



WHY THE CHURCH OF ST. FRANCIS XAVIER'S "RACIAL JUSTICE PLEDGE" IS INTEGRAL TO OUR COMMUNAL AND SACRAMENTAL LIFE

The Church of St. Francis Xavier has participated in the modern Civil Rights Movement since 1960. Not long after the first sit-ins began that year, the Reverend Anthony S. Woods, SJ, presided at a "civil rights Mass." In 1962, Xavier premiered *Black Christ of the Andes*, a Mass by African American jazz pianist, composer, and arranger Mary Lou Williams and dedicated to St. Martin de Porres, whose statue stands at the rear of the church.

In 2018, Xavier embarked on a community-wide examination of institutional and systemic racial inequity, including manifestations of it within the Roman Catholic Church. This effort is consistent with Xavier's historical commitment to put Catholic social teaching into practice by feeding the hungry, visiting the imprisoned, clothing the poor, and offering a spiritual home to the rejected.

As a parish community, predominantly descended from white European immigrants, it is challenging and uncomfortable to recognize that being white confers privileges that Black, Latin, Asian, Indigenous, Pacific Islander, and other nonwhite people do not enjoy. "White privilege" is an advantage that is taken for granted and accrues to white persons merely due to skin color. It is a presumption of "belongingness" in a particular context—government, education, economics, health care, housing—that is withheld from people of color.

After the death of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, Xavier parishioners organized a prayer service for racial justice and peace. We professed a longer "Racial Justice Pledge" then. Community members and the pastoral council agreed that a shorter version could be stated at the end of each Mass. The pledge was edited by a smaller group of parishioners, and this is the one we say today.

Xavier's "Racial Justice Pledge" invites us to personally and communally reflect on racial inequity. It is an opportunity for us to dedicate ourselves to the biblical cause of justice, which is consistent with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' recognition of "systemic racism." Its pastoral letter "Open Wide Our Hearts" states: "... all of us are in need of personal, ongoing conversion.... To do justice requires an honest acknowledgment of our failures and the restoring of right relationships between us." The pledge is offered in the spirit of advancing our conversion, righting inequity, and embracing those whom we have wronged.

Racism affects all social justice ministries to which Jesus calls us to attend; the same ministries that Xavier acts on: hunger, poverty, homelessness, the environment, homophobia, misogyny, to name a few. Some people feel that the pledge is monotonous or unnecessary, and may choose not to participate. To those who do, we invite you to reflect on the reasons why. We also ask you to look at the pledge as a prayer to renew our dedication to eradicating the sin of racism, as a reminder that there is more work to be done, and as a promise that together we can do better.

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