

LEARNING FROM PRACTICES OF WOMEN RELIGIOUS ENGAGING
AUTHORITY, RACIAL INJUSTICE AND DIFFERENCE – SELECTED SESSION

Topic: Learning from Practices of Women Religious Engaging Authority
Racial Injustice and Difference
Convener: Patricia A. Parachini, S.N.J.M., Sisters of the Holy Names
Moderator: Rachel Bundang, Santa Clara University
Presenters: Maria Cimperman, R.S.C.J., Catholic Theological Union
LaReine-Marie Mosely, S.N.D., Notre Dame of Maryland University

Posing the question, “Is there anything we can learn from the practices of women religious that can provide the wider church with a way forward in the context of its present struggles,” the presenters invited the participants to enter into the discussion from their own experience, encouraging both personal and communal reflection about mistakes and sins of the past, as well as the creative ways of contributing to the needed transformation.

Maria Cimperman offered a model of “transformative leadership” exercised by the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR), as they addressed the doctrinal assessment of the LCWR, initiated by the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) in 2009. In her paper, “Transformative Practices of Women Religious Engaging Church Authority, Racial Violence and Difference,” Cimperman examined the values embedded in the method employed by the LCWR throughout the entire process of the investigation from 2009 through 2015, ending in a joint report issued by the CDF and the LCWR. The report described the spirit of the process highlighting the values upheld throughout: “From the beginning, our extensive conversations were marked by the spirit of prayer, love for the Church, mutual respect and cooperation. We found our conversations to be mutually beneficial.” Cimperman pointed out that, to its credit, the LCWR chose to stay at the table through the difficult and challenging moments of the conversation. Asserting its authority as a viable organization established by the Vatican, the LCWR, continued to speak its truth in love, as it stayed in the dialogue. Grounded in communal contemplation and the virtue of hope, using religious imagination and drawing from the strength of all of the religious congregations working as one, the LCWR was able to acknowledge its strengths and areas that needed further growth and highlighted its very real contributions to the service of the People of God. Briefly, Cimperman illustrated how this methodology of the LCWR could be used to help religious congregations examine their history with persons who were enslaved, as well as their relationship to people of color in our present day, and encouraged this reflection by the Church as a whole. In addition, she invited members of religious congregations to engage in critical reflection about ways to transition from a multicultural to a more intercultural mindset and reality.

In her paper entitled, “Naming Difficult Conversations about Race, Ethnicity and Difference,” LaReine-Marie Mosley spoke with great passion about living in a “politically charged time,” and pointing to the need for religious communities of both women and men, to have those difficult conversations. “The changing demographics in our congregations and in our country and the countless ‘dog whistles’ employed by political leaders that trigger previously indoctrinated bigotry and hatred, cry out for

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honest and thoughtful conversations concerning how we want to be in relationship with each other today and in the future.” Illustrating this need, Mosely shared a few stories of individuals in religious communities who feel shut out, isolated and excluded; she noted, too, how difficult she finds it to live in the present climate of killing and bullying so often portrayed on social media. Mosely went on to speak about how the “dog whistles” are provoking her, because although described by some as innocuous, they are in fact, perpetrating great harm and need to be seen as “attacks against those deemed inferior mentally or socially.” She expressed her gratitude to the LCWR, who has addressed racism head on and has begun to invite member congregations to look at their own pasts to examine the racism present there--e.g., a segregated ceremony of profession of vows or the exclusion of African American women from some religious congregations. Mosely, spoke of the need for the efforts of organizations such as LCWR to “trickle down,” so that all of the People of God are dialoguing and working together to effect the changes needed to end racism and its “real time influences on the lives of people of color today.”

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