



Monastery of the Ascension

THE DESERT CHRONICLE

XXIX, No. 3 SEPTEMBER 2020

In The Image of God

By Fr. Hugh Feiss, O.S.B.

Editor's NOTE:

*The pandemic has been the backdrop for very serious reflections about racism. The bulk of this issue of the Desert Chronicle will be devoted to three articles: the first will introduce the German Catholic philosopher, Josef Pieper and his essay, *The Christian Idea of Man*. The second article will describe his encounters with racism during his visits here. The final article will discuss some recent Catholic thinking and teaching about the racism that puzzled Pieper so much.*

I

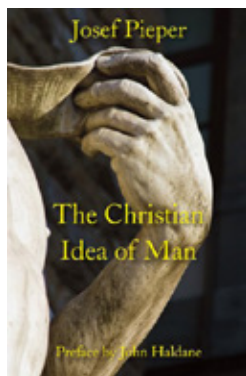
Josef Pieper (1904-1997), *The Christian Idea of Man*

Fr. Hugh Feiss, O.S.B.

Josef Pieper studied classics, philosophy and sociology. His philosophical work centered on ethics. He was a master at explaining philosophical ideas in clear, succinct prose that any educated person could understand. The key topics of his writing were virtues and festivity (*Leisure, the Basis of Culture*). In 1945, at the end of World War II, he wrote an essay, *The Christian Idea of Man*, which was translated into English in the University of Notre Dame's *Review of Politics* in 1949, and republished in a new translation by St. Augustine's Press in 2011.

Pieper begins that book by referring to Thomas Aquinas' *Summa of Theology*. After finishing the first part of the *Summa* that is about God, Thomas begins the second part by saying having considered God, we shall now consider God's image, notably human beings. That is the key to the Christian idea of humanity: God makes us in God's image. Our fundamental task as human beings is to realize God's image in ourselves to the extent possible. We do that by being and acting virtuously, by faith, hope, love, prudence, justice and moderation. For example, the prudent person "does not let her view of reality be clouded by what her will dictates without reference

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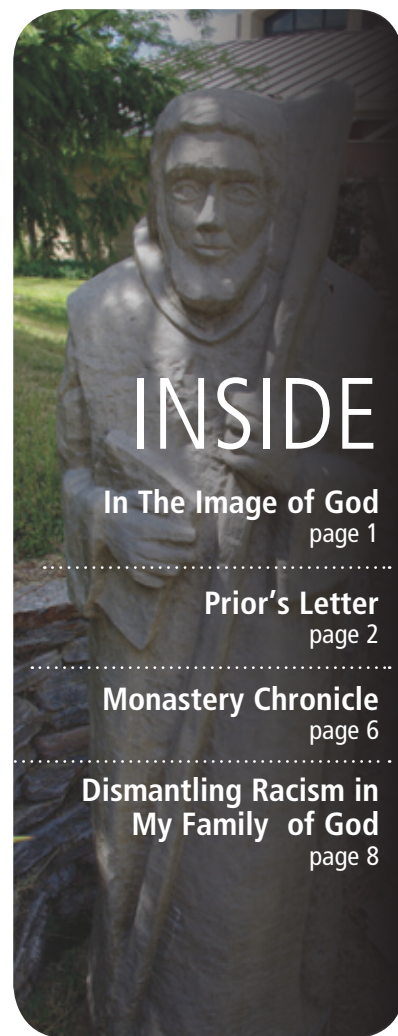
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Dear Friends of the Monastery,

The June issue of *The Desert Chronicle*, contained an article about Fr. Andrew's and my 60th anniversary of ordination to the priesthood. The article was written in mid-May. Unexpectedly, Fr. Andrew died on June 2. There will be more about that in this issue. This letter to you is being written on August 14. It is the date when, in 1954, Fr. Andrew and I entered Mount Angel Abbey, along with two other candidates. These past three months have been a time of remembering and adjusting in the light of our confrere's death.

Though it may seem insignificant, one of the "adjustments" has been figuring out what to do with the things Fr. Andrew left behind. When we entered the monastery in 1954 we were allowed to bring two suitcases and a typewriter. The intervening years and varying responsibilities have resulted in accumulation of much. St. Benedict does say that the monks should get what they need. But life was a little less complicated in his day.

So the days since June 2 have been and continue to be taken up with finding what to do with things he left behind: mementos of past assignments, friendships, and accomplishments. Some of them can be put to good use here in our archives, or in the local St. Vincent de Paul store. And the rest?

This reflection is prompted by Fr. Andrew's death, but the implications apply to all of us. Even if we have survivors who can use things, how much do they need or want? At least in monasteries, there is a limit. The question that can be asked is: "How much stuff do I need?" An additional consideration might be to think about those who will have to take care of what we have left behind.

Tomorrow will be the celebration of the Assumption of Mary into Heaven. Where she is now, we hope to be. As Mother of the Church, her love and care draw us close to her Son. Through her intercession may we be kept safe and steadfast in following Jesus.

We will remain isolated from guests at least until the end of the calendar year. We wish it were different. Be assured of our prayers, and keep us in yours. Peace and good things.

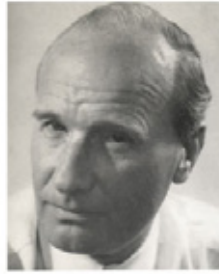
Fr. Boniface Lautz, O.S.B.
Prior



to the truth about the real situation." A just person "is able to live in truth 'with the other,'" to see himself as a member of communities. A moderate person "does not allow his desire for possessions and enjoyment to become destructive and repugnant to his being."

The implication of this, as the Scottish philosopher John Haldane says in his preface to the new edition, is that morality is not primarily about a set of rules but about living a good life. As Pieper put it, people "should not think so much about what they ought to do, they should think about what they ought to be." What is the image of a good person one should strive for? For the Christian, that image in Christ.

In the last two volumes of his autobiography Pieper tells of his trips to the United States as a visiting professor, lecturer and recipient of several awards for his philosophical work. He was a very inquisitive person who wanted to understand the people of the many countries of the world that he visited. The next article tells of Pieper's puzzlement at his experiences of race in America. According to his philosophical understanding of human beings, racism is a defect in those who are racist, and a failure to respect the God-given dignity of those they regard in racist ways. •



JOSEF PIEPER

and again, full of pride. With my eagerness to learn—which did not always lie comfortably with him—I inquired what this clean was supposed to mean exactly. So little by little it became clear that here they wanted not only not to have colored people or Jews, which I had already known, but they wanted also, if possible, just moneyed people. . . . In their area not only could no rental houses be erected but also . . . no bus stops were allowed from which people who had no cars could all too easily get to the nearby beach." (p. 155)

Not long afterwards, he was visiting a small museum at the excavation of an ancient pueblo along the Rio Grande. As he was leaving he met an old Indian who was using a wheelbarrow to take out sand that had blown in during a storm. He asked where Pieper was from, and Pieper told him, Germany. Then the old man pointed at the rest of Pieper's group and asked where they were from. Pieper answered, "they are Americans." The old man answered, "No, they're not Americans! Where are they from?" "Well, the woman is from Belgium; and the man's father is Yugoslavian." The old man answered, "You see, we are the only real Americans." (p. 166)



I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed - we hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal.

—Martin Luther King

II. What A German Catholic Philosopher Discovered about Race in America

Fr. Hugh Feiss, O.S.B.

1950s

In the mid-1950s, Josef Pieper was a visiting professor at Stanford. An eager traveler, he visited much of the United States. In the second volume of his autobiography, *Not Yet the Twilight* (2017; German 1979), he describes some of the places he visited.

When he was giving the annual Suarez lecture at Fordham University, he stayed with one of the Jesuit's parents in a posh suburb of New York City. "While I was walking through the quiet green area with my friendly host who was a retired lawyer, a new lesson about the inexhaustible subject matter of 'America' began. 'Keep it clean here'—that is what I heard the old man saying again

go to the top of the next column

He had visited New Orleans in 1950 and was shocked to find that he was told to move to the front of the bus, since the area where he was sitting was for Black people. He asked a priest in New Orleans what was the most difficult problem in his predominately Black parish. The priest replied, "The discrimination of the Black people among themselves. . . . Those with brighter skin want nothing to do with those with darker skins." Now in 1956, after the Supreme Court declared segregation illegal in 1955, things did not seem to have changed. At a breakfast bar, he and his wife were having scrambled eggs prepared by a Black person. Constantly the chef passed eggs over their heads to Black customers who could not sit down and eat with white customers, but had to take their food outside. (pp. 169-70).

1968

In the third and final volume of his autobiography, *A Journey to Point Omega*, (pp. 63-65). Pieper tells of a visit to St. Louis just after Martin Luther King, Jr., was shot. He met two priests who were responsible for a program that renovated dilapidated

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housing for poor people. They visited two apartments that had been provided for Black men. Both were in horrible disarray. A third apartment held by a Black woman was clean and neat. Then they visited housing that had been provided for a poor white family of five; it too was neat and clean and orderly. They asked the priests about the contrast. They said it was a matter of background (cultural tradition, milieu, education and other things). Pieper told them he had met highly educated Black people who were in the medical or legal professions. The priests said, none of us would go to a Black doctor or lawyer.

A few days later, Pieper made his last visit to New Orleans. Restaurants and buses were now integrated. He wanted to find out about what was happening. A meeting was arranged; he took a taxi, driven by a blatantly racist driver, to Peter Claver House, where the National Urban League had an office. A well-dressed Black woman, who had been a close associate of Martin Luther King, Jr., told him, "nothing has changed in the racism of the whites." As for his dream, she said, "I don't believe in it anymore." The Archbishop of New Orleans had excommunicated some proponents of racial segregation. She said, "The Archbishop is completely isolated; his own clergy opposed him." Then a knowledgeable priest, who ministered to Black people, arrived and agreed with everything the woman had said. He commented, "You know, something new has happened recently: the Black people themselves no longer want this much talked about integration. You asked about the future. I can only say that there is no solution in sight." (pp. 70-71).

2020

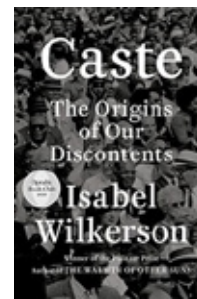
Pieper, a German, certainly knew about racial prejudice against Jewish people that led to the Holocaust. In his autobiography he did moralize about racism in America, but it puzzled him. He could not understand how skin color could be the basis for such injustice. What he saw was certainly unjust; it did not, in practice, recognize Black people as images of God, deserving of full justice and respect. Now over fifty years since Martin Luther King, Jr.'s murder, what people told him then—things have not changed—is borne out. Black Lives Matter has touched off a great deal of agitation and soul searching. In the next article, we'll will how leaders in the American Catholic Church are addressing racism in America today.

III. Racism and the American Church Today

Fr. Hugh Feiss, O.S.B.

A Blessed or Privileged Life

It not an easy thing to write about racism. No matter what one says, there will be people who are angered. I am perhaps not qualified because of lack of experience. I was raised by parents who had zero tolerance for any sort of racist attitudes or speech, much



less actions, toward Black people. When he was a teenager, my father worked as a sawyer ("pond man") on the millpond in a company town where most of the inhabitants, a mixture of Black people and

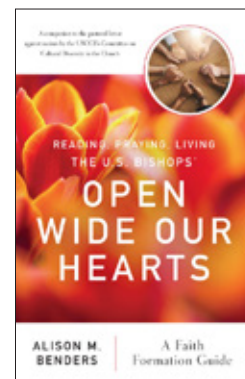
white people, were poor and from the South. One of the few people he ever talked about from those days was his friend Bill White, another sawyer, who was Black.

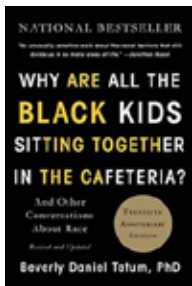
I have had few interactions with Black people. When I was about eleven, I met a Jewish boy as I was walking to the grocery store. Before we had gone very far he asked me what I thought about Jews. I said they were fine, though I had never met one. If he had asked about Blacks, I would have said the same. As a university chaplain and priest I have met dozens of children of immigrants from Mexico, who seem proud of their bilingual heritage and determined to fulfill their parents' hopes by graduating from college, entering a profession, and in many cases using their education to help people, whatever their ethnicity. I don't remember meeting one of them who expressed feeling like a victim, though in a general or personal way many of them must have been victimized by the biases of Anglo-Americans.

All of which does not exonerate me from racism nor disqualify me from thinking about it. Black lives do matter, and it is my responsibility to make sure that they do, as a citizen, as a Christian, as someone who has been privileged to grow up in a stable family in safe surroundings, receive lots of education and good medical care, find meaningful employment, and almost never felt endangered because of my skin color. These are things that should be available to everyone in a wealthy country like ours, but they aren't. I don't know how much this can be explained in zero sum reckoning, that concludes that because people like me have had these things others have not, but it is indisputable I have them and others, Black people, do not.

What Racism Is

In their 2018 document, *Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love - A Pastoral Letter against Racism*, the American Catholic bishops begin by saying we are all children of God, all equally made in the image of God. Racism occurs when someone judges persons of other races or ethnicities as inferior and unworthy of equal regard. Such an attitude leads to sinful acts of exclusion and injustice. Racism results in discrimination in hiring, housing, education, and incarceration. "Too often, racism comes in the form of the sin of omission, when individuals, communities, and even churches remain silent and fail to act against racial injustice."





Racism can be instilled in our hearts through our upbringing and culture. It can also be institutional, entrenched “in structures of injustice and violence that make us all accomplices in racism.” What is needed is a conversion of heart that will compel change and reform our institutions, including our churches. Conversion requires repentance and humility.

St. Paul wrote, “If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored all the parts share its joy.” It is a fact that Martin Luther King, Jr., also pointed out, when others are diminished, we all are diminished. The bishops trace racism in the Church, from the Bull of Pope Nicholas V granting permission for the kings of Spain and Portugal to buy and sell African slaves, to the treatment of Fr. Augustus Tolton (1854-97), the first American-born Black priest. He had to study in Europe, since no American seminary would accept him as a student. Catholic bishops often failed to oppose slavery, and some owned slaves. In their letter, the bishops of today ask forgiveness for all this.



Fr. Augustus Tolton

The 400-Year History of Racism in the United States

Drawing on an idea of St. Augustine, the bishops say that one cause of racism is the “lust to dominate” others, an impulse that most of us share. They trace the effects of this in the experience of Native Americans, which is a dismal story of invasion, expulsion and neglect. Manifest Destiny is a national sin, a sacrilege the effects of which are still with us. I listened a couple of years ago to a program on the radio about some young Native Americans who held a talking circle and vowed that their generation would put an end to intergenerational cycles of abuse within their culture. We need to do the same.



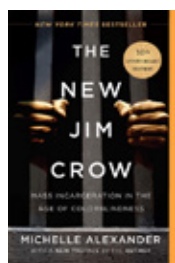
Turning to the African American experience the bishops tell how Africans, captured and brought to this country by slavers, were separated not just from their homelands, but from their families and forced from childhood to work for others’

benefit. Treated by their owners without love, it was hard for them to love themselves as they absorbed the attitudes of their oppressors.

Writing in 2020 to the people of his diocese, Bishop Anthony Taylor of Little Rock, Arkansas, noted that we tend to think that the disadvantages that Black people experience are the result of factors within the African



Bishop Taylor



American community, whereas if Black lives really matter as much as white lives, our whole society would be structured differently. He documents structural problems in law enforcement, employment, health care, and education that especially impact Black lives. These, he says, are life issues, just as much as abortion and the death penalty are.

The Matanza in El Paso, August 3, 2019

Hispanics, too, have borne the brunt of discrimination and



Bishop Mark Steitz

violence. They still do because of mass deportation, family separation and denial of asylum.

The shooting of dozens of people in an El Paso Walmart by a white supremacist, elicited a wonderful document, Bishop Mark

J. Steitz’s *Night Will Be No More*. In it he wrote, “If we are honest, racism is really about advancing, shoring up, and failing to oppose a system of white privilege and advantage based on skin color.” It is a “soul sickness.” “Our highest elected officials have used the word ‘invasion’ and ‘killer’ over 500 times to refer to migrants, treat migrant children as pawns on a crass political chessboard, insinuated that judges and legislators of color are un-American, and have made wall-building a core political project.” The message is “*tu no vales*,” “you don’t count.”



Border Wall near El Paso

What We Can and Must Do

The American bishops say we need to dialogue with those who are on the peripheries of our society or of our own limited view. We need to form relationships with them and listen to their point of view. From that can come understanding and empathy so we see each other as brothers and sisters. They urge that curricula in Catholic education, in the family, in schools, in parishes and universities, treat of racism and reconciliation. We must advocate and join others in advocating to repair the harm racism has caused.

A Black Theologian Speaks

These recent documents from Catholic bishops draw on the work of sociologists, writers, historians, and biographers, both Black and white. One of their most important sources is the Black priest and theologian, Bryan Massingale, particularly his *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church* (Orbis, 2010). It is a frank appraisal of its subject, beginning with a chapter which defines and analyzes racism, followed by a chapter on Catholic social teaching on racism up to 2010. A third chapter studies ways toward a more effective Catholic engagement with racism.



Bryan Massingale





Monastery Chronicle

By Fr. Boniface Lautz, OSB

JUNE

The previews for the coming month that conclude these notes are always the last thing written. What was never "previewed," much less expected, was the death of Fr. Andrew on June 2. His congestive heart failed as Andrew was seated praying in church before night office that Tuesday evening. Thinking he might have been sleeping, Fr. Ezekiel went to rouse him and found him very weak and physically unable. The EMT's were called and their efforts did not get a response. Fr. Andrew died close to 8:30 PM. It was about the same time that the community was praying the Nunc Dimittis. We were all with him as he died.

The funeral was on Saturday, June 13. Fr. Andrew's sister, Dorothy Diehl and a nephew, Robert Diehl, were able to attend. Because of COVID-19, the Mass and burial were private. Three additional people who had worked with Fr. Andrew here were included. We tried to live stream the ceremony. It was our first attempt and had limited success. The rest of June has been filled with what needed to be done following Fr. Andrew's death. Fr. Hugh has been appointed subprior; corporation officers named; new names attached to bank and investment statements. Fr. Andrew the monk and friend will not be replaced.

John Wasko and Art Brown gave the deck in front of the trailer a new coat of paint. They began last month but periodic rain showers delayed them. John and Art also repaired the lawn mower. The needed parts were delayed in transit for several weeks while the lawn kept growing.

The experts predict that the COVID-19 is to be with us for a long time. Like many other communities, we are not opening up before the end of the year. It may be longer than that. Br. Tobiah has been keeping in touch with other monasteries about their plans. He says we're all doing the same things.

Fr. Hugh's studies have resulted in some recent publications: On the Sacraments (Brepols), a study and translation of Victorine texts; "Christ in the Rule of St. Benedict, Relevance for Today," in *American Benedictine Review*, June 2020; "Benedict's Rule," in the volume, *Great Christian Jurists and Legal Collections: The First Millennium*; the article "Eschatology," in *Oxford Handbook of Mystical Theology*. Congratulations and thanks to our confrere for his scholarship and contributions.

We started to live-stream our Sunday Mass. We have had some trouble with the video, but will keep working with our network provider to improve that. Staying at home is easier for some than others, but we're all staying put. A friend recently gave us some jigsaw puzzles. They are a great way to do something entertaining during lockdown.

JULY

One way or another COVID-19 has affected our lives this month, and will continue to do so for a long time. For example, Fr. Hugh was scheduled to speak at the American Benedictine Academy meeting July 16-18. Travel was out of the question, so the meeting convened via ZOOM and Fr. Hugh gave his talk to the participants that way. Every two years, the ABA gives the Egregia Award for outstanding accomplishments in the field of Benedictine scholarship and writing. Fr. Hugh is the recipient this year. Fr. Hugh was introduced by Fr. Joel Rippinger, and I had the privilege to hand Fr. Hugh the plaque via ZOOM.

We managed to project a budget for 2020-21. We will likely have no income from events that utilize our guest facilities, and we will do little or no external pastoral work. We all probably asked Fr. Andrew's intercession. We will have to try to keep the deficit budget within the projected limits. Given the current news about others' finances, we are fortunate to have "limits" within which to stay.



We have been working to set aside some restricted funds to provide for our personal health care and living needs. That is a realistic thing in light of our fragile situation. We also have been planning on how to make responsible disposition of our assets when we eventually die out, which seems inevitable. We've been at it for quite some time, and in the process are getting some clarity on the values we want to maintain.

Brief power outages have occurred recently. One happened while this article was being written. Strong winds have caused some of them; hot temperatures may be another factor. Today's outage occurred while Lu Ann was beginning to prepare supper.

Earlier this month Br. Sylvester's brother-in-law, David Duman, died. Travel restrictions kept our confrere home from the funeral in Keuterville, ID. Our prayers were with the family.

AUGUST

Because of the virus, we agreed, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, to wear protective face masks whenever we go out and request the same of all who come in. We don't go out except for necessities. Br. Tobiah continues to politely let potential guests know that we hope they will be able to come at a later time.

The barley harvest has been completed; yield and the quality were good. We're fortunate to have good caretakers of our land. The silage corn will be harvested much later. The coyotes and deer seem interested in going in and out of the shelter provided by the corn. The annual arrival of Night hawks and their fantastic flight is a treat. Barn owls swoop around the tree lines in the late evening. The deer, the coyotes, and rodents make regular appearances.

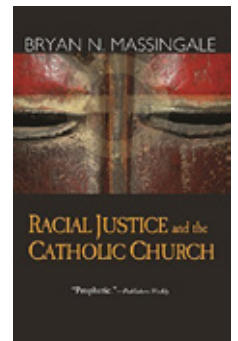
We've received lots of good things from our gardening friends. Our garden is much smaller and limited this year. We do look forward to some tomatoes that will become salsa. We had an abundant apricot harvest and were able to share it.

We're trying to make our celebration of the Office a more reflective time. The period between the psalms and readings has been extended and we're slowing the pace of recitation. It will take some time for us to adjust, but the effort is well spent.

Br. John made the move to Mount Michael Abbey in August 4 and arrived there safely. He was quarantined for two weeks and reports that he is eager to become involved in community life. Fr. Ezekiel is visiting for two weeks at St. Walburga Monastery in Colorado and will be back September 2. •

There Fr. Massingale says that racial difference is not the problem; the problem is linking stigma and prestige to racial difference. He explains Erik Yamamoto's four-stage path to racial justice: recognition of the humanity of the other and the historical roots of racial grievances; accepting responsibility for a group's racial wounds; reconstruction, that is, active steps, e.g., apology, to heal racism's wounds like sense of inferiority or self-hate; reparation for material harms such as economic disadvantages, social deprivations, and political exclusions. These must be undertaken with truth-telling and lament for what has been suffered or for having caused suffering.

Fr. Massingale mentions three Catholic practices that can foster this process. (1) the pastoral work of conversion, which can help us face painful truths; (2) rebirth and putting on of Christ; (3) the Eucharist, in which we all partake as equals.



St. Benedict: Leave Social Distinctions Outside

St. Benedict's Rule includes an inventive combination of utter equality, democratic election, and abbatial authority, under the Rule and the Gospel, which is directed at the flourishing of all the members of the community. We learn from Gregory the Great that the sons of Roman aristocrats, old people and young, priests and illiterate Goths came to Benedict's monastery. Any such distinctions were annulled at the door: in the monastery people were organized solely on the basis of when they arrived. Entering the monastery was like being baptized: you were beginning a new life. That is what we need in our Church and our nation, a new birth into a life in which race plays no part in access to the goods of safety, health, education, and respect. We need a radical conversion in which the toxic legacy of racism in our country is recognized for what it is and renounced by all of us. We are all brothers and sisters of Christ, children of the one God, called to share in the goods of God's earth. We eat of one loaf because we are members of one body, and vice versa. •





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Dismantling Racism in My Family of God

Dear God,

In the effort to dismantle racism, I understand that I struggle not merely against flesh and blood but against powers and principalities-- institutions and systems that keep racism alive by perpetuating the lie that some members of our family are inferior and others superior.

Create in me a new mind and heart that will enable me to see brothers and sisters in the faces of those divided by racial categories.

Give me the grace and strength to rid myself of racial stereotypes that oppress some in my family while providing entitlements to others.

Help me to create a nation that embraces the hopes and fears of oppressed people of color where we live, as well as those around the world.

Help me to heal your family making me one with you and empowered by your Holy Spirit.

-Adapted by Debra Mooney, PhD from Pax Christi



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