

WE COMMIT OURSELVES:

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



Special Interest Articles:

- Greta Thunberg's Superpower
- Quote from Pope Francis



Individual Highlights:

- | | |
|---|---|
| Teatime for Peace... | 1 |
| "Race"? "Black," "White"? I Think Not | 2 |
| Our Relationship with Climate | 3 |
| The Latest Immigration and Asylum Processes | 5 |

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

Who is My Neighbor?

by Sister Dorothy Pagosa

²⁵ On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

²⁶ "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"

²⁷ He answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

²⁸ "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

²⁹ But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus "And who is my neighbor?"

Luke 10: 25-29

The Gospel continues on with the story of the Good Samaritan. The person who is rejected by most of the dominant class in society comes to the aid of the injured victim.

In this issue of "We Commit Ourselves" we look at who we consider neighbors. We have a review of Ta-Nehisi Coates' book about race and his questioning if

the concept is truly valid. Sr. Donna Wilhelm reviews the book for us.

"Tea time for Peace" was an event that took place at Marymount Congregational Home on September 17. Srs. Jane Blabolil and Joyce Soukup participated (as well as other sisters) and share what happened through word and pictures. How do we break down the barriers of different faiths and recognize we are neighbors?

I share the latest procedures around immigration and asylum. Some of the policies just enacted endanger the lives of our neighbors from the south. Asylum seekers are fleeing violence, yet are being sent back into violent situations.

Greta Thunberg, 16 year old climate activist, tells the United Nations General Assembly that we cannot ignore our relationship with climate which is our ultimate neighbor and life force.

Read these articles and reflect on "who is my neighbor?" or "who do I not consider my neighbor?" ■

Teatime for Peace... at MCH

by Sister Jane Blabolil

"Do the voices of love, compassion, and unity call you? Do you want to be a catalyst for Peace?"

These words of invitation and call to reflection appear on a brochure prepared by a group

called "Teatime for Peace" co-founded by April Stolz, a member of a Unitarian-Universalist church in the Cleveland area.

It began in 2016 when a women-led grassroots peace organization invited folks to host a "Pop Up for

Peace" event bringing together the Muslim community with the broader community.

April often remarks that 70% of Americans have never interacted with a member of the Muslim community. Since then over

Continued on p. 2

Teatime for Peace... continued from p. 1

30 Teatimes, organized by various denominations and groups, have helped people of different belief systems and ethnic and racial backgrounds come together to share in face-to-face conversations. Over a cup of tea (or coffee) each person has the opportunity to listen, ask questions, and open the door to mutual understanding.

Deeply aware of the atmosphere of fear and misunderstanding so rampant in our country today, several of our sisters in the Cleveland area (Donna Wilhelm, Jane Blabolil, and Joyce Soukup) decided to organize and invite our neighbors to our Community Home, Marymount, on the night of September 17th for our First Teatime for Peace.

There was a very good turnout of people from area churches, schools, and the neighborhood. April Stoltz, one of the co-founders present that evening, commented: *"I was so heartened by the wonderful turnout and yes, from your neighbors!"* Several people who shared comments began by saying: "I'm your neighbor – I live about 2 blocks from here" and then shared a thought or question.

As Franciscans who follow in the footsteps of St. Francis many of us felt a

strong desire to sit at table with the neighbors who we perhaps do not really know and share our questions, concerns, and honest feelings. Somehow sharing at table as Jesus did opens our hearts and minds to our brothers and sisters who live, work, pray, and hope for a world of better understanding.

Since Muslims make up only about 1% of our population the stereotypes and misunderstandings are rampant. This evening was only a beginning for what many hope will be further face-to-face encounters, deepening our relationships with our neighbors.

Humera Kahn, another of the co-organizers of the evening, shared her thoughts: *"There is so much we can learn from each other and inshallah, God willing, we will be in touch."*

Sister Joyce shared the following: *"As people were leaving some commented they hoped they would get announcements on other types of these opportunities to gather in conversation. So many said they were just glad they came. Some had to leave early... but each expressed gratitude for the opportunity to gather."* ■

Photos for the above article were provided by Sister Joyce Soukup.
The Invitation for the event was prepared by Sister Catherine Britton, with input from Sister Joyce.

"Race"? "Black," "White"? I Think Not

Book Review by Donna Wilhelm, ssj-tosf



James Baldwin once wrote that 'white people' "have brought humanity to the edge of oblivion: because they think they are white." Ta-Nehisi Coates' book *Between the World and Me* uses Baldwin's category, "those who think they are white" as well as personal anecdotes and historical accounts to paint a picture of the divide between "Blacks" and "Whites."

It is written as a letter to his 15-year-old son. The content is at one time shocking and, I believe, true. This isn't a book about racism or white privilege. It is one man's attempt to deconstruct the

whole notion of "race" as a real category of human beings.

There is no such thing as race, he contends. Americans have created it so that those "who think we are white" don't have to take responsibility for the fact that the economic engine of the growth and development of our country and of the "American Dream" was built on the stolen labor of a stolen people.

White oppression, murder, and slavery of stolen Africans and their ancestors

Continued on p. 3

"Race"? "Black," "White"? I Think Not... continued from p. 2

didn't go away after the Civil War. As a matter of fact, it continued in our systems and in outright slavery, particularly in the Deep South, to our day. And if scholars are to be believed this oppression and denial of civil rights for those of African ancestry remains a reality in our America, the land of Dreamers, today.

Did you have the opportunity to see the Smithsonian Museum's traveling exhibit on Race? It was here in Cleveland in 2011-2012.

One of the things the exhibit highlighted was the lengths researchers and anthropologists went to prove that races even

exist. The answer: they were unsuccessful. Other than a variance in the amount of melanin in our skin there is no scientific basis for the category of race. The dreamers (those who think they are white), Coates says, have and continue to build their myth of "whiteness" on the backs of Americans of African descent through unjust systems. Funny, it's all around us and we don't see it.

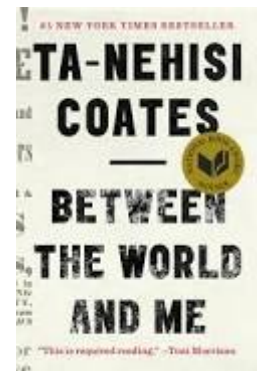
Another compelling commentary on race appeared in the April 2018 special issue of the National Geographic Magazine. What is most amazing is the photo on the front. There stand twin girls, one who has unmistakable African

features, the other with features some might call "White." Their mom is English, their dad of Jamaican/African descent.

Does this matter? I believe it does because unless we can deconstruct the notion of race as a category we will continue to be a racist society.

Things you will want to do:

- Read the book.
- Look up the issue of National Geographic Magazine on Race and read it.
- The next time you are asked to indicate "race" on a form, leave it blank or check "choose not to answer." ■



Our Relationship with Climate

Climate activist Greta Thunberg, age 16, addressed the U.N.'s Climate Action Summit in New York City September 23rd. Here is the full transcript of Thunberg's speech, beginning with her response to a question about the message she has for world leaders.

This is all wrong. I shouldn't be up here. I should be back in school on the other side of the ocean. Yet you all come to us young people for hope. How dare you!

"You have stolen my dreams and my childhood with your empty words. And yet I'm one of the lucky ones. People are suffering. People are dying. Entire ecosystems are collapsing. We are in the beginning of a mass extinction, and all you can talk about is money and fairy tales of eternal economic growth. How dare you?"

"For more than 30 years, the science has been crystal clear. How dare you continue to look away and come here saying that you're doing enough, when the politics and solutions needed are still nowhere in sight.

You say you hear us and that you

understand the urgency. But no matter how sad and angry I am, I do not want to believe that. Because if you really understood the situation and still kept on failing to act, then you would be evil. And that I refuse to believe.

The popular idea of cutting our emissions in half in 10 years only gives us a 50% chance of staying below 1.5 degrees [Celsius], and the risk of setting off irreversible chain reactions beyond human control.

"Fifty percent may be acceptable to you. But those numbers do not include tipping points, most feedback loops, additional warming hidden by toxic air pollution or the aspects of equity and climate justice. They also rely on my generation sucking hundreds of billions of tons of your CO2

Continued on p. 4



WASHINGTON, DC – SEPT 18: Founder of Fridays For Future Greta Thunberg testifies during a Climate Crisis Committee joint hearing Sept. 18, 2019 on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC.

Thunberg, who recently sailed across the Atlantic Ocean in a zero-carbon emissions sailboat, was in Washington to discuss the climate crisis with lawmakers and to speak at the UN Climate Action Summit Sept. 23 in New York.

(Photo by Alex Wong/Getty Images)

Our Relationship with Climate... continued from p. 3

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

SSJ-TOSF Congregational
Commitments
26th General Chapter

out of the air with technologies that barely exist.

"So a 50% risk is simply not acceptable to us — we who have to live with the consequences.

"To have a 67% chance of staying below a 1.5 degrees global temperature rise – the best odds given by the [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change] – the world had 420 gigatons of CO2 left to emit back on Jan. 1st, 2018. Today that figure is already down to less than 350 gigatons.

"How dare you pretend that this can be solved with just 'business as usual' and some technical solutions? With today's emissions levels, that remaining CO2 budget will be entirely gone within less than 8 1/2 years.

"There will not be any solutions or plans presented in line with these figures here today, because these numbers are too uncomfortable. And you are still not mature enough to tell it like it is.

"You are failing us. But the young people are starting to understand your betrayal. The eyes of all future generations are upon you. And if you choose to fail us, I say: We will never forgive you.

"We will not let you get away with this. Right here, right now is where we draw the line. The world is waking up. And change is coming, whether you like it or not.

"Thank you." ■

Greta Thunberg's superpower

Swedish activist **Greta Thunberg** opened up about her Asperger's diagnosis, calling it her superpower. The condition is on the Autism spectrum and affects the way people interact socially. Thunberg says Asperger's has given her the confidence to face the climate crisis head on and speak up for her generation and the future generations affected by climate threat. She told CBS that, "I want to make sure I have done anything, everything in my power to stop this crisis from happening."



"The violence that exists in the human heart is also manifest in the symptoms of illness that we see in the Earth, the water, the air and in living things."

Pope Francis on climate change

The Latest Immigration and Asylum Processes

by Sister Dorothy Pagosa

Some migrants (asylum seekers) are coming to our border because of violence in their own countries and the risk to their lives.

One woman I met at Bethany House escaped her human trafficker and fled to the US.

Some migrants are coming from Guatemala because of climate change. They are in the midst of a drought. Unable to plant coffee, they no longer have livelihoods.

Our country is doing anything possible to make this as difficult as possible. We are not being very neighborly.

It is estimated that there are still several thousand children separated from their families. The government says it will take two years to reunify all of them. The ACLU is working through the courts to expedite the process.

In addition to the above, the following procedures have been implemented in mid-September:

The Trump administration announced a migration deal Wednesday that will give U.S. immigration authorities the ability to send asylum seekers from the border to Honduras, one of the most violent and unstable nations in the world.

Department of Homeland Security officials reached the accord with the government of President Juan Orlando

Hernández, who is embroiled in allegations of government corruption and charges that he and others have been operating the nation as a criminal enterprise — [Hernández has been named as a co-conspirator in a major U.S. drug trafficking case.](#)

The deal paves the way for the United States to take asylum seekers from the U.S. border and ship them to a nation with one of the highest murder rates in the world, a country with gang wars that have fueled waves of mass migration and multiple “caravans” to the United States that became a major irritant to President Trump.”

Washington Post 9/25/19

“Under the [MPP](#) [remain in Mexico policy], the U.S. government sends asylum-seeking migrants to Mexico, where they reside as they wait for court dates in the U.S. to pursue their claims for protection. The program, also known as “Remain in Mexico,” has come under [widespread criticism](#) for failing to protect migrants with legitimate fears of returning to their homeland.

McAleenan said the end of “catch and release” is a reaction, in part, to the record number of 144,000 migrants apprehended or encountered at the southern border in May. He said that 72% were unaccompanied children or families.”

NPR 9/24/19

Who is My Neighbor? ■

²⁵ On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “*what must I do to inherit eternal life?*”

²⁶ “*What is written in the Law?*” he replied. “*How do you read it?*”

²⁷ He answered, “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and, Love your neighbor as yourself.*”

²⁸ “*You have answered correctly,*” Jesus replied. “*Do this and you will live.*”

²⁹ But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus “***And who is my neighbor?***”



Luke 10: 25-29

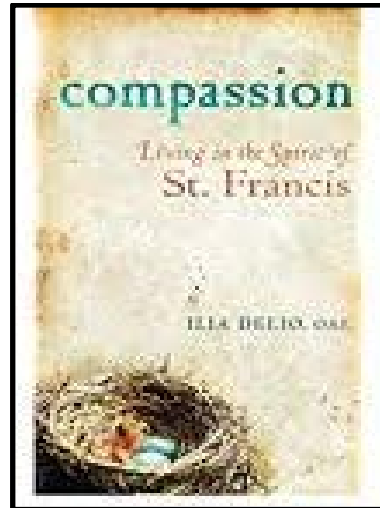


Book Recommendation

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

SSJ-TOSF Congregational
Commitments
26th General Chapter

... and **WHO**
is My
Neighbor?



Recommended by Sister Dorothy Pagosa

Compassion: Living in the Spirit of St. Francis

By Ilia Delio, OSF

Copyright 2011, St. Anthony Messenger Press

Quotes from the book's **Introduction**:

- “The prevalence of anonymity marks our culture today....
- What keeps us together and apart simultaneously?
- Why do we fear being humanly related to one another?...
- Compassion is a thread that binds together the deepest centers of life beyond the borders of race, gender, religion, tribe, or creature.”

REMEMBER...

We welcome your submissions in the form of

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

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

Please send any items for inclusion in this next issue to **Sister Rose Grabowski** no later than **November 25th**, the Monday before Thanksgiving.

~ Your Social Justice Committee