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WE COMMIT OURSELVES:

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



Special Interest Articles:

- Sr. Marge White: This April Issue
- In Memory of Dorothy Stang, SSND
- In Honor of Mary Oliver



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

In This Issue

by Sister Marjorie White

As we celebrate Easter and the birth of new life let us remember those whose lives have been altered due to violence, discrimination, and a lack of secure shelter.

In this newsletter I have presented issues that resonate with our own Franciscan call to be with the marginalized, the downtrodden.

I found the values stated by the Women's History month very encouraging. I included an article on blackface since it speaks to unrecognized racism.

Hopefully, together, we can continue to educate and challenge ourselves to be more authentic in our Franciscan call to be women and men of the gospel. ■

Earth Day: April 22, 2019

“In nature, nothing exists alone.” – Rachel Carson, 1962

Nature's gifts to our planet are the millions of species that we know and love, and many more that remain to be discovered,

Unfortunately, human beings have irrevocably upset the balance of nature and, as a result, the world is facing the greatest rate of extinction since we lost the dinosaurs more than 60 million years ago.

But unlike the fate of the dinosaurs, the rapid extinction of species in our world today is the result of human activity.

The unprecedented global destruction and rapid reduction of plant and wildlife populations are directly linked to causes driven by human activity: climate change, deforestation, habitat loss, trafficking and poaching,

unsustainable agriculture, pollution and pesticides to name a few. The impacts are far reaching.

If we do not act now, extinction may be humanity's “most enduring legacy.” [Here](#) are some quick facts on the current wave of extinction and additional information about this problem [here](#).

All living things have an intrinsic value, and each plays a unique role in the complex web of life.

The good news is that the rate of extinctions can still be slowed, and many of our declining, threatened and endangered species can still recover if we work together now to build a united global movement of consumers, voters, educators, faith leaders, and scientists to

demand immediate action.

Earth Day Network is asking people to join their Protect our Species campaign. Their goals are to:

- Educate and raise awareness about the accelerating rate of extinction of millions of species and the causes and consequences of this phenomenon.
- Achieve major policy victories that protect broad groups of species as well as individual species and their habitats.
- Build and activate a global movement that embraces nature and its values.
- Encourage individual actions such as adopting plant based diet and stopping pesticide and herbicide use. ■

The National Women's History Theme for 2019

Visionary Women: Champions of Peace & Nonviolence



*National Women's
History Alliance*

The theme for 2019 is "Visionary Women: Champions of Peace & Non-violence."

This year we honor women who have led efforts to end war, violence, and injustice and pioneered the use of nonviolence to change society.

These Honorees embraced the fact that the means determine the ends and so developed nonviolent methods to ensure just and peaceful results.

For generations, women have resolved conflicts in their homes, schools, and communities. They have rejected violence as counterproductive and stressed the need to restore respect, establish justice, and reduce the causes of conflict as the surest way to peace.

From legal defense and public education to direct action and civil disobedience, women have expanded the American

tradition of using inclusive, democratic and active means to reduce violence, achieve peace, and promote the common good.

From women's rights and racial justice to disarmament and gun control, the drive for nonviolent change has been championed by visionary women.

These women consciously built supportive, nonviolent alternatives and loving communities as well as advocating change. They have given voice to the unrepresented and hope to victims of violence and those who dream of a peaceful world.

The women honored on March 30, 2019 are:

- **Kathy Kelly**, Coordinator of Voices for Creative Nonviolence;
- **Zainab Salbi**, Founder and former CEO of Women for Women International;
- **Graciela Sanchez**, Co-

founder and Director of the Esperanza Peace & Justice Center;

- **Deborah Tucker**, President of the Board of Directors of the National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence;
- **Dr. E. Faye Williams**, President/CEO of the National Congress of Black Women;
- **Sister Alice Zachmann, SSND**, Founder and former Director of the Guatemala Human Rights Commission USA;
- **Elise Boulding** (deceased), Creator of Peace and Conflict Studies;
- **Sarah Brady** (deceased), Gun control Advocate;
- **Dorothy Cotton** (deceased), Civil Rights Activist;
- **Peace Pilgrim** (deceased), Spiritual Leader and Peace Activist;
- **Mary Burnett Talbert** (deceased), Anti-lynching activist, Orator, and Suffragist.

To read more about these women, click on this link: [2019 Honorees](#) ■



Jesuit Fr. Joseph Brown, Ph.D.

Catholic Connection to Blackface

By Jesse Remedios

**This article appeared in the National Catholic Reporter, February 26, 2019*

Jesuit Fr. Joseph Brown was in high school when he and his father attended a show sponsored by a local chapter of the Knights of Columbus in 1960. The show he said was advertised as a fundraiser and a "great time" for the entire community. Sitting in the

audience, Brown and his father were surprised and put in an uncomfortable position, when performers in blackface appeared on stage. They were at a minstrel show.

"At that time, as the only two black people in

the building, my father was not going to say something," Brown said. "We were not going to talk about it."

Recent revelations in Virginia involving the governor and attorney general, both of whom have admitted

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to using blackface in the 1980s, have brought national attention to the long history of blackface minstrelsy in this country.

Little noticed in that history is the Catholic Church's connection to the offensive practice—a connection that goes back to the very beginnings of blackface minstrelsy.

According to the National Museum of African American History and Culture, blackface was first popularized in 1830 when white entertainer Thomas Dartmouth Rice rose to fame by painting his face black and performing as the character "Jim Crow," a disabled African-American slave.

Historian Rhae Lynn Barnes wrote on her website, [U.S. History Scene](#), that the minstrel show format was born a decade later when a theater troupe called the Virginia Minstrels performed in New York City in 1842 — "a full night of blackface entertainment featuring black political mimicry, exaggerated African inspired plantation dances, and dialect songs."

As minstrel shows rose to prominence as one of

the most popular forms of American entertainment, the U.S. simultaneously experienced a wave of Irish-Catholic immigration. According to the Library of Congress, the Irish, fleeing the Potato Famine of 1845, made up nearly half of all immigrants to the United States in the 1840s.

Initially, according to Ball State University English professor Robert Nowatzki, the Irish were considered racial "others," in part due to their Catholic religion, and were similarly ridiculed by minstrel show characterizations. However, Irish-Americans quickly began donning blackface and participating in minstrelsy themselves in order to become more "white" and "American" by denigrating African-Americans.

"Blackface was at one and the same time a displaced mapping of ethnic Otherness and an early agent of acculturation," cultural historian Eric Lott wrote in his book *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*.

In his paper, "Paddy Jumps Jim Crow," Nowatzki argued Irish-Catholic parti-

cipation in blackface minstrelsy "helped to shape the meanings of blackness, whiteness, ethnicity, and American nationalism—all issues that dominated the minstrel stage during the mid-19th century."

By the turn of the 20th century, minstrelsy was no longer the preeminent form of popular entertainment in the U.S. However, communities, schools and Catholic churches across the country continued to stage blackface minstrel shows for decades, perpetuating negative and offensive stereotypes of African-Americans among multiple generations.

Brown, who is now a professor of Africana Studies at Southern Illinois University, believes the prominence of minstrel shows in parishes was tied to the segregation of the church in the first half of the 20th century. Because of that separation, there weren't many who questioned the ethics of blackface minstrelsy in white communities.

"[The Rev. Martin Luther] King and [James] Baldwin said it: the most segregated times in America were Sunday mornings," Brown said. "There was nobody there to challenge it." ■



This reproduction of a 1900 [William H. West minstrel show](#) poster, originally published by the Strobridge [Litho Co.](#), shows the transformation from "white" to "black".

— *Graphic and text from Wikipedia, the free Encyclopedia*

"We embrace our immigrant roots and identify with the struggle of all people to find a home in this world."

SSJ-TOSF Congregational Commitments
26th General Chapter

Resources on Understanding Immigration

The U.S. Immigration system is complex and difficult to understand. These resources provide key data points, historical information, and background on hot topics in immigration:

- [How the United States Immigration System Works](#)
- [Asylum in the United States](#)
- [An Overview of U.S. Refugee Law and Policy](#)

State by State Impact

[Find demographic data on your state's immigrant population](#)—including the most recent estimates of population, education, and labor force. ■



From the Global Catholic Climate Movement LAUDATO SI' REFLECTION

This Laudato Si' Reflection is dedicated to the life and memory of **Sr. Dorothy Stang, SNDdeN, "Martyr of the Amazon."**

Sr. Dorothy spent over 30 years working as a missionary among the rural farmers and peasants in Amazon Brazil.

She struggled tirelessly for land reform and human rights, amidst death threats from wealthy ranchers.

On February 12, 2005 while walking on the road she was approached by two gunmen. She pulled out her Bible and began reading from the

Beatitudes, ending with the phrase "Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called children of God."

After some moments of hesitation, the gunmen fired six shots, killing Sr. Dorothy. ■

Hearing Creation's Song

Sr. Dorothy had a great love for creation.

She once wrote *"I'm trying daily to fill my lungs with the beauty of our cosmos – her energy – so all that is to be woman can be felt in me."*

Take a moment now to take a few deep breaths.

Imagine that you are breathing in the beauty of the cosmos.

What images come to mind?

Can you imagine that this is God breathing life in you to be your fullest person?

Give thanks for the gift of creation, of air, and the cosmos. ■

Hearing Creation's Cry

"We must make great efforts to save our planet.

Earth is not able to provide anymore. Her water and air are poisoned and her soil is dying of exaggerated use of chemicals."

–Sr. Dorothy Stang

Sr. Dorothy was killed because of her commitment to the poor and the earth. The lives of those fighting for environmental justice continue to be at risk.

Brazil is the [deadliest](#) place for environmental activists, with at least 57 killed in 2017. In the last few months alone, an [indigenous leader](#) and [two leaders of the landless movement](#) were murdered in Brazil for their justice work.



**This month we pray for the safety
of all environmental activists around the world.**

*All quotes as well as the photo of Sr. Dorothy Stang SNDdeN
courtesy of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur*

In Honor of Mary Oliver

I considered Mary Oliver to be one of nature's mystics who kept us aware that we are not the only ones to grace this lovely planet. It is for this reason that I share the following poem in her honor. Mary Oliver died on January 17, 2019.

Marge White

When Death Comes

When Death comes
like a hungry bear in autumn
when death comes as takes all the bright coins from his purse
to buy me, and snaps his purse shut;
when death comes
like the measles-pox;
when death comes
like an iceberg between the shoulder blades,
I want to step through the door full of curiosity, wondering;
what is it going to be like, that cottage of darkness?
And therefore I look upon everything
as a brotherhood and sisterhood,
and I look upon time as no more than an idea,
and I consider eternity as another possibility,
and I think of each life as a flower, as common
as a field daisy, and as singular,
and each name a comfortable music in the mouth
tending as all music does, toward silence,
and each body a lion of courage, and something
precious to the earth.
When it's over, I want to say: all my life
I was a bride married to amazement.
I was a bridegroom, taking the world into my arms.
When it's over, I don't want to wonder
if I have made of my life something particular, and real.
I don't want to find myself sighing and frightened
or full of argument.
I don't want to end up simply having visited this world.

Mary Oliver

(New and Selected Poems, Volume I)



Mary Jane Oliver was an American poet who won the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize.

In 2007 The New York Times described her as "far and away, this country's best-selling poet."

– Wikipedia

Tell me, what is it you plan
to do with your one wild
and precious life?

Mary Oliver

Reducing Our Carbon Footprint: Around the Congregation

Here is what some of our sisters and associates said they were doing **in 2016**:

- I am trying to define my neighborhood; then I shop there rather than traveling further.
- I am trying to combine my trips more, when possible.
- I'm trying to drive a little slower when traveling, helping conserve gas.
- I take public transportation as much as I can.
- I recycle daily, as needed.
- I do not use my air conditioner unless it is oppressively hot.
- I am washing clothes in cold water instead of hot or warm.

What are YOU doing today to reduce your carbon footprint?





Facts Worth Pondering

"We respect the earth and recognize that all life is interconnected in a continuing cosmic evolution."

SSJ-TOSF Congregational Commitments
26th General Chapter



April 22:
Earth Day

www.earthday.org

200 million gallons of gasoline are used each year in the U.S. to cut lawns.

3 trillion gallons of water are used in the U.S. each year to water lawns.

*National Resources Defense Council, Environment and Human Health Inc. and the Environmental Protection Agency

The US is the only major Western economic power without universal health care system in which health care is considered a human right.

*Commonwealth Fund

44% of the workforce in the U.S. earns under **\$15** an hour, and **32%** earns under **\$12** an hour.

*Oxfam

Muslims make up the **2nd** largest religious population in the world and are discriminated against in **121** countries worldwide.

*Pew Research Centers Religion Public Life

For the **4th** straight year, the number of hate groups has grown across America to a record high of **1,020**.

In 2018, the number of white nationalist groups surged by almost **50%** from **100** groups to **148**.

This trend follows **3** straight years of decline during the previous administration.

*The Southern Poverty Law Center

The "carbon footprint" of a **1/2** pound hamburger is equivalent to:

- **200** hours of a **60** watt light bulb;
- **24** hours of air conditioning;
- Driving **42** miles in a Prius.

Chickens need about **20%** of the land and produce **10%** of the greenhouse gas emissions as cows.

*National Geographic

Noncitizens contribute to the American safety net disproportionately to what they receive. Between 2000 and 2011, undocumented immigrants contributed between **\$2.2 billion** and **\$3.8 billion** more than they withdrew from Medicare Trust Fund each year. This created a total surplus of **\$35.1 billion** over the **11**-year span, staving off Medicare insolvency.

*Journal of General Internal Medicine

REMEMBER...

We welcome your submissions in the form of

- "Sightings"
- Brief write-ups of your activities, "prototypes," suggestions for workshops, books, articles, films, resources.

Please send these to **Sister Donna Wilhelm** by **May 24th** for inclusion in the June issue of our newsletter, *We Commit Ourselves*.

~Your Social Justice Committee