louis CW hosted an anti-racism workshop attended by many CWers in the Midwest. Not surprisingly, the workshop brought into question many of our tightly held values and entrenched ways of organizing our communities, striking at the core of our CW identity.

This identity crisis was brought this into focus for me by an exercise led by Crossroads, who asked us to draw a picture of a tree representative of the Catholic Worker. The roots were to represent our guiding values, the trunk represented our structures, and the fruit was the outcome of our values/structures. Our trees were put on display. Looking at the variety of trees, I was both struck by the deep roots that hold the movement together: personalism, non-violence, care for the earth, faith, resistance, and saddened that ending racism was, with a few exceptions, not included. The question I am holding now is: What if it was? How might the value of ending racism reinforce, or be in tension, with our other values? And, how might the adoption of this value transform the future of the movement? While holding dear to the core CW values, I imagine a future CW, deeply rooted in the value of anti-racism, that is more connected, vibrant, and fruitful. ♦

-From the 2015 St. Louis CW RoundTable “Racism: Resources Toward Understanding”
Community Reflection #1: How Communities manifest Oppression, and What to Do About it
From “Coming to Ferguson: Building Beloved Community” by the Fellowship of Reconciliation

Examples and indicators for oppressive tendencies in organizations:

**Racism and white supremacy: race, culture, ethnicity**
- the assumption of white as the norm, universalizing white experience
- talk about needing to “pull” people of color in, or “reach out” to people of color to “diversify” the organization, rather than needing to change the organization’s culture, build skills and analysis so that people of color will want to/be willing to join (and stay in) the organization
- leadership or public face of the organization is disproportionately white
- organization is majority or predominantly white
- higher turnover of people of color
- lack of adequate translation for folks who don’t have English as a first language
- the assumption that “we don’t have racism here”
- deracializing: removing or not including race in discussions, not recognizing or addressing the impacts of race on the organization and the people in it
- challenging the creation or existence of people of color spaces, not understanding the need for them
- conversations dominated by white people, white voices held in higher esteem
- downplaying or ignoring organizational concerns raised by people of color

**Patriarchy and male supremacy: gender, sex, transphobia**
- policies and bylaws that use gender binary language (he/she) rather than gender neutral pronouns (they/them)
- office space or work space has gender segregated bathrooms
- leadership or public face of the organization is disproportionately male/masculine presenting
- masculine voices dominate at meetings
- masculine opinions are held in higher esteem
- cis men feel more entitled to propose changes to policies or practices in order to get their needs met
- organization is majority or predominantly gender privileged men
- higher turnover of women and trans people
- women and trans people do the majority of the unrecognized and undervalued work: taking notes, cleaning, answering the phones, taking care of coworkers, recognizing and appreciating people’s work
- masculine people restating words, statements, ideas of women, trans, and gender non-conforming people in meetings, or not listening to what women, trans, and gender non-conforming people are saying
- challenging the creation or existence of women and trans spaces, not understanding the need for themselves
- health benefits do not cover trans health care
- refusal to refer to people by their preferred/requested pronouns
- certain tasks considered “macho” or “manly” and treated with more respect

**Capitalism: class, income, wealth**
- childcare not provided for meetings
- food not provided at meetings (especially long meetings or ones that fall during meal hours)
• meetings held outside of work hours (in evenings or on weekends)
• low paying jobs, with the assumption that people will be able to coast off their partner’s jobs
• not providing health benefits, retirement plans
• expectation to work more than 40 hours/week, or long hours to “get the job done”
• people who have more money considered more trustworthy, valuable, legitimate, intelligent
• assuming that everyone has the same class background and needs the same money (equality)
• devaluing life experience, placing higher value on institutional education, or conflating institutional education with “intelligence”
• anti-oppression resource and training alliance
• universalizing middle class experience: assuming it as the norm

**Ableism: mental, physical, and emotional ability**
• only full time workers get health benefits
• undiversified work structure with no room or options for people with disabilities
• no options for part time work
• if you can’t work, you don’t get paid
• if you can’t work fast or “hard” enough, you aren’t hired, or should quit/leave
• not providing health benefits, retirement plans
• expectation to work more than 40 hours/week, or long hours to “get the job done”
• using the word “crazy” in ways that equate it with wrong, bad, or broken
• casual use of the word “retarded,” and “lame” as unpopular, bad, or negative
• work values that build burnout culture, with no support provided when people are unhealthily stressed or burned out (they often instead are shut out or devalued)
• not prioritizing wheelchair accessible spaces, scent free/ reduced spaces
• the strict and exclusive value of physical labor over other work

**Homophobia and heteronormativity**
• assumption of straight as the norm
• lack of recognition or visibility of queer people, assuming people are straight
• offhanded comments, jokes that equate gay with bad, weak, lesser, gross
• questions to queer people: “Why don’t you have a boyfriend?”
• statements to queer people about their gender expression: “You’d look so good in a dress.”
• low paying jobs, with the assumption that people will be able to coast off their partner’s jobs
• higher turnover of queer people
• health benefits don’t cover same sex partners, or only cover spouses
• harassing or socially ostracizing people with non-normative gender behaviors

**QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER**
• Who are the leaders of the organization? How did they get there?
• Who do people go to to get questions answered?
• Who are the ‘experts’?
• Who holds the power in the organization? Whose opinions and voices matter most?
• What are the assumptions of needs of folks in the space?
• What is the division of labor in the organization?
• What types of knowledge and skills are valued? Which are not valued?
• Are there types of work that are unpaid? What types are they?
• What language is used around sexuality? How is gender identity talked about and addressed?
• Are there people who speak english as a second language in the organization? If so, what structures, if any, exist for language development, interpretation and translation, to ensure their full and knowledgeable participation?
Community Reflection #2: Manifesting White Supremacy Culture

Questions for personal reflection
1. Which of these characteristics do I especially manifest or struggle? How specifically does this characteristic influence my interactions, decisions, relationships, etc?
2. In what ways have I grown in dealing with these characteristics? What strides or victories have I made?
3. What are my hopes or goals for the future in dealing with these characteristics in myself?

Questions for reflection on community
1. In your experience, which of these characteristics most affect or influence your community? How specifically does this show up?
2. In what ways has your community grown in addressing these characteristics as a group? What progress have you made?
3. What are your hopes or goals do you have for the community in addressing these characteristics in the future?

White Supremacy Culture by Tema Okun, changeworkDR

This is a list of characteristics of white supremacy culture that show up in our organizations. Culture is powerful precisely because it is so present and at the same time so very difficult to name or identify. The characteristics listed below are damaging because they are used as norms and standards without being pro-actively named or chosen by the group. They are damaging because they promote white supremacy thinking. Because we all live in a white supremacy culture, these characteristics show up in the attitudes and behaviors of all of us -- people of color and white people. Therefore, these attitudes and behaviors can show up in any group or organization, whether it is white-led or predominantly white or people of color-led or predominantly people of color.

1 - perfectionism*

- little appreciation expressed among people for the work that others are doing; appreciation that is expressed usually directed to those who get most of the credit anyway
- more common is to point out either how the person or work is inadequate
- or even more common, to talk to others about the inadequacies of a person or their work without ever talking directly to them
- mistakes are seen as personal, i.e. they reflect badly on the person making them as opposed to being seen for what they are -- mistakes
- making a mistake is confused with being a mistake, doing wrong with being wrong
- little time, energy, or money put into reflection or identifying lessons learned that can improve practice, in other words little or no learning from mistakes
- tendency to identify what's wrong; little ability to identify, name, and appreciate what's right
- often internally felt, in other words the perfectionist fails to appreciate her own good work, more often pointing out his faults or 'failures,' focusing on inadequacies and mistakes rather than learning from them; the person works with a harsh and constant inner critic

antidotes: develop a culture of appreciation, where the organization takes time to make sure that people's work and efforts are appreciated; develop a learning organization, where it is expected that everyone will make mistakes and those mistakes offer opportunities for learning; create an environment where people can recognize that mistakes sometimes lead to positive results; separate the person from the mistake; when offering feedback, always speak to the things that went well before offering criticism; ask people to offer specific suggestions for how to do things differently when offering criticism; realize that being your own worst critic does not actually improve the work, often contributes to low morale among the group, and does not help you or the group to realize the benefit of learning from mistakes

2 - sense of urgency

- continued sense of urgency that makes it difficult to take time to be inclusive, encourage demppressive culture

antidotes: understand that structure cannot in and of itself facilitate or prevent abuse; understand the link between defensiveness and fear (of losing power, losing face, losing comfort, losing privilege); work on your own defensiveness; name defensiveness as a problem when it is one; give people credit for being able to handle more than you think; discuss the ways in which defensiveness or resistance to new ideas gets in the way of the mission
3 - quantity over quality*

1. all resources of organization are directed toward producing measurable goals
2. things that can be measured are more highly valued than things that cannot, for example numbers of people attending a meeting, newsletter circulation, money spent are valued more than quality of relationships, democratic decision-making, ability to constructively deal with conflict
3. little or no value attached to process; if it can't be measured, it has no value
4. discomfort with emotion and feelings
5. no understanding that when there is a conflict between content (the agenda of the meeting) and process (people's need to be heard or engaged), process will prevail (for example, you may get through the agenda, but if you haven't paid attention to people's need to be heard, the decisions made at the meeting are undermined and/or disregarded)

antidotes: include process or quality goals in your planning; make sure your organization has a values statement which expresses the ways in which you want to do your work; make sure this is a living document and that people are using it in their day to day work; look for ways to measure process goals (for example if you have a goal of inclusivity, think about ways you can measure whether or not you have achieved that goal); learn to recognize those times when you need to get off the agenda in order to address people's underlying concerns

4 - worship of the written word

- if it's not in a memo, it doesn't exist
- the organization does not take into account or value other ways in which information gets shared
- those with strong documentation and writing skills are more highly valued, even in organizations where ability to relate to others is key to the mission

antidotes: take the time to analyze how people inside and outside the organization get and share information; figure out which things need to be written down and come up with alternative ways to document what is happening; work to recognize the contributions and skills that every person brings to the organization (for example, the ability to build relationships with those who are important to the organization's mission); make sure anything written can be clearly understood (avoid academic language, 'buzz' words, etc.)

5 - only one right way

1. the belief there is one right way to do things and once people are introduced to the right way, they will see the light and adopt it
2. when they do not adapt or change, then something is wrong with them (the other, those not changing), not with us (those who 'know' the right way)
3. similar to the missionary who does not see value in the culture of other communities, sees only value in their beliefs about what is good.

antidotes: accept that there are many ways to get to the same goal; once the group has made a decision about which way will be taken, honor that decision and see what you and the organization will learn from taking that way, even and especially if it is not the way you would have chosen; work on developing the ability to notice when people do things differently and how those different ways might improve your approach; look for the tendency for a group or a person to keep pushing the same point over and over out of a belief that there is only one right way and then name it; when working with communities from a different culture than yours or your organization's, be clear that you have some learning to do about the communities' ways of doing; never assume that you or your organization know what's best for the community in isolation from meaningful relationships with that community

6 - paternalism

- decision-making is clear to those with power and unclear to those without it
- those with power think they are capable of making decisions for and in the interests of those without power
those with power often don't think it is important or necessary to understand the viewpoint or experience of those for whom they are making decisions
those without power understand they do not have it and understand who does
those without power do not really know how decisions get made and who makes what decisions, and yet they are completely familiar with the impact of those decisions on them

antidotes: make sure that everyone knows and understands who makes what decisions in the organization; make sure everyone knows and understands their level of responsibility and authority in the organization; include people who are affected by decisions in the decision-making

7- either/or thinking*
• things are either people who show emotion
• requiring people to think in a linear (logical) fashion and ignoring or invalidating those who think in other ways
• impatience with any thinking that does not appear 'logical'

antidotes: realize that everybody has a world view and that everybody's world view affects the way they understand things; realize this means you too; push yourself to sit with discomfort when people are expressing themselves in ways which are not familiar to you; assume that everybody has a valid point and your job is to understand what that point is

8- right to comfort
• the belief that those with power have a right to emotional and psychological comfort (another aspect of valuing 'logic' over emotion)
• scapegoating those who cause discomfort
• equating individual acts of unfairness against white people with systemic racism which daily targets people of color

antidotes: understand that discomfort is at the root of all growth and learning; welcome it as much as you can; deepen your political analysis of racism and oppression so you have a strong understanding of how your personal experience and feelings fit into a larger picture; don't take everything personally

One of the purposes of listing characteristics of white supremacy culture is to point out how organizations which unconsciously use these characteristics as their norms and standards make it difficult, if not impossible, to open the door to other cultural norms and standards. As a result, many of our organizations, while saying we want to be multi-cultural, really only allow other people and cultures to come in if they adapt or conform to already existing cultural norms. Being able to identify and name the cultural norms and standards you want is a first step to making room for a truly multi-cultural organization.

Article available for download at dismantlingracism.org under Resources, Articles

* These sections are based on the work of Daniel Buford with the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond, who has done extensive research on white supremacy culture. I dedicate this piece to my long-time colleague Kenneth Jones, who helped me become wise about many things and kept me honest about everything else. I love you and miss you beyond words.

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Partial Bibliography:
• changeworkDR is a group of trainers, educators and organizers working to build strong progressive anti-racist organizations and institutions. changeworkDR can be reached at temaokun@earthlink.net.