The Seven Fates: Racial Healing Stations

Engaging hearts and minds through the arts

Since the 2020 murder of George Floyd, staff and parishioners at The Basilica have been searching for ways to educate and engage the parish community in discussions about racial injustice in Minnesota and the world at large.

Recently, the staff developed a program called “The Seven Fates: Racial Healing Stations” to engage with these topics through the arts. This program is intended to provide a new point of entry into these conversations via visual arts, music, written word and prayer.

“We know that the arts are a way of bringing people together and helping people to learn things in a very different way,” said Janet Grove, of the Christian Life and Liturgy departments.

Sarah Bellamy of Penumbra Theatre provided the inspiration for the program with an essay she wrote entitled “The Eight Fates of George Floyd.” This essay explored the confluence of factors that contribute to racial inequality in America and led to Floyd’s tragic end – from maternal health to poverty to police violence. Bellamy’s original piece listed poverty twice to emphasize its importance in Floyd’s story, but for the purpose of this program, Basilica staff decided to consolidate the eight fates into seven.

Each fate also included challenging statistics about the disparities Black Americans face with regard to poverty, health outcomes (including maternal health, chronic health, addiction and Covid-19), and police brutality.

“Listening to these statistics can be eye-opening,” Grove explained. “They include things people don’t tend to think about, like how so few therapists are Black, for example. If you’re someone who is Black and struggling with mental health issues, how do you go about finding a therapist who looks like you and can understand what you’re going through?”

Acknowledgments

Created by Janet Grove, Walter Tambor, and Johan van Parys
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Eve Black, The Fates
Felicia De Santos, Discussion Facilitator
Amanda Leger Harewood, Singer
Mary Syfax Noble, Prayers
Colin Rouser, Singer
Walter Tambor, Pianist
Johan van Parys, Director of Liturgy and Sacred Arts
Robert Welch, Ally Prayer Response

Contributions from:
‘On Heroism, Race, and Fate in America’, a speech by Sarah Bellamy, used with the permission of the author
Prayers by Cole Arthur Riley, Black Liturgies, used with the permission of the author
Ally Prayer Responses from Stations of the Cross to Overcome Racism were commissioned by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB)

Introduction by Rachel Newman Hogness

Rachel Newman Hogness is the editor of BASILICA magazine and a parishioner since 2017.
Voices from participants

WITH Bellamy’s work providing a framework, the team at The Basilica brought the program to life with artwork, music and prayer to fully engage attendees’ hearts and minds in the issues at hand.

“We are known for our beautiful artwork—our collection of art, our galleries, our showing of art from all cultures and all means and everything,” Grove said. “So we knew we wanted this to have a piece of art that would go with each of these healing stations. We then looked at The Basilica’s music.”

Johan van Parys, Director of Liturgy and Sacred Arts, selected a piece of art for each station and wrote an explanation of each piece.

“It wasn’t enough to just look at the work of art,” Grove said. “We needed Johan’s understanding of where this piece comes from and where it fits in with the fates we were discussing.”

Walter Tambor, Contemporary and World music Leader, selected the music, looking specifically at opportunities for a male vocalist and a female vocalist and spaces for congregational singing.

“We were intentional about the order of each element of the program: the art, the fate, the music, and the prayer,” Grove said. “Listening to the fate is so difficult in so many ways that it was good to provide an opportunity to just sit back and listen to a beautiful piece of music and allow each participant to rise up from that.”

Each Racial Healing Station concluded with a prayer, some with a call and response for BIPOC attendees and White allies.

“What does The Basilica do well? We pray,” Grove said.

The staff discussed whether they should write the prayers, but found that it was important to highlight the work of a Black writer since much of the program’s content focused on issues affecting Black people. They discovered Cole Arthur Riley (colearthurriley.com) who publishes her prayers on her website and @blackliturgies on Instagram.

“She has an incredible website, this young Black woman. And we decided since this was so surrounding George Floyd and people who are Black, that we would keep it in that focus for this one,” Grove said. “I read probably hundreds of them and really looked to see which ones fit best with that particular fate, with that particular station.”

The stations concluded with a discussion session in Teresa of Calcutta Hall, where attendees could discuss next steps they could take to advance racial healing within their own lives, at The Basilica and within the larger community.

“We feel that it’s really important that it’s not enough to say ‘Oh, I stand with you,’ but then go back to your house and not turn on the TV when things are hard or not go out and walk in solidarity,” Grove said. “So we hope that this will offer people a range of things to get them started or to continue their process and give us next steps for our parish.”

One attendee provided the following feedback on how the Seven Fates impacted her: “Thank you so much for your hard work on creating this beautiful, consciousness-raising piece that moved my heart and mind with facts that are unbelievable and art and music to engage my sense and give my mind a break.”

Continued

Participating in the Racial Healing Stations service has been such a meaningful experience for me, both to be able to use my music towards this important work but also to get to participate in the stations myself. There is something about ritual that helps us to process, and the opportunity to engage fully — body and soul — really helped me to process my pain at the injustice that I am unfortunately complicit in, and to turn it into productive energy for justice.

I am heartened by watching the care and humility with which The Basilica staff and community have lovingly crafted and re-crafted this service, and grateful for the expert advice of EDI consultant Sarah Bellamy to be able to make sure that the intent of the service matches its execution. At the end of the day, I am simply grateful to be part of a community that sees this work as important and does something about it.”

— Amanda Leger-Harewood

I feel blessed and honored to be a part of this project. Also, I am excited and proud to be a part of The Basilica community that gets how important it is to address racial healing amongst ourselves. This project is a good step in the right direction and I hope we can help others in the effort.”

— Eve Black
EDI Leadership Team member

A SPECIAL THANK YOU TO
The Basilica of Saint Mary EDI Leadership Team, Janice Andersen, Staff Liaison, The Basilica of Saint Mary Staff EDI Cohort

For more information about The Basilica of Saint Mary’s Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) program and for resources and ways to get involved, please go to mary.org/edi
2. Maternal & Infant Health

**FATE:** Imagine adrenaline, cortisol, and norepinephrine surging through a pregnant woman’s system each time she is triggered, affecting the fetal environment as her baby’s nervous system is developing.

If she is a poor Black woman, the likelihood of these surges happening frequently was high. Maternal stress is associated with poor birth outcomes including preterm birth, infant mortality, and low birthweight.

**PRAYER:** A Black baby girl was born yesterday, who will tell her that it’s not true what they say about her? Come, let us swaddle her in the truth: It sounds like no one can give you freedom, your blood cannot be chained. It sounds like be gentle with yourself, we buried miracles in your bones.
1. Ancestral Trauma

**FATE:** Research is tracking the ways that experiences during our lifetime—particularly traumatic ones—can have a very real impact on our families for generations to come. It shouldn’t be surprising that we develop genetic responses to threat and trauma. Trauma can reverberate down the generations in humans, influencing both our biology and our behavior.

Psychologist Dr. Errlanger Turner explains that “psychological symptoms such as anxiety, hyper-vigilance to threat, or lack of hopefulness regarding your future can occur due to repeated exposure to racism or discrimination.” For someone who experienced terrorism repeatedly during childhood, these symptoms would likely not present as episodic, they would become persistent.

**PRAYER:** God who answers, Would you who makes water burst forth from rock, remind us that you are a God who responds to our exhaustion and defeat? Just as you had Moses cling to an artifact of memory to meet the present moment, would you grant us physical artifacts which call us back to visceral emotions of our own stories, recalling how you have brought freedom and care to us before.

Let us grasp the staffs of our past believing in their power even now—that we would be a people who meets desperation and sorrow with a remembrance that protects us from despair. Let our elders go with us to the rock, knowing they hold memory for us, increasing our belief and resolve. And as we approach the hopeless stone of our lives, let us meet the face of God, seeing that we aren’t standing in the traumatic memories of the past alone, but with the breaker of chains and maker of water in the wilderness. We have not been forgotten.
The highest poverty rate by race is found among Native Americans (25.4%), with Blacks (20.8%). Lines of race and class have created crushing parameters around even the most resilient people.

We shouldn’t be able to determine with such precision the quantity of years or the quality of life of a child born in a particular zip code, but we can. In some places in the country, like New Orleans, children born in neighborhoods just a few miles apart can have a 25-year difference in life expectancy. The systems and structures that govern much of Black life in the United States mean children are raised inside a crucible of racism and poverty.

Wealth in this country is unequally distributed by race — and particularly between white and Black households. African American families have a fraction of the wealth of white families, leaving them more economically insecure and with far fewer opportunities for economic mobility.

God of the cross, forgive us that sympathy which makes the pain of another more about our own offeelings than their reality. An evil vanity perverts our desire for justice and equity for the oppressed. Lord, we don’t need people to feel bad, we need those with inordinate power to relinquish I, becoming acquainted with the sorrows of those they’ve held down in the mud for so long. Let daily living undergo a holy metamorphosis, that no structure of injustice would go untouched as we interrogate our everyday systems and choice and comforts, and make right where there is wrong.

God, we thank you that you know our sorrows up close. That you did not attempt a rescue from afar but knew that there was no helping apart from becoming.
4. Chronic Health Conditions
(Due to Weathering Racism)

**FATE:** Data since the late 1990s in social epidemiology have shown that adverse health outcomes are linked to stress experienced due to racism: hypertension, stroke, heart disease, kidney disease, even certain cancers. Over time, the repeated activation of the stress response system takes a strenuous toll on the body. What’s more, these outcomes of weathering racism create the preconditions that seem to make Black and brown people more susceptible to Covid-19 today.

**Prayer:** God who rests, it is difficult for us to imagine a Christ who, having all power and capacity to heal others, still at times walked away. Who napped unapologetically in the face of danger. Give us the courage to rest. The holy audacity to do absolutely nothing at all. And as we do, allow us to hold vigil for the tombs of this world while honoring that we are neither savior nor slave. Grant us a slowness that allows us to feel what hurts and makes healing possible. Let our rest be our liberation.
5. Addiction

**FATE:** Attention to the opioid crisis is fraught with racism. It has been framed as an urgent public health issue but prevention and treatment is focused disproportionately on white drug users, even though Black drug overdose deaths between 2015-2016 was up 40 percent compared to the overall population at 21 percent.

Black people struggling with opioid use disorders are not getting the treatment they need. Drug related offenses are more criminalized for Black users. Severe sentencing policies continue to disproportionately target Black populations, disrupting Black families and Black communities as people struggling with addiction are incarcerated rather than routed for treatment. Lack of diverse representation in physicians and clinicians who can prescribe treatment medications only exacerbates an already sensitive cultural divide.

**PRAYER:** Tender God, Some days our sadness feels too much to hold. It shackles us to our beds. It colonizes even our deepest joys. Would you hold it with us? Would you let our beds be our restoration and not our guilt? Keep us from speaking those secret words of self-hatred that demand that we carry our pain in some other way, that tell us to conquer sadness instead of feeling it. Help us to be weak. That holy weakness that doesn’t sneer at itself, but allows us to see that we are no less dignified because of our tears.

Help us to be tender with ourselves, patient with those wounds which we can’t seem to put words to. Guide us toward communities that don’t force us to explain our sadness or coerce us into expressing it in any particular way on any particular timeline. And as we do our best to live, grant us the resolve to care for our bodies. To use what strength we have to make small steps toward loving our bodies and minds best we can.

*OUR LADY OF SORROWS by Gabriel Vigil*
6. Global Pandemic

**FATE:** The Global Pandemic has hit people of color in the United States very hard. The Navajo Nation has been ravaged by the virus. In June 2020, the reservation had an infection rate of 3.4 percent and more than 6,000 confirmed cases of COVID-19. By comparison, at the same time New York state had an infection rate of 1.9 percent.

For Black Americans, due to the kinds of jobs they hold, they are at a much higher risk of contracting COVID-19 than the rest of the population. If they do contract it, they are also much more likely than White people to die from the disease.

**PRAYER:** Shelter God, Help us to trust the promise. There are times it feels like our present reality will always be. It becomes difficult to dream. Our imaginations for healing and health are far too small. Expand them, God, that we might grow the branches of hope into something we can cling onto without them buckling under the weight of our next tragedy. Let our dreaming be our rest, a shade from the heat of the evils of this world—that our alienation and oppression would not resign us to the wilderness.

Be who you say you are. If you are a stronghold, then keep the marginalized within the walls of your chest. If you are destroyer of the veil, come and let it fall from the eyes of those who do injustice and make death. And protect our dreaming, Lord, that as we wait for you, our hope would not be tarnished by our tears but renewed—sacred glints of light in the darkness.
**FATE:** One of the health risks associated with being Black and male is absolutely an encounter with the police, as we’ve seen again and again in city after city. Black parents of boys all shudder to see their sons’ baby arms and legs grow long and lanky, their feet and hands get bigger, their voices get deeper—they can directly correlate their growth with their vulnerability in the world; they will no longer be perceived as someone’s sweet and singular child, but instead cast as a threat, as a menace to a White society.

Between 1980 and 2018, nearly 31,000 Americans were killed by the police, with more than 17,000 of them going unaccounted for in the official statistics. Black Americans were 3.5 times as likely to be killed by the police as white Americans were, and Latinos and Native Americans also suffered higher rates of fatal police violence than White people.

**PRAYER:** God who remembers, They think we will forget. We cannot. Thank you for being a God who keeps account of every evil thing. A God who calls us toward habits of memory for both death and liberation. Forgive us for how we’ve discarded and diminished the evils of the past as some fractured end note in the book of American glory. Help us to remember all that made us, that the beneficiaries of injustice and exclusion would look in the mirror and be unable to perceive their reflection apart from those dark histories that have placed them in front of that particular mirror in that particular neighborhood.

Help us to remember those ancestors from whom this land was taken and those whose backs were broken to build up a fortune and society that would never embrace them. How long will the arms of death and injustice see themselves as heroes? It seems that whiteness alone can never be trusted to tell its own story. Have mercy and hand us the pen.

**Closing Prayer from Stations of the Cross to Overcome Racism:**

Loving God, you call us from every race and ethnicity to be one human family. Our nation has fallen far short of that goal. Too many of our brothers and sisters are ignored, ostracized, mistreated, and even killed because of the evil of racism. Too often, our own ways of thinking are infected by the messages of exclusion and marginalization around us.

Transform our hearts, renew our minds, and inspire our actions to effectively address and overcome racism in our day. Help us form new relationships, transform social structures, and reform public policies to establish justice for all. Then all of us will be able to approach you as one people, equal in our dignity, magnificent in our variety, and joyful in our unity, so that this world may be all that you intend it to be. AMEN