A Matter of Spirit

Beloved Community

Draw Close and Be Curious
Creating a Community of Belonging p.2
Communities of Safety: Offering Refuge p.5
A Prayer from my South Asian Heart p.7
Resiliency in the Face of Colonization p.8
The Human Heart is Bigger Than the World p.10
God Made Me p.12
"The end is reconciliation; the end is redemption; the end is the creation of the Beloved Community. It is this type of spirit and this type of love that can transform opponents into friends. It is this type of understanding goodwill that will transform the deep gloom of the old age into the exuberant gladness of the new age. It is this love which will bring about miracles in the hearts of men [and women]." These were the words preached by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1956, towards the end of the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

Like the flames of Pentecost that stirred in the hearts and minds of those gathered in the Upper Room (Acts 2:1-5), a fire of the Spirit blazed that day in Montgomery, Alabama. In this issue of A Matter of Spirit, we examine what it will take to build the Beloved Community in a new age of revolutionary love that is emerging out of the embers of this past year. This Divine call for radical love impels us to disrupt the status quo in our churches and communities so that persons of goodwill can create spaces that are welcoming, inclusive, and safe for all people, especially for those who have been pushed to the peripheries.

This issue of A Matter of Spirit was written by six truth tellers. Six disrupters who call forth our society and Church to acts of solidarity with those who feel unsafe, unwelcomed, and unhoused. Each of these powerful narratives, from people working in justice, reveals the deep-seated cracks and broken pavement of our society where many have fallen in—wholly disregarded. Each of these prophetic voices provides us with a pathway where communities are formed and can emerge out of our broken world, where love exists. May this issue of A Matter of Spirit invite you into revolutionary acts of love and justice.

Samantha Yanity, Editor

"YOU DON'T BELONG HERE!" That is what the attacker yelled at an Asian-American woman in Manhattan right before he violently beat her. Hearing about this incident reminded me of the many times I have been told, either with words or actions, that some people do not believe I belong here as an Asian-American woman myself. When I was young, I never understood it. I thought that being born and raised in the U.S. implied automatically “belonging.” But I realized that was not true. The real messages behind the words “you don’t belong” are: you are not accepted, you are not valued, you are not known.

With the rise of anti-Asian hate, an increased number of children detained at the border, and Black bodies dehumanized by state-sponsored violence, it seems that as a country, we are focusing more energy on identifying who does not belong than on looking for the ways in which we belong to each other. We are pushing each other away instead of drawing close and being curious.

Ironically, I only discovered what it feels like to authentically belong when I left and lived outside the U.S. I learned that belonging has less to do with where you were born and more to do with how the community, the network of relationships that holds us all together, accepts you, values you, and recognizes you. You can be a “stranger” in another land and still feel a sense of belonging.

I arrived in Brazil in 1998 to start a 16-year journey, far away from all that was familiar—friends, family, language, and culture. As a Maryknoll Lay Missioner, I went to live and work in the periferia (periphery, margins) of the megacity of São Paulo. My background was dramatically
different from the Brazilians who lived on the periferia. As a child, I never worried about shelter or food while the children on the periferia lived precariously day-to-day. I had years of formal education and an advanced degree, while most of my neighbors had barely completed grammar school. I had traveled all over the world, and many of them had never gone farther than a bus ride away from the neighborhood. It would seem that I didn’t belong in the periferia.

Today, I know that was exactly where God wanted me to be. It was in that place, so uncomfortably foreign to me, that I finally discovered what it feels like to belong. God pushed me to the limits of my fear. If I was to survive, I needed to get close and get curious.

I worked with a team of volunteer health promoters, engaging families in favelas (shantytowns) who had children at risk of malnutrition. These very low-income families had occupied public land and precariously built their dwellings either along hillsides or over sewage canals. Since they were not legally on the land, they did not have access to services like electricity, water, sewage, and trash pick-up. We accompanied families in the healthy development of their children, offering education around nutrition, safe hygiene practices, and advocacy within the public health system.

Our main work was visiting families in their homes. We spent hours walking up and down the narrow alleyways of the favelas, going into parts that were well known for drug trafficking and gang activity. When we entered people’s homes, I was usually nervous because I did not speak Portuguese well. I felt incompetent because I did not think I would be able to “help” in any constructive way. I usually did not say much, but people almost always received me warmly and without judgment. Most of the criticism was in my own head.

We would sit with people for hours, listening to their stories, oftentimes of deep pain and sorrow. Many of them rarely had visitors, so they were happy when we appeared in their doorway. I think I “helped” by simply showing up, faithfully, every week. I understood less than half of what people said, but I believe they were grateful that I came to be present with them, that I had not forgotten them, that I had learned their names. Thankfully as time went on, my Portuguese got a little better, and I was able to listen deeply to learn more about people’s lives and share more about my life. We drew closer to each other.

In the second year of working with this team of health promoters, I still was not fully confident in Portuguese. At one of our monthly meetings, the coordinator said she wanted to step down. Immediately, another leader suggested that I assume the coordination efforts. I felt insecure and unprepared, worried that I did not have all the connections they had in the community to take on such a role, and I still felt like an outsider. Other team members jumped in and supported the idea of me being the coordinator. Then one person put it plainly and directly, “You are one of us, and we need you. Yeah, you don’t speak Portuguese perfectly, but you have many gifts that we need right now. And, you’re not doing this alone. We’re a team. So even though you’re taking the lead in this way, we’re all leading by supporting you.” Wow! That was one of those amazing life moments when a few affirming words made a huge difference. I heard that I belonged despite being imperfect; they valued the gifts I brought to the team, I was not leading alone, and the team had my back.

After six years, hundreds of visits to people’s homes, and hours of getting closer and being curious, I knew people by name, and they knew me by name. We had spent the time working, crying, praying, playing, and celebrating together, and we had bridged differences to form bonds. When I walked into one of the three favelas where we worked, people would always yell out from their doorways, “Oi, Angelica. Tudo bem querida?” “Hey Angel, how are you, dear?”
“I bring people together across differences to discover their shared purpose, so that together we can build a new world where everyone belongs.”

All of these feelings of being accepted despite my imperfections, valued for the gifts that I bring, and being known and knowing people by name gave me a real sense of belonging. The community opened up to receive me, and I actively, despite my fears, entered into the community. I belonged to that community and they belonged to me. Together we were transforming the health of children in the area.

It sounds like a dream. Obviously, there was a lot of failure, pain, conflict, and hardship in those years as well. However, the main learning remains true: the quality of relationship matters. Belonging results from giving and receiving acceptance, value, and recognition. Also, it does not happen overnight. It takes time and intentionality. You have to be patient with awkwardness and discomfort and willing to risk being vulnerable.

Fast forward to today. I work as a community organizer in Los Angeles for which my time in Brazil prepared me well. When people ask me what I do, I say that I bring people together across differences to discover their shared purpose, so that together we can build a new world where everyone belongs. In organizing, we say that power is the product of relationship, and we define power as the ability to act. Community organizers work to build power, accompanying people in their journey to recognize their own agency and ability to act, and to use their collective power to transform our world. But the first step is relationship. We cannot build authentic and sustainable power without first being in relationship with each other.

A basic organizing tool is the one-to-one. It is an opportunity to draw close and be curious. Through conversation and deep listening, we learn each other’s names, recognize each other’s gifts and talents, and learn to accept each other as we are. We start on the path to discovering a shared purpose—where are we connected, where are we aligned, where can we work together to transform something in our community that needs transforming? That might be a speed bump on our street, a health clinic in our neighborhood, more affordable housing in our city, or a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants in our country.

I would wager that if the man who attacked the Asian-American woman sat down for a one-to-one with her beforehand, he probably would not have acted as he did. If they intentionally came close and became curious about each other, took the risk to be vulnerable, and listened deeply to each other’s stories, they might have started on the path of discovering a shared purpose. God calls us to wholeness. We can move forward toward healing and transformation more powerfully when we do it together.

Angel Mortel lives in Los Angeles, CA. She works as a community organizer with L.A. Voice/PICO, a multiracial, multifaith network of over 70 congregations leveraging their collective power to create a L.A. County where all are included, and all belong.
WORDS HAVE ALWAYS had a sort of magic for me. I love the subtleties in language that render completely different meanings to words. Sometimes, it is the actions performed in the realm of a given meaning that expands the scope of a word or adds a new dimension to it. But there are words that, for all their magic and meaning, can be empty and useless if not supported by actions.

In the times we are presently living through, when polarization seems to have taken over understanding and agreement, words such as sanctuary, refuge, safety, justice, fairness, solidarity and compassion come to mind.

When talking about sanctuary, Emily Busse, in her article How Berkeley Became America’s First Sanctuary City¹, says: “The term isn’t specifically defined, nor does it have any official legal meaning, but it generally describes a city (or county) that...generally commits to protecting refugees, asylum seekers and undocumented immigrants who haven’t committed serious crimes.” This made me think of how we individually and as a community can also be that sanctuary, that refuge, for those who have no legal status, or who have been waiting for years for their asylum petition, or who are simply displaced, going through difficult times in their lives.

The COVID-19 pandemic has severely limited our interactions with others and has mostly confined us to our homes. For over a year now, Pedro Rubalcava, a nationally known Catholic composer has been leading people in a bilingual Night Prayer/Las Completas via OCPMúsica² on Facebook. Every night at 8:00 pm PST, a good-sized group comes together virtually from across states, time zones, and borders to pray for anybody and everybody. A warm and welcoming half hour that gives a sense of family and belonging to the participants, it is delivered virtually, through social media platforms. While an unorthodox way of praying the Liturgy of the Hours, it is pure sanctuary and refuge!

A wrong interpretation of the word “individualism” sometimes serves as an excuse to do nothing to help others, ignoring their needs under the guise of respect for their space. In my church

---

¹ The Bold Italic, Online Magazine, April 15, 2019
² Oregon Catholic Press
community I have had and continue to have many opportunities to make a difference. One time, when entering the church, I saw a woman seated by herself in one of the back pews. I approached her and said, “Hi, are you new to our church? I don’t think I have seen you before!” She smiled and said that it was her first time there, that she had moved to the neighborhood only a month before, and that she still did not know many people. She said her name was Teresa Moreno. I invited her to come sit with me and my husband. I told her that my hearing was not what it used to be and that I sat up front to be able to fully enjoy the liturgical music. Her expression changed! She actively participated in the service, and thanked me for making her feel welcome.

In the summer of 2017, there was another situation that greatly affected my church community. Arturo, a husband, the father of three, and a member of our Hispanic church community had been unfairly arrested. He was the passenger in a vehicle that was stopped by the police at the end of the day, after long hours of work in the construction industry, solely because the officer in charge thought the men looked suspicious. Arturo was arrested for not showing valid identification, even though he was not driving. Once arrested, he was transferred to ICE and put in a federal detention center to wait for immigration processing.

Meanwhile, his only daughter, Mercy, was finishing up her senior year in high school, and getting ready to graduate with honors. The day of graduation was fast approaching, and Arturo was still in detention, while volunteers and pro-bono lawyers that the Hispanic community at church had contacted were frantically trying to get him released. We, the community, split into two groups. One supporting the lawyers, keeping a change of clothes for Arturo in a vehicle waiting in the parking lot of the detention center, praying for Arturo’s release on time to see his daughter graduate. The second group, of which I was a part, attended the graduation ceremony with Arturo’s wife and children and other family members, lending moral support, telling Mercy to have faith that her dad was going to make it to the ceremony, and praying hard for it. Arturo made it a couple of minutes before Mercy, his only daughter and the first person in her family to graduate from high school, walked across the stage to receive her diploma. He made it! He made it because of the incredible support, faith, and generosity of so many concerned people in the community.

Our actions don’t have to be big or take something from us. A small act suffices—placing ourselves in the other person’s shoes, just being there for the family, praying, cheering Mercy, and hugging Arturo when he, actually running, perspiring and crying at the same time, came to stand on the grassy area of the school’s sports field to see his daughter become an honored high school graduate. Actions such as these truly help one understand what sanctuary means.

According to Lisa Hoffman, development director at the EBSC, “…sanctuary is ... a moral commitment to our values of recognizing the inherent human dignity and worth of every person. It’s a matter of conscience." This notion of sanctuary is not new. Jesus gave us many wonderful examples such as when he asked the woman accused of adultery, “Where are your accusers? Didn’t even one of them condemn you?” “No, Lord,” she said. And Jesus said, “Neither do I.” Another instance is when he not only talks to the Samaritan woman at the well, but he takes the time to teach her and to reveal to her that he is the Messiah. Jesus saw those women’s humanity and upheld their dignity as children of God in spite of the existent laws and custom. These actions are what words like refuge and sanctuary are all about. They are about support, involvement, and a spirit of seeing Christ in others!

“We individually and as a community can also be that sanctuary, that refuge, for those who have no legal status, or who have been waiting for years for their asylum petition, or who are simply displaced, going through difficult times in their lives.”

With time, I learned a little more about Teresa. She had come from Peru to the United States to escape a life of violence that included death threats. She did not have legal status, could only work in menial, short-term jobs and was having a difficult time financially. With her permission, I shared her story with the Hispanic community at church and that marked a dramatic change in her personal situation. Many of the women and families befriended her, invited her to gatherings, to get-togethers, to cookouts, to participate in fundraisers, and simply to be an active member of the community. There were no conditions, and no need for institutional involvement in this effort. It was the people in the community who made a difference in Teresa’s life and gave her support and refuge. They were Teresa’s sanctuary!

In the summer of 2017, there was another situation that greatly affected
A Prayer from my South Asian Heart, for the Asian Pacific Islander Desi’ American Community

BY JOANN MELINA LOPEZ

GOD OUR MAMA,
  in every generation you have carried the hopes of our ancestors
  and brought our uncles and auntsies,
  resilient and hopeful to new life.

We know that you were their Source of Strength
  through trials of colonialization, immigration, expulsion, exclusion,
  internment, discrimination, and innumerable daily indignities,
  as they sought a better future for themselves and their children.

On this day, we turn to you anew and ask
  that you hear the cries of your children,
  who yearn for a world and a Church
  that is more just and loving than we can dare imagine.

Protect us from the racist violence that threatens our lives,
  and liberate us from the systemic and internalized racism
  that drives our pursuit of perfection and performance and cuts us off
  from kinship with our Black and Indigenous siblings.

Give us the same passion for your kingdom of peace, mercy, hope, joy, justice, and love
  that burned in the heart of Jesus,
  and inspire and empower us to live and work now for its unfolding among us.

Remind us that we belong to one another,
  just as our own mothers and grandmothers taught us:
  to see every stranger as uncle and auntie,
  to ask “have you eaten,” and respond lovingly to the hungers of the world,
  to take off our shoes to acknowledge sacred ground,
  to tend to wounds with healing balms, gentle touch, and cups of tea,
  to recognize that family trees can span every distance and difference.

Teach us again to walk in the ways of Christ,
  who knew when to be silent and when to speak up,
  how to rejoice and weep,
  how to listen well, and tell stories that stirred the imagination,
  and how to be a prophetic voice for transformation in his own community.

O Spirit of Love, our Constant Companion,
  be with our Asian Pacific Islander Desi American Community
  on this day, and every day ahead,
  drenching us in your boundless love,
  so that in the midst of every joy and celebration,
  every challenge and trial to come,
  we may bear witness with our lives to your
  abundant and abiding care and transforming power.

We make this prayer through Christ Our Lord.

Amen

JoAnn Melina Lopez currently serves as Campus Minister for Liturgy at Seattle University. She received her Masters of Divinity (M.Div.) from the Boston College School of Theology and Ministry, and joined Seattle University’s Campus Ministry team six years ago.

1 Desi, derived from the Sanskrit word for “land,” refers to the people, cultures, and products of the Indian subcontinent and their diaspora.
ONE QUESTION I COMMONLY RECEIVE from other service providers is, “How can we better serve the Native American community?” To answer that, we must recognize and understand the trauma that has happened and is still felt in our community. For example, data shows that Native Americans make up only 1% of the general population while making up 15% of the homelessness rate. That is appalling and egregious in itself. Additionally, the data reveals that Native Americans are least likely to access services and support from the mainstream system as a result of 500 years of genocide and oppression.

Five hundred years ago, Native communities thrived. We had healthy family systems, a strong culture, and our spirits were vibrant. Colonization systematically nearly destroyed our people. Settler colonizers wielded the Doctrine of Discovery and Manifest Destiny, both philosophical myths, to colonize our lands and erase and replace our sovereignty. Not only were we displaced, but our lives were threatened by genocide. Today, Native people are forced to walk these city streets and see wealthy non-Natives fill their pockets and profit from stolen Native land, while we must continue to fight for scraps and beg people to acknowledge our existence. The City of Seattle continues to ignore our existence while producing wealth for non-Native communities. This inequity is extremely hard for us. We are often left to feel unacknowledged and unappreciated. We have come to realize that westernized wealth is how communities stay healthy—by passing down that communal, intergenerational wealth. However, BIPOC communities are systematically disenfranchised from economic opportunity. Instead of solving this inequity, many people pose the question, “Why aren’t you taking advantage of many of the economic opportunities today?” The underlying conclusion to this question fails to understand what the past 500 years have done to our community.

I often deliver presentations on the inequitable policies the government has inflicted upon us. Many policymakers try to hide these inequities as “good intentions.” The reality is that most policies targeted at Native people are designed to assimilate us forcibly. First, there were policies like the Indian Removal Act that took the land. Next, policies like land allotment stripped away even more land. After realizing that we weren’t going away, policies were put in place to strip the Indian out of us. Eventually, boarding schools came along with the attempt to eradicate what was left of our culture and communal systems. Settlers tore Native children from their families and abused them at these schools—schools designed to “kill the Indian and save the man.”

Our elders were taught to be ashamed of being Indian and were beaten when they showed any traits or signs of their culture. This violence occurred during a vital stage of early childhood cognitive development. Schools usually use this time period to prepare youth to enter adulthood and be successful in society—no matter what culture one belongs to, this is standard socialization. Instead, the violence our elders and ancestors endured damaged the family structure in our community severely. Our communities were robbed of the opportunity to instruct our young people to walk the “Red Road” of life, or what it meant to serve our community, take care of our elders, keep a good heart, and think.

RESILIENCY

IN THE FACE

BY DERRICK BELGARDE

“Our Native community’s biggest strength is our resiliency. Throughout history, we have shown that we will not go away or forget where we came from.”

---

2 Black, Indigenous, People of Color
3 For more information on the connection between American Christianity and Indian Boarding Schools go to: https://boardingschoolhealing.org/education/us-indian-boarding-school-history/
many generations ahead. When children of the boarding school generations eventually went home, they knew of only abuse. They lost their basic cultural values like kindness and love, which harmed our community for generations. We are still dealing with the aftermath today.

The attack on our way of life is not simply a thing of the past. We continue today to fight for recognition and respect. Being a sports enthusiast, I am appalled—Why are we still fighting to remove racist mascots and logos? This past year or two, we have finally seen some changes, and teams/schools are starting to admit they are wrong. This makes me happy, but I often wonder why did it take so long? Many schools/teams would agree that logos imitating any other cultural group is inappropriate. For some reason, westernized culture believes it has the right to hold sway over our community. We are the only group of people who must prove who we are via blood quantum. When we do not behave or act according to mainstream standards, people question our Indianness and invalidate our identity. Today we have cell phones and drive cars like anyone else, so I guess it goes against the romanticized vision of how Natives are supposed to behave.

Additionally, settlers use the myth of disappearing Indians to defend the use of Indian Mascots. People argue “Indians” (in wigwams and teepees) no longer exist. Thus they are allowed to use the racial slur “Redskins,” put Indians on logos, or even dress up in offensive costumes.

If there are any takeaways here, I hope that people will try to understand that 500 years of genocide, bad policies, systematic breakdown of our families and community, and continual disrespect of our culture and way of life have left my community in a heavy state of PTSD. Additionally, there is a general mistrust of non-Native systems. Someday our community will be stabilized, and our people will feel safe enough to enter other providers’ doors to receive help. I hope one day Western systems will write equitable policies, affording my people the ability to trust the medical field. Native people trust vital culturally appropriate services run by us and for us. These services must create safe spaces that honor our heritage and come from people we know and trust because of shared trauma experiences.

Our Native community’s biggest strength is our resiliency. Throughout history, we have shown that we will not go away or forget where we came from. Today you can find cultural revitalization happening throughout the Native country. We are beginning to heal and learn how to walk in this modern world to ensure health and happiness for future generations. We dream that our communities can learn to live in peace and harmony with one another.

Aho!

Derrick Belgarde is an enrolled member of the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians of Oregon. He serves his Native community as Executive Director for the Chief Seattle Club and, for the past six years, as Deputy Director. Chief Seattle Club is a nonprofit located in the Pioneer Square neighborhood of Seattle that serves the urban Native community.
THIS IS THE DISTANCE BETWEEN SEATTLE, AND THE PHILIPPINES, between where I have lived my whole life, and my parents’ original home. One of my Papa’s favorite stories is how his 28th birthday was also his longest day as he traversed oceans and timelines to arrive in the States. It took thirty years, six months, and ten days for me to meet the Philippines for the first time. Late by some standards, but enough time to change everything.

In 2017, I joined an international solidarity trip with fifteen others from across the United States, Australia, Malawi, Canada, and China, to collect accounts from indigenous communities displaced by bombings in the southernmost island of Mindanao. At that time, Mindanao had been under de facto martial law by the recently-elected president, Rodrigo Duterte. Two years later, in 2019, I visited community organizations in the central region of the Visayas, still responding to the lasting effects of the 2013’s Typhoon Haiyan, one of the most powerful storms recorded to have ever made landfall.

In Seattle, almost 40 years ago

On June 1, 1981, Filipino-American union leaders Gene Viernes and Silme Domingo were gunned down in Seattle by state agents of the Philippine government under then-president Ferdinand Marcos. Viernes and Domingo were staunch critics of the Marcos dictatorship and organized solidarity relations between longshoremen in Seattle and the trade union movement in the Philippines.

Today, forty years later, another dictatorship in the Philippines and the passage of the Anti-Terror Law threatens Filipino-American activists once again.

Under Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte, over 30,000 Filipinos have been killed by their government. These began as a so-called “War on Drugs” that targeted poor drug users and drug dealers. This silencing and violence against the people has since escalated in various forms, including but not limited to the aforementioned Martial Law in Mindanao, orders consolidating more power to the executive branch of the government, attacks on freedom of the press, and most notably, the Anti-Terror Law enacted last July.

Philippine military and police have increased their targeting of social activists, accusing them of being communists (a common tactic known as “red-tagging”) and terrorists. As a result, indigenous people, human rights workers, peasants, labor organizers, environmental activists, journalists, health workers, local elected officials, and clergy—many that I met on my trips—have been red-tagged, imprisoned, and extrajudicially killed.

In addition, the Duterte government has used COVID-19 lockdown measures to militarize the country rather than address the country’s health crisis. While the majority of the Filipino people already struggle to have their basic needs met, the government has failed to provide them with economic support, food, PPE, and vaccines. Meanwhile, Philippine police and military have arrested individuals delivering relief and food to those in need, increasing the country’s already high number of political prisoners. This militarist solution to a public health problem has failed miserably to provide a comprehensive health response and adequate economic support to the suffering Filipino people amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.
$550 million in U.S. taxpayer money

We must be critical and reflective of our relationship to the struggles of the world. Father General Arturo Sosa SJ’s questions from the Universal Apostolic Preferences are constantly relevant: How are we living and working for justice within our institutional context? How are we relating within our institutional context to the people we serve?

Since Duterte’s election in 2017, the Philippines has received over $550 million in U.S. taxpayer money in the form of military aid. Similar to the ongoing events in Palestine, Colombia, and many other places in the world, we see that these contributions are leading toward people’s suppression rather than people’s liberation. How can we, as U.S. citizens, use our voices to ensure our government resources are not used to commit injustices in places abroad, like the Philippines? At times, grappling with these questions can feel like we are the camel traversing through the eye of a needle (Matthew 19:24), but Jesus promises that we save ourselves as we save each other in this process (Matthew 16:25). These are the tough questions we must answer not only in thought and spirit but also in action. We must confront these questions and organize ourselves as people standing for justice.

Organizing work is the recurring invitation to ground ourselves in who we most truly are in God’s eyes (Galatians 3:28), and acting from that posture day in and day out. It is a subversive act. And it gets at the root (aka radical) of justice work. It simultaneously rejects being owned or claimed by the decrepit systems of empire, capitalism, and fascism. We are neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, woman nor man (Galatians 3:28)—but we also deny racism, white supremacy, xenophobia, “model minority” and other life-denying narratives that prevent us from recognizing and claiming our right relationship with ourselves, others, and God.

One way to practice this organizing of consciousness and people power is to join the movement to pass the Philippine Human Rights Act (PHRA)! Organizers from all over the U.S. are pushing to reintroduce the PHRA bill to the House of Representatives and Senate. In its reintroduction, we ask our legislators to look critically at the role of U.S. taxpayer money in the Philippines and “to suspend United States security assistance with the Philippines until such time as human rights violations by Philippine security forces cease and the responsible state forces are held accountable.”

In Seattle, ICHRP (International Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines), Malaya Movement and the Kabataan Alliance are engaging in this campaign to encourage Washington state representatives to endorse the PHRA via outreach, phone barraging, and more. They also hope to form a local PHRA coalition. This is a call and invitation to participate in something as simple as a phone call to your representative or to have you or your organization join our local coalition! As we have seen in the BLM mobilizations, Standing Rock actions, Stop Asian Hate, and many other movements in this country and across the globe, democracy is more than voting. And the true power of the people is wielded in collective day-to-day action and solidarity.

Even in the conditions presented to us by the COVID-19 pandemic, solidarity does not mean social distancing. Though we are thousands of miles and a 20+ hour flight away from the Philippines and many other places that encourage our care and concern, solidarity urges us to reduce this distance. We remember and live out our identity as God’s people and through genuine building and organizing together as the Lord’s Prayer invites us to do day in and day out. May we bring Your Kingdom here on Earth as it is in Heaven.

Michael Alcantara is a member of PUSO Seattle (Philippine US-Solidarity Organization) and the ICHRP (International Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines). He is a graduate of Seattle University. Take Action to support the PHRA at ipjc.org/legislative-action-center/

---

1 A quote from Filipino novelist and poet Carlos Bulosan
2 Model Minority is a common racist stereotype of an ethnic or racial group that assumes an individual or group has a high level of education, socioeconomic status, and professional level. The idea stems from a “deservingness framework” that constructs the “ideal” minority for other minorities to follow or become.
“WHO MADE YOU?  
God made me.
WHY DID GOD MAKE YOU?  
God made me to know, love, and serve Him in this world.”

These are the first “teachings” I remember growing up Catholic—a “cradle Catholic.” I was taught and believed, for many years, that I am a child of God, made in his image and likeness. I was “special” because I was a CATHOLIC. We had a sticker on our car that said, “In case of emergency, please call a priest.”

“WHO MADE YOU?  
God made me.
WHY DID GOD MAKE YOU?  
God made me to know, love, and serve Him in this world.”

There is a boys’ choir. They have long white robes, a red rope necklace, with a simple wooden cross to complete the outfit. They process in every Sunday at High Mass and sit in the first six pews. Girls say, “We want a choir!” OK. We are called to start practicing after school. We are so excited! Turns out, we sit in the choir loft in our uniforms to sing at funerals and weddings on Saturday mornings.

“WHO MADE YOU?  
God made me.
WHY DID GOD MAKE YOU?  
God made me to know, love, and serve Him in this world.”

The boys have organized baseball and soccer leagues. They have full uniforms and play on weekends at other parishes. There is a trophy case in the school hallway with lots of boys’ baseball and soccer trophies. Girls say, “Can we play?” “YES,” comes the answer. “When spring comes, we will start girls’ softball teams.” We show up and are lined up. We count off by four. All the ones are a team. All the twos are a team, etc. We are given white, red, green, and blue hats. They paint bases on the parking lot, and we play on the blacktop on Tuesday nights.

“WHO MADE YOU?  
God made me.
WHY DID GOD MAKE YOU?  
God made me to know, love, and serve Him in this world.”

In high school, I participated in the Bellarmine Speech League. For the whole season, I am ranked first in my category. Then, on the last day of the competition, after a strange delay, a Brother comes to judge my round instead of the Sister who was scheduled. He gives me the lowest marks I have ever gotten—10 and 15 points LOWER than ever before. At the end of the season,

I am invited to a banquet to receive an award. I get a SILVER MEDAL. The GOLD MEDAL goes to a boy from Bellarmine High School, where the Brother who marked me down teaches.

“WHO MADE YOU?  
God made me.
WHY DID GOD MAKE YOU?  
God made me to know, love, and serve Him in this world.”

I am beginning to know I am different. I mention these feelings of “different” to a priest in Confession. He yells and tells me to stop feeling this way.

“WHO MADE YOU?  
God made me.
WHY DID GOD MAKE YOU?  
God made me to know, love, and serve Him in this world.”

I get married and find I am very lonely. He is a nice boy. I am a nice girl. We have a nice baby. I cannot take it anymore. I get a divorce. I am no longer CATHOLIC. I am now A DIVORCED CATHOLIC.

“WHO MADE YOU?  
God made me.
WHY DID GOD MAKE YOU?  
God made me to know, love, and serve Him in this world.”

---

1 The refrain is drawn from the *Baltimore Catechism*, circa 1954
Sermons are about occasions of sins. [Still feeling different]. Can’t go to Communion. Does God still love me? Stop going to Church. Too painful. Too much. Hurts my parents terribly. Can’t tell them I am different. We all know it is a sin.

“WHO MADE YOU?
God made me.
WHY DID GOD MAKE YOU?
God made me to know, love, and serve Him in this world.”

I CAN’T NOT feel different. I know it is who I am. I strive to be all I can be. I meet a person who lifts me up and loves me. My parents visit us and love her too. I take them to 5 o’clock Saturday Mass whenever they come. At Christmas, we all go to Midnight Mass together. My mother tells me that they are letting DIVORCED CATHOLICS back into the Church. I should go back. I still cannot tell her I am different.

“WHO MADE YOU?
God made me.
WHY DID GOD MAKE YOU?
God made me to know, love, and serve Him in this world.”

We are living in Denver. Colorado passes a law that there are to be “no special rights” for “gay people.” No parish stands up and says we are all children of God. LBGTQ+ people are attacked on streets and in bars more than ever now. No parish stands up to say we are all children of God.

“WHO MADE YOU?
God made me.
WHY DID GOD MAKE YOU?
God made me to know, love, and serve Him in this world.”

The Catholic Church forms an ADHOC COMMITTEE for THE DEFENSE OF MARRIAGE. THIS sacrament, they state, is ONLY FOR ONE MAN AND ONE WOMAN. They join forces with Evangelical Christians to lobby legislatures to keep “those people” from marrying. After years of preaching that the “Lifestyle” is promiscuous and the big reason why being gay is a sin, the Church denies us a pathway to live in a loving and committed relationship.

“WHO MADE YOU?
God made me.
WHY DID GOD MAKE YOU?
God made me to know, love, and serve Him in this world.”

On family visits, I hear my relatives disparage us as more evil than Communists: “Father said they try to turn ‘normal kids’ into them! They RECRUIT KIDS.”

“WHO MADE YOU?
God made me.
WHY DID GOD MAKE YOU?
God made me to know, love, and serve Him in this world.”

My father dies. My mother is very ill. She tells me that she and my father prayed every night that I would go back to the Catholic Church. Now she is pleading with me to go back before she dies. I have to bite my tongue to keep from crying. “The Catholic Church doesn’t want me.” After my mother dies, my sister does not speak to me anymore. She doesn’t “want THAT” in her life. My only sibling feels I am not worthy.

“WHO MADE YOU?
God made me.
WHY DID GOD MAKE YOU?
God made me to know, love, and serve Him in this world.”

After 27 years together, we get married in our son’s backyard by a non-denominational minister. We cry, filling out the papers. We had no idea this could ever happen for us. We have picketed for civil rights, women’s rights, and LBGTQ+ rights, and maybe the tide is turning...we pray.

“WHO MADE YOU?
God made me.
WHY DID GOD MAKE YOU?
God made me to know, love, and serve Him in this world.”

Many denominations begin to erect signs in front of their churches: “We are an open and affirming church.” This turns out to be code for “we let gay people in.” Through trial and error, we find that some are more “open and affirming” than others. “It’s OK to be gay....just don’t show it in front of us.” We decide that at least some are trying. We never see such a sign in front of a Catholic Church.

“WHO MADE YOU?
God made me.
WHY DID GOD MAKE YOU?
God made me to know, love, and serve Him in this world.”

I have traded Christmas cards with my cousin, daughter of my favorite aunt, who I talk with often; we have done this for years. I enjoy seeing her sons grow up from afar. One year she sends a card with a letter and a prayer card. She is asking everyone to pray this prayer so that all “gay people” can be converted to a sinless life because it is this scourge that is causing so many terrible weather catastrophes. God is visiting these events in the world because we tolerate “gay people.” She never sends me another Christmas card again.
Reflection Process

Readers are invited to use the following reflection to process the contents of this issue, and to move into action to bring about equity in their lives, and in our world.

Angel Mortel explains that “community organizers work to build power, accompanying people in their journey to recognize their own agency and ability to act and to use collective power to transform our world.” How do you build relationships that help people recognize their own gifts and agency while also encouraging a collective use of power to create transformation? Where might God be calling you to use your individual gifts in a collective space?

Beatriz A. Cortez suggests that acts of solidarity don’t have to be big acts, they can be simple acts of accompaniment done out of authentic love for the other person. How is the Spirit calling you to be sanctuary to another person?

Derrick Belgarde closes his reflection with a vision of communities living in harmony. How can we make that dream a reality? How do those of us with racial privilege pay (economically, ecologically, spiritually, emotionally) reparations to our Indigenous and Black sisters and brothers? How do we heal the wounds whiteness creates in order to foster an inclusive and welcoming future for the next generation?

Michael Alcantara reminds us that living out the Gospel is a “subversive act” that calls us to justice. Justice is a disruption of the status quo, and it often comes at a cost. What sacrifices or risks is God calling you to take? What might God be calling you to give up to make room for others to have equity?

JoAnn Lopez prays for the end of white supremacy and AAPI hate. How are we actively dismantling white supremacy?

Betty Devereux shares her painful experience in the Church. When have we failed to love the Body of Christ and treat it as our own flesh?

What would our Church and society look like if all people were completely welcome to bring their full, authentic selves into every space?
What’s Happening at IPJC

With Gratitude!
IPJC celebrated 30 years of building community and creating change at our first virtual spring benefit! We raised $161,000 to support our work thanks to the generosity of our sponsors and IPJC community. We are honored and humbled by your confidence in our ministry.

Thank you for celebrating our anniversary with us!

NWCRI: Investors Score Victories for Planet & People!
✓ NWCRI co-filed a resolution requesting ExxonMobil to align its climate lobbying with the Paris Treaty goal of limiting global warming well below 2° Celsius. 63.8% of shareholders supported the proposal!
✓ Despite vigorous opposition from ExxonMobil, three of the four Board members put forward by Engine #1, a tiny activist hedge fund, won seats on the Board of Directors. Their mandate is to transition the ExxonMobil to clean energy.
✓ Royal Dutch Shell was ordered by a court in the Netherlands to cut its CO2 emissions from its operations and the products it sells by 45% below 2019 levels by 2030.

Care for Creation
On Earth Day, the Creation Care Network of Catholic parishes and organizations (includes IPJC) in western Washington delivered a letter to Archbishop Etienne asking him to prioritize Care for Creation and to address our Climate Crisis. The 400 signatories to the letter committed to personal and community-based actions to care for our common home. The Archbishop responded to the letter thanking us, and saying that “several thoughts were ‘percolating’ about the goals proposed.”

Justice for Women
Plans are underway for a fall/winter gathering of all of the Women’s Justice Circle facilitators. The goal is to strengthen our Justice for Women network and assess the collective needs of the communities where Circles have taken place over the years.

In partnership with the Washington COVID-19 Immigrant Relief Fund, IPJC directly assisted 80 undocumented individuals to apply for a third round of financial assistance. Many of our Circle participants and facilitators were also able to help their communities receive financial support during the pandemic.

Judy Byron, OP
On July 1, Sister Judy will move to part time. Her responsibilities will include serving as the Director of the Northwest Coalition for Responsible Investment and working on special projects for IPJC. The impact that Judy has had on the work of IPJC cannot be overstated. We are excited for this new chapter and thankful that she will be continuing at IPJC.

Catholic Advocacy Day
Over 220 Catholics from around the state of Washington gathered virtually on March 23 to advocate with their legislators for the common good. Among the bills that we addressed in our meetings with legislators that were passed and then signed into law were: Healthy Environment for All, Working Families Tax Credit, Private Detention Prohibition, and $175 Million in the Housing Trust Fund.

Donations
IN HONOR OF
Maureen Augusciak
Patty Bowman
Judy Byron, OP
Hazel Anne Burnett
Mary Hamilton
Linda Haydock, SNJM
Jesuit Volunteer Corps
Ann Marie Lustig, OP
Kit McGarry
Peg Murphy, OP
Patty Repikoff
Linda Riggers, SNJM
John Whitney, SJ

IN MEMORY OF
Patricia Isakson
Virginia Pearson, OP
Mary Irene Walker, OP

IN MATTER OF SPIRIT
In Beloved Community

- Poverty, hunger and homelessness are not tolerated
- Racism and all forms of discrimination, bigotry and prejudice will be replaced by all-inclusive spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood
- Disputes will be resolved by peaceful conflict resolution and reconciliation of adversaries, instead of military power
- Love and trust will triumph over fear and hatred
- Peace with justice will prevail

—EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF VIRGINIA