



The Catholic Worker Anti-Racism Review

Black Lives Matter: An Oral History of the 2016 Midwest Retreat by Brenna Cussen Anglada, St. Isidore CW Farm

**CW Anti-Racism Review
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In April 2016, the Minneapolis Catholic Worker (MCW) collaborated with Black Lives Matter Minneapolis (BLM) to host the 14th annual Midwest Catholic Worker Faith and Resistance Retreat. From Friday night through Monday morning, about 100 Catholic Workers (CWers) met at a downtown church to participate in an anti-racism training that would lead to a nonviolent direct action, both of which had been specifically planned for us by the MCW and BLM leaders.

In light of the movement for racial justice that has been taking place in the U.S. and around the world since the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police, this issue of the *Catholic Worker Anti-Racism Review* - our last issue - consists of oral histories of that weekend, in interviews given by both leaders and participants.

First, a brief overview of the retreat, the training, and the action: Since 2003, Midwest CWers have been meeting every Spring for a resistance retreat in the hometown of one CW community, in order to support that community's local non-violent campaign. Gatherings had traditionally focused on such issues as war and militarism, immigration, and the

environment.

In the Fall of 2015, the MCW organizers got the green light from the wider Midwest CW both to invite BLM to help lead the following Spring's retreat and to financially compensate them as a form of economic justice (a difficult conversation, as "paying for nonviolence training" went against the grain for many.)

Our BLM trainers were Lena Gardner, currently the executive director at Black Lives of Unitarian Universalism, and Kandace Montgomery, who has since become a co-founder and leading member of the Black Visions Collective and Reclaim the Block. (Montgomery became a prominent figure in the protests following the death of George Floyd after she confronted Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey about defunding police.)



Photo by Annabelle Marovici

The April training began Saturday morning with talks by white members of the MCW on the history of racial justice (and injustice) within the CW - highlighting Dr. Arthur Falls, a Black physician who founded the first Catholic Worker in Chicago in 1936 - and the importance of "followership," or deferring to the leadership of People of Color in movements for racial justice. Gardner and Montgomery provided us

with an overview of the often unacknowledged Black liberation movements on this continent; and a disturbing, detailed account of the way Black people are targeted by police in Minneapolis (over the ten previous years, 100 percent of people killed by the MPD had been Black or Brown).

Montgomery and Gardner unpacked the main principle that guides the national BLM movement: that all Black lives - regardless of age, sex or gender - matter. Because of this overarching belief, BLM has made a specific effort to centralize the voices of trans and queer Black women, some of the most marginalized people in our society today.

On Sunday, Rev. Osagyefo Sekou, a Black pastor and theologian who had been active in the Ferguson protests, facilitated a nonviolence training. Based on his own experience with police brutality, Sekou prepared the group for possible use of tear gas, mace, clubs, or “snatch and grab” maneuvers by police.

Our BLM leaders strongly recommended that only white people, who are less vulnerable to police brutality or abuse in jail, risk arrest during this particular action. (Many BLM members were currently facing severe penalties from their own recent actions.) On Monday morning, our group physically divided into three groups: those who would risk almost certain arrest (“red”), those who were willing to take some risk but who would prefer not to be arrested (“yellow”), and those who were not willing/able to risk arrest (“green”). The groups were not informed of what their actions would be until about an hour before they took place, leading to a good deal of tension.

BLM had invited members of the Black Liberation Project (BLP), a group of young activists, to work with the “red” group. At one point during the morning debriefing, one of the BLP activists told the group

(mistakenly) that they could be facing “20 years in prison,” so BLP would understand if anybody wanted to back out of the action. This led to several people dropping out of “red,” and caused a lot of confusion and anxiety until Gardner and Montgomery, frustrated with the lack of trust in their leadership, reassured the group that they would never put anybody into that situation without consent.

On the afternoon of April 11th, about 25 CWers and members of a local Unitarian Universalist congregation, led by Kandace Montgomery and several BLP members, linked arms to block the major intersection outside Target Field in Minneapolis during the Minnesota Twins' home opener. The action blocked not only car traffic, but also several city buses and a light rail train for about 90 minutes.

The demands were twofold: first, that the case of the killing of Jamar Clark, an unarmed young Black man who had been shot in the head by Minneapolis police the previous November, be reopened with an independent prosecutor assigned; and second, that Target end its exploitative labor conditions for its mostly Black and Brown workers.

Under the direction of Lena Gardner, others blocked a major auto intersection and unfurled banners both inside and outside the stadium, bringing attention to the recent decision of prosecutor Mike Freeman not to indict the officers who shot Clark. Only the 25 who blocked the light rail and buses were arrested; the group of white activists was gently processed and released in less than two hours.

The following interviews were conducted in the fall of 2018 by Lincoln Rice and Lydia Wong, transcribed by Lydia Wong and Brenna Cussen Anglada, and edited for publication by Rosalie Riegler.



Katie Yanike and Joe Kruse **Core Organizers for the 2016 Faith and Resistance Retreat**

Joe Kruse is a member of the Rye House Catholic Worker community in Minneapolis; he is also a butcher at a local cooperative grocery store and a member of United Food and Commercial Workers, Local 663. He engages in anti-racism and anti-capitalist organizing with his community, at work, and in his union. He was on the planning committee and one of the core organizers of the 2016 Retreat.

Kate Yanike graduated from the University of Minnesota Twin Cities and has been a member of the Minneapolis Catholic Worker Community since 2012. She was also on the planning committee and one of the core organizers for the retreat. She coordinated logistics to make the space comfortable and functional and worked with other Catholic and Mennonite Workers to provide a gender-affirming and disability-accessible space, as well as to solve problems that popped up during the weekend.

Lincoln: What sessions struck you as the most important?

Joe: The session that the retreat leaders from Black Lives Matter Minneapolis (BLMM) led was really significant for me because it was like a Direct Action 101 class, with a thorough history of Black liberation movements. So that was cool, because the story of direct action that the Catholic Worker often tells doesn't focus on those specific movements. It was pretty powerful, and that's when it became clear that the retreat was going to be led by these folks. And later, the Catholic Workers realized that the action was planned and organized by BLMM, and that they were just going to plug into this—like almost entirely but not completely—preconceived plan, to the extent of their comfort.

Katie: Lena Gardner and Kandace Montgomery are charismatic, powerful, and inspirational people, so it was nice to have a sort of plenary opening conversation, both by CWs in Minneapolis and then by Lena and Kandace. I remember just really admiring them as speakers and as organizers. To be a speaker in front of a large group is not an easy dynamic, to have a crew of people where you're an outsider feel connected to you and buy into what you're saying.

Another piece that felt really important to me was Reverend Sekou's facilitation of the direct action training. I didn't know what it was going to look like, so it was a bit of a surprise to me, even as an organizer of the event. I experienced personal discomfort in the run through about arrestability with Sekou. I think he dragged me across the floor as an example of what resisting looks like.

I went into the retreat thinking I wanted to push myself, push my boundaries, and it was at his training that I felt a high intensity moment. I really felt the idea of followership. After a day and a half of being together, that training with Reverend Sekou made me comfortable enough to push my edge and be arrested for the first time. It was a decision that very clearly happened in the moment.

But when we started the strategic conversations [about the action for the weekend], that's when differences in the way things happen in the CW and how the BLM organizers were asking us to participate [became apparent]. I remember feeling really uncomfortable in all of that, like maybe not even knowing if [the action]

was going to happen.

Lincoln: Joe, did you ever become uncomfortable?

Joe: I'm thinking of two times that were particularly uncomfortable. Or three actually. And two of the three occurred during the action planning. The organizers were from BLM, plus a couple of local, non-BLM organizers who had done scouting and basically come up with the rough outline of an action. And they revealed that. "Here's what we're doing." And it was like, "If you want to be of this group, go to this part of the space, if you want to be in this group, go to this part." I ended up floating back and forth between two of the groups, I think. The arrestable group had split into two for a period of time, or maybe had to attend two different trainings before the action. But in both of these, I think people were working through the fact that they were committing to do an action that they didn't necessarily build via consensus. And that brought up tension.



Photo by Annabelle Marovici

I'm also remembering another moment where CWs were talking about what we were gonna do as we were blocking the light rail train, and CWs suggested singing songs from the Civil Rights movement. Some of the Black organizers said like, "Oh, those songs are not your songs to sing. We feel uncomfortable with a group of primarily white people singing those songs." And that was real dissonance because, you know, there were people there who had been arrested, maybe like 50 times, who had probably sung that song at every protest. (*Laughs and Katie joins in.*) So there was tension at that moment.

And the third time: when we were talking about legal risk, people who were gonna engage in civil disobedience were understandably nervous, and asking our lawyer a ton of questions. Some of the BLMM and organizers of color that were facilitating noted this need to know every single possible outcome, and [commented] that it is maybe an aspect of the privilege of the group of people participating in the action

Katie: Yeah, I remember practicing for the action in the big ballroom meeting area, and people were both standing and sitting, and it felt more chaotic than just sitting and listening to a speaker. So much questioning was happening! I was really prepared to walk into it as a trusting in the leaders, so I probably didn't prep myself enough, and we didn't prep ourselves enough as a com-

munity, or have the skills and the tools to respond with compassion to a long history of one way [of doing nonviolent direct action.]

Tons of BLM and otherwise organizers who were super knowledgeable kept walking in and I trusted them, but I didn't even know all their names. But as a co-organizer of the event, I had become answerable to all these questions, in a way that I wasn't prepared to do. So yeah, that was uncomfortable in a big way. I was like fading into the logistical woodwork, so I'd be busy doing something that was valuable, but taking a step back from being a person to respond to those questions.

Then I tried to revert to [being] a participant [instead of] an organizer, because of the discomfort. I became more comfortable dealing with my discomfort as a person about to be arrested than a person answering for the whole deal. (*laughs*)

Lincoln: What was your role in the action? How did you decide to take that role and how did it work out?

Joe: Well I don't want to speak for you, Katie, but both of us decided to be part of the "risking arrest" group, and I think decided that it was a risk but because we trusted the BLM who were asking this of us, we trusted in the care and affinity of the BLM activists who were guiding us. So we were part of the line that blocked the train and traffic in front of the Twins' home opener game. We blocked for about 3 hours, I think.

The MPD arrested a total of 26 people and we were booked into the jail and then released pretty much like right after. Except for Eddie Bloomer of the Des Moines CW, who had a warrant out for his arrest in Winona County. So Eddie got shipped down to Winona and had to spend the night down there.

Katie: One thing that feels important for me to say, especially as a first time arrestee, is that the decision to be arrested and to be part of the action was very much about the moment—the political moment and the movement moment. And the statement of putting white bodies on the line and then seeing how that played out in relationship to the cops—that felt really clear to me.

We were really supported by the BLM leaders; it was a powerful thing for them to experience white people putting their bodies on the line under Black leadership.

All of that was integral to my choosing to be in an arrestable position... I think the beauty and the skill of their facilitation was that it was very clear that the risk to our bodies was so different than the risk to their bod-

ies, and so it felt like a pretty easy decision to make, while I don't think [deciding to risk arrest] is always an easy decision.

I loved the action. I took it all as one big thing, and the bubble of the retreat is one of the things I'm most proud of. I remember standing arm in arm with various comrades and watching the Black facilitators and activist leaders encourage us through chants and energy, helping us keep it up in the bitter cold. It was also a time of bonding with John Heid, who I held arms with for hours. Yeah, I thought it was good, a . . . a great action.

But the messiness of it was a huge learning moment, too. Like we did so much planning around hosting and facilitating, knowing that the BLM activists were going to take the leadership in facilitating these other pieces. I think the actual spectrum of learning was not in not trusting them but actually in not knowing our [CW] constituency better and having tools to respond to those folks, and care for them in this uncomfortable time. Yeah, that was a huge learning moment.

Joe: I thought the action itself was really beautiful, too. It was powerful to see the BLM activists excited about our action and telling us that it was useful and hopeful and good. Taking a step back, I think one of the reasons I was really, really happy with it was that for both our community and the wider CW, it was part of the CW conversation about racism, with the retreat in St. Louis and a bunch of other work that CW's all over the country have done. About different ways the CW could function or different parts of activism where the CW could focus on. I think our retreat was a physical manifestation of that conversation, and that was really powerful for our community, as the type of activism that we want to try to do.

Lincoln: Did the retreat change your thinking about non-violent direct action?

Joe: I don't think it totally changed my thinking about it, but I do think that it was part of a series of events and experiences that challenged some of the nonviolent direct action orthodoxy that I had absorbed through the CW. It has made me much more open to being in coalition and working with organizations and activists and organizers who don't necessarily share my . . . my nonviolent ethos. To be in coalition with them and then do an action together, and then allow space for different types of ways of interacting with the police, for example.

Cause at our action, you know, the CWs that were

there had a very different—well *some*, not all the CWs there—Had a very different way to interact with the police than some of the BLM activists, which was good. I'm glad that difference was there, and I feel that action was part of helping me move into a space where I'm fine to work with people who aren't going to be friendly or cordial to the police. Or even with people who are gonna be aggressive and confrontational with them.

Katie: I don't have much of a framework around that in practice, so I learned a lot... In that event and over the past few years, the question to me has been "What is violence, and who experiences what violence?"

I think this question can be applied in so many different ways with so many different things. It's really important to ask how you define violence. What are the limits of violence or limits of nonviolence and um... I think the action itself is part of this huge conversation that's [going on] in the CW right now, around strategy, like historical CW strategy, and other strategies that Joe was talking about. Other ways of being in coalition with people who do actions differently and have different ideas. Like there's not one way forward. And how can we learn to question our own definitions?

Lincoln: Did the retreat change your participation in BLM or other protests?

Joe: I think it really strengthened our personal relationships with some of the BLM organizers and others. There's another organization that helps BLM called Black Liberation Project (BLP). That's another group that we've worked with. So yeah, I think with the BLM organizers, Lena and Kandace especially, that experience really helped build our trust of each other, and [in the] future kind of collaboration that we've done, it gave us confidence that we as a community could plan and carry out actions, and the legal recourses [arising] from them.

Katie: From allyship to followership was the frame of the actual retreat, and I think the learning through hosting that retreat and being in relationship with the BLM organizers was about what followership looks like. What does it look like to be a white activist in the Cities in this critical time? As Joe was saying, it gave us some different perspectives around the need to check in with people of color to get an OK to move forward. We come from a tradition that is rich and has a perspective, and we can move forward in our own way, in relationship with people of color and other groups.

Lincoln: Did the retreat change what you think about the CW?

Joe: I don't know if it changed, but it has made me more hopeful about the future of the CW. To see the way in which our CW community has now built solidarity and relationship with the BLMM, for instance. I think that's a hopeful relationship, that the CW has a place in this burgeoning movement, and it can fulfill a unique role. I mean not only has a place but is needed and useful.

"I do think that, by and large, there is a CW culture that isn't necessarily based on following the lead of other organizations, when it comes to direct actions, particularly with groups led by people of color and women and queer people.

So it was hopeful to see the CW coalescing around that vision of followership, and then coming together to pull off a really successful action.." - Joe

Other activists and organizers I respect outside of the movement saw that, and validated us and what we were doing. So it was hopeful in that way, and it was hopeful in that—and I don't want to presume that the action we did was like totally new within the history of the CW or whatever, and we've gotten pushback from our elders about getting too arrogant—but I'm sure that some of this stuff *is* brand new. I do think that, by and large, there is a CW culture that isn't necessarily based on following the lead of other organizations, when it comes to direct actions, particularly with groups led by people of color and women and queer people. So it was hopeful to see the CW coalescing around that vision of followership, and then together to pull off a really successful action.

Katie: Yeah. I felt really connected to the CW. I'm really proud of it. I felt we were vulnerable in hosting. I'm like a new person in the movement, I felt, "Yeah, I'm a part of this and, we're putting this out there, and it's messy, and it's imperfect, but we did a good job, and we're trying really hard." I felt a lot of investment from other CWs, in their openness and support of and participation in the action. Even in those uncomfortable moments, I felt like we were doing it together and that was a good, good way to feel.



LENA GARDNER

Co-Facilitator of the Minneapolis Faith and Resistance Retreat

Lena Gardner was raised in Golden Valley, Minnesota. Lena Gardner holds a masters degree in Justice and Peace Studies from United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities. She co-founded the Black Lives Matter Minneapolis (BLMM) chapter in September 2014 and was a member of its Core Team at the Resistance Retreat. In 2017 she began serving as the inaugural Executive Director of Black Lives of Unitarian Universalism (BLUU)—an organizing collective born out of collaboration from Unitarian Universalists involved with the Movement for Black Lives. For the Catholic Worker Resistance Retreat, Lena assisted in designing and facilitating both the learning experiences and the action.

Lena met three members of the Rye House Catholic Worker—Joe Kruse, Katie Yanike, and Zed—at local actions and, as she says, they bonded over shared visions of beloved community and dismantling capitalism. Then she was invited for dinner at Rye House, where the community explained Catholic Worker Faith and Resistance Retreats and invited her in as a partner. The Black Lives Matter Minneapolis (BLMM) core team agreed and she invited Kandace Montgomery, another member of the BLMM Core Team to join her.

Lena: We were still dealing with Jamar Clark, who had been killed, and we were trying to get justice for him and his family. So we said, “Yeah, let’s do it.” Kandace

has more experience in direct action training than I do and together we planned with the CWs over several months, with dinners at Rye House where we got really clear about the goals and the mood of the group and built out what I think was a beautiful retreat and action.

Overall, the sessions that Kandace and I presented went really well. People like Kathy Kelly were there and also people who had never done a direct action before, so a big spectrum. Once we moved into the direct action part and tried to apply some of the things we talked about, you could see some of what I call “real life” white supremacy rearing its head.

We brought in attorneys to give people some idea of the legal risks they’d be taking in being on the “red team,” the team planning on getting arrested. But oh, the questions about the action! They seemed to be more about control and power and really, they’re a response to anxiety. So how do you usher people through that?

To manage anxiety, they try to have everything hyper planned out and to know all of the variables. As if that matters, as if that could influence how the police respond. As a movement we talk about how there’s always three things: white supremacy, patriarchy, and the cops. Those things are always there and you just have to operate from that modality. In the end, all the questioning devolves into white neuroticism around control and domination.

With Black folks, it’s a night and day difference. Not that Black people also can’t uplift white supremacy, because they can, but the Black folks that we know would mostly just listen to the plan and then be “Cool. Let’s go.” Without sometimes asking questions that they should ask. It’s a different culture, and I think it comes right out of privilege. Black folks operate all the time in a world where so much is out of our control.

Lydia: I also recall people having a good bit of discomfort in not knowing what the action was until pretty late in the game, which is different for most Catholic Workers. How was the decision made to withhold details of what the action was going to be?



Photo by Josh Miller

Lena: Oh, that was a security measure. That's a direct action strategy. You don't want to give that information away because the police find out right away, and then your action is dead in the water.

Lydia: When I interviewed Kathy Kelly she told me she tends to publicize even her high risk actions as much as possible.

Lena: I think that's again a demonstration of privilege. Certainly white activists have a different level of surveillance and scrutiny than Black activists. You know, like there's a Black identity extremist list, but is there a white counterpart to that? From our perspective and from having other events infiltrated by the police and interfered with by the police . . . You know, I'm on an FBI list; I was with Kandace, and I'm probably still on those lists [so] it becomes a different place.

Lena told Lydia she thought the actions went as well as they did because the Catholic Workers came to trust the leadership. Kandace facilitated stopping the light rail train and Lena facilitated shutting an auto intersection and doing a banner drop from a parking ramp near the stadium. The banner was supposed to be secured from the top of the ramp by sandbags, but it was a really windy day and the sandbags started blowing down to the street below.

Lena: I actually watched a police officer, of all people, narrowly miss [getting hit by] a sandbag. And I was like "Oh man! We have to abort!" So they eventually got the banner unstuck and pulled it up and were fine. They didn't even get arrested because there was just a security guard up there.

After that hiccup on our side . . . I was sad that we couldn't hold the intersection and the banner placement longer, but. . . We also had a number of young Black folks that were part of a group called the Black Liberation Project [BLP]. I remember a Black man who got out of a car and disagreed with what we were doing. I have a non-engagement strategy with people of any color, but a person from BLP did not have that strategy and started screaming back at him. So that was a new variable for me.

But yeah, we pulled back and went back to the church, and the feedback I got from people was that it was right to pull out. So that's how it goes. You plan and plan, and then sandbags start falling so what are you gonna do? We got the photo op, which was one of our goals for that particular part of the action. The folks blocking the light rail didn't have anything like that happen and they were able to hold.

Since the retreat, Lena has continued to work with the folks at Rye House, including a Good Friday action at the governor's mansion.

Lena: There was a bill in the statehouse that would increase blocking a highway from a petty misdemeanor to a gross misdemeanor and also would stick protesters with the law enforcement response cost. And the governor would not commit to vetoing that bill so our message on Good Friday was "You need to veto this bill." I heard from Joe, who knew somebody who knew someone who worked in the governor's mansion, who said [the governor] saw the whole action and that it really affected him. I'd like to think that it had some role in [the governor] later vetoing that bill. I definitely think we need to stay in community with the Catholic Workers. I just joined the Center for Prophetic Imagination which Zed and Mark co-founded and are running.

Lydia: Oh that's great! Is there anything else you feel is important to get on the record about the Faith and Resistance Retreat?

Lena: On a personal level, I was just very touched that there were white people really grappling with systems of oppression and empire and beloved community and doing it in a visible, visceral way. And doing it in relationship. A number of people in the Black community were deeply affected and said they didn't think there were white folks out there who were like that.

You know there's so much white fuckery in the world, and to work with a group of white folks in their understanding and analysis of racial justice, and not having them erase the uniqueness of the legacy of Black people in this country which, you know, is what a lot of white reformers do. We so often get shoved under this umbrella of "People of Color and Indigenous people" and I think that does a disservice to the particular problems that the Black community is facing.

It was also beautiful that they were willing to compensate us for all of the work. A lot of people want us to do it for free. Not understanding the depth of not only the learned experience and knowledge that we have, but also the emotional work that it takes to be in those spaces. So feeling like we were adequately compensated—I mean it shouldn't be a thing, but it was. Like a good thing.

And lastly the worship service the day after was such a powerful experience. It really connected me to the Catholic Workers in some way that I don't yet fully understand.



KANDACE MONTGOMERY

Co-Facilitator of the Minneapolis Faith and Resistance Retreat

Kandace Montgomery grew up in rural Maine and fled her back-of-the-woods town to the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, where she studied Public Health and began community organizing. She is “an unapologetically fierce Black, queer, womanist organizer, done with the structural and intentional oppression placed on her people for the benefit of corporate interests and profits.” She helped to organize a Black Lives Matter chapter in Minneapolis and met Catholic Workers from Rye House who were working as allies with BLM. She was serving as a member of its Core Team when Lena Gardner asked her to help facilitate both the learning experience and the action for the Retreat.

Lydia: What were your initial thoughts when you were asked to work with the Midwest Faith & Resistance Catholic Worker Retreat?

Kandace: This wasn’t the first time I had been invited to work with a group; so I was generally happy. Also, I think it’s really important that folks were paying because the work that I do that makes it matter oftentimes is unpaid. It can be a model of resource redistribution. From the beginning, the project was around direct action, tapping into the tradition of civil disobedience within the Catholic Worker movement and centering the political education sessions on the Black radical tradition, particularly around civil disobedience. What brought me on board was the idea that white folks would be willing to put their bodies on the line when it had primarily been young Black youth who had been doing that work.

Lydia: How do you think people responded to the presentations?

Kandace: Our big question was, “How do we balance giving folks both hard skills and information through a Black lens?” There was definitely an age gap. A more millennial group of white folks, having been in practice in a lot of different ways and in relationship with Black folks in a lot of different ways, were also able to see that

“We landed around a largely symbolic action— disrupting the culture of whiteness in which folks can go to a Twin Cities ball game and not have to be confronted with the reality of anti-Blackness and state violence. Bringing it to people’s front doors, so to speak. So part of the action was an intervention at the light rail in front of the Twin Cities stadium.”

-Kandace

gap, and at the same time be critical. So what was our role in supporting an older white crew, generally more radical, in terms of being interested in uprooting systems, and how do we push [a group of older folk] around their ideologies and understanding [into] more of an intersectional lens, and not be in an elitist position about that? And so wrestling with some of those questions, as well.

We wanted them to think about how they are showing up for Black folks in a way that is transformative. So that is how we figured out the final agenda. As we moved into setting up the direct action, there were definitely moments where [I saw] a lot of emotional labor on top of the intellectual labor.

We asked some Black youth who had been practicing civil disobedience to come and support the action and seeing some of them rubbed some folks, quite frankly. It was interesting to see how those tensions came up and the ways Black youth younger than me were challenging white folks to get in line with Black leadership.

We were prepped that there was a small group of Black folks or folks of Color [coming to the retreat from Catholic Worker communities], and about the isolation those folks feel and their hunger for more complex conversations that have an intersectional lens. As a facilitator and an organizer, [remembering this] helped me to stand on steadier ground, in saying that I’m going to show up as my unapologetic Black queer self, and really push you to be down and to be ready.



Ideally, I prefer that actions are planned ahead of time. Because actions are actually about escalation, and escalation requires strategy, which requires planning and wanting to make the largest impact with the resources [you have]. We landed around a largely symbolic action—disrupting the culture of whiteness in which folks can go to a Twin Cities ball game and not have to be confronted with the reality of anti-blackness and state violence. Bringing it to people’s front doors, so to speak. So part of the action was an intervention at the light rail in front of the Twin Cities stadium.

Lydia: What motivated the decision that the details of the action weren’t shared with the Catholic Workers until fairly late in the game?

Kandace: Primarily security culture. Yep, security culture. The way that I have been trained and practice direct action is that you have specific roles and responsibilities and forms of communication are tiered. Different information is shared among different groups of people in order to make sure that things go effectively and that we’re able to minimize any intervention by the State.

Lydia: Yeah. That’s often not familiar to Catholic Workers and part of it is that many of them want to be decision makers.

Kandace: Yeah, I do remember that. But people were able to be pushed and see that they didn’t have to lead everything, and that this is what it really means to be in solidarity and in practice. But it was frustrating, especially during prep.

Lydia: How did you feel the actual action went off?

Kandace: I thought it was effective. It was really dope. I got a lot of really good feedback, especially from the Black folks who helped to do a lot of the “day of” coordination. Folks were able to feel transformed in the work, and that was important to me. Also it was fun to bring it right to people’s sports, [to their] ball game and to challenge them in that way.



KATHY KELLY

Participant in the 2016 Faith and Resistance Retreat

Kathy Kelly was born in Chicago in 1952 and it has remained her home base, although she travels frequently in the cause of peace and justice and has been imprisoned for nonviolent civil disobedience actions in several states. She received a BA from Loyola University in Chicago and an MA in Religious Education from Chicago Theological Seminary. A war tax refuser since 1982, Kathy was one of the founding members of Voices in the Wilderness, a campaign to end the US/UN sanctions against Iraq. Voices organized over seventy delegations to Iraq, bringing food and medicine directly to Iraqi citizens in deliberate violation of both UN-imposed economic sanctions and US law, with Kathy traveling on 26 of these delegations and refusing to pay the imposed fines.

She was present in Baghdad for two months during the US invasion in 2003. In 2005, Voices in the Wilderness disbanded, and the group Voices for Creative Non-violence was formed to continue challenging US military and economic warfare. Until it closed in 2020, it carried

on extensive activism in Afghanistan, Gaza, Jeju Island in South Korea, several US drone bases, and US congressional offices, all in the cause of peace.

Kathy came to the Faith and Resistance Retreat because she wanted to learn from Black Lives Matter activists about the police killings of people of color in the Twin Cities. Following the training days, she joined others obstructing a Minneapolis Metro bus on April 11, the opening day of the Twins baseball season.

Kelly notes that during the trial, there was barely a mention of Jamar Clark, police executions, or the systemic racism in communities where people of color are executed with no questions asked. She was found guilty and left Minneapolis convinced that “we can never be acquitted of our responsibility to continue breaking the terrible silence surrounding unjust executions that afflict people of color in the US.”

Kathy: There seemed to be a commitment on the part of [the facilitators] to try to get us to toss aside our pre-

sumptions of how things should go and be guided by people who have a different perception of developing a nonviolent action than old timers like me. The planning for the action was quite a departure from what I'm accustomed to, so there was a tendency, probably with my colonized mind, to think, "Wait a minute! This is not what I'm easily comfortable with."

Lydia: Can you talk about how this shift impacts what it means to be nonviolent?

Kathy: Well, my consistent experience has been that the means you use determines the end you get.

We were being asked to trust that the action would be planned carefully and well, but we weren't asked to be in on its details. In fact, in order to be able to carry out a pretty dramatic and challenging action, it was felt that it was extremely important for the details not to be disclosed, even to the people who would be the participants. So we were going forward with just a lot of trust.

We didn't know what the action [was] going to be, and our input wasn't particularly sought. We were needed for this action—it was certainly invitational—but there was a very high value placed on the trust level. I think trust is important and also setting aside one's presumption of being "in the know" and allowing others in the know to move forward, but also—and please, cut me off if I am going too far—looking back on this experience, I can see much more clearly now, that even though it was a very important retreat, it was just a stop along the way.

There's a continuum being developed in the history of actions specific to Minnesota, specific to the police brutality, to killings and to very, very raw and rough treatment of the people who are protesting, so there needed to be an event in which people who weren't normally part of those protests would be included in an action so that the case would go into court. *(2-3 minutes of recording lost due to technical difficulties)*

Lydia: How did you feel, not knowing the details of the action?

Kathy: I've never participated, for instance, in a traditional Plowshares action, which demands a great deal of



Photo by Vanessa Shuck

secrecy. A group I was part of planted corn on nuclear missile silo sites and we talked about it [beforehand] everywhere we could. Being responsible for communicating the purpose and the intent of the action as widely as possible is something I've always thought was an important part of the truthforce in nonviolent direct action: that every means that you can come up with, given energies and resources, is used to try to communicate what you are doing and why. That was impossible [in Minneapolis] because we didn't know what we were doing, or where, or [whether] there would be some means of communicating to the public or to onlookers or to

people affected by the action.

So I can't say that I felt like I was experiencing something that was . . . was an advance on what I had done before, because I had no idea of what we were going to do. And I'm still at the point where I wouldn't set aside. . .if I'm planning an action or part of planning an action, I'm probably not going to say that I want to do [it] in secrecy.

Lydia: So why did you decide to participate anyway?

Kathy: Well, it wasn't a difficult decision. I felt I really needed to hear the idea of "lean out so that others can lean in" and to practice placing trust in other people. And I couldn't imagine a better context in which to do this than with the people who had come together for that retreat. I have a lot of trust in people who decide to get involved in the Catholic Worker in the first place, and the Minneapolis people definitely trusted the Black Lives Matter community.

Lydia: How did your part in the action go down?

Kathy: I stood in front of a bus and blocked it, and others had the intersection cut off. Some younger Black activists who had not been very much a part of the [planning], expressed real joy. They seemed happy over our success in blocking the entrance to the stadium. People even danced in the streets a little and I remember liking that. But I do want to emphasize that throughout the process of arrest and being detained, we were



never harmed in the slightest; in fact we were treated very politely. I think all of us were white people, and that seems to me to be one of the major justice issues that emerged—that people have been tasered and pepper sprayed and criminalized and threatened and, you know, treated as though they were doing something wrong and bad for protesting. And made to feel frightened perhaps, whereas for us it was comparatively safe. We really were not treated much differently than we would have been treated going through TSA at O’Hare Airport. Maybe some inconvenience, but not treated badly.

Lydia: What was your sentencing by the court?

Kathy: I was sentenced to 10 days in the workhouse, and then [the judge] said she would give me a stay of execution. I don’t know if it’s still in effect, but the idea is that if I didn’t get arrested in Minneapolis again, I wouldn’t have to serve the 10 days. My co-defendant Dan Wilson was acquitted, which I think is important. The lawyer was very skillful.

Lydia: What are some takeaways from the retreat and the action?

Kathy: I continue to trust the motivation of Catholic Workers. Finding ways for the pursuit of justice and equality through nonviolence can and should take on new dimensions, but I don’t think that means that what’s gone before should be pitched. So I think it’s kind of a “both and.” It’s not always so easy to find the equilibrium. Another takeaway for me was that, in being arrested in another state, maintaining relationships with people who are part of that process is not always plausible, especially because my schedule doesn’t always have me even in the country. I think community actions where people have strong relationships and the chance to maintain them are important. Now that doesn’t mean I’ll never do another out-of-state action again, but I recognize the difficulties.

On the other hand, there’s a lot of good in gatherings of CW’s who come from different parts of the country. I guess I just regret that I wasn’t very present myself to the process of preparing for court. ✦

Rosalie Riegle

Participant in the Minneapolis Faith and Resistance Retreat

Rosalie Riegle was born in 1937 in Flint, Michigan and lived most of her adult life in Saginaw. After raising four children and receiving tenure at Saginaw Valley State University, she “wrote her way” into the Catholic Worker by collecting and publishing an oral history, *Voices from the Catholic Worker* (Temple University Press, 1993). A few years later, after the end of her marriage, she and two other women opened the Mustard Seed Catholic Worker in Saginaw. Later, when she was teaching only half-time, she started another Catholic Worker house in Saginaw with former students.

In 2003, Orbis Books published her oral biography of Dorothy Day and the next year Rosalie retired and moved to Evanston, Illinois to be closer to her grandchildren. Since that time, she has been arrested several times in nonviolent actions for peace and has published two oral histories of resisters who were imprisoned for resisting war and its instruments. She remains active in the larger Catholic Worker movement and with the Su

Casa Catholic Worker.

Rosalie: The whole weekend was more engaging than at other faith and resistance retreat, where we sometimes feel so “talked to.” We’ve always had people from outside at Faith and Resistance Retreats but I had never attended one with everything planned and facilitated by Black people. The other big difference was in action planning. In these retreats, the folks at the retreats always decided what to do and how and sometimes even what we’d focus on. Realizing it had already been decided in Minneapolis and that we were going to be told what to do was just a huge...a huge change for me, and kind of an emotional thing because I was so used to being in control.

It wasn't that we didn't have decisions to make: We could decide where to go and what group to be in, and in a way, um.... it was good to not have to spend so much time in consensus-building. The one time I really

faced big time in jail was years ago in Omaha [at a Faith and Resistance Retreat.] I was one of 6 or 7 risking arrest and [there]. I wanted to know exactly what I was doing and to be in on the planning; Minneapolis was a different model.

Then I start thinking about my model for nonviolent direct action and realizing that it was just such...a ritual. Something we unknowingly accepted as the way to do nonviolent civil disobedience. You walk in, kneel down, say a prayer. They tell us to leave, we keep praying, and then they arrest us. But just because I like kneeling down and saying a Hail Mary for my direct action doesn't mean that it's *the* direct action.

Even the symbols were pretty much absolutely meaningless. Now I think, "Did we really decide or were we just following what everybody had done before?" The Minneapolis weekend called the whole process of nonviolent civil disobedience into question for me.

For starters, the [Minneapolis people] knew a lot more [about] what to do than a bunch of imports did. So my initial discomfort with being told what to do when it was already planned, was kinda' silly. It was pretty late in the game when I realized that, and maybe we wouldn't have had the anxiety if we'd known ahead of time that it was pre-planned. But also, we wouldn't have had the learning.

I finally realized that what I had thought was nonviolent direct action was just *one* kind of nonviolent direct action. Now I knew this intellectually. I've written books about it. I knew all sorts of nonviolent direct action tactics, but I had been valuing the particular kind of ladylike nonviolent action that I liked to do. I guess I thought that it was better than other kinds of nonviolent action, particularly . . . well, I didn't believe in yelling, whereas I know intellectually that yelling is not physically violent, but emotionally it still is to me. Because even in [one-on-one] relationships, if I'm angry at someone and yell out in anger, I actually get sick to my stomach. And also, the yelling itself feeds my anger and makes me more angry.



Photo by Vanessa Shuck

So I'm trying to be peacefully angry, if that makes sense, and I did actually practice this a little bit last year, in the streets of Chicago - in an action where I yelled and pumped my fist. It's not anything that comes naturally--to see if I can [act] appropriately - and controlled—angry and not be sick-to-my-stomach angry. I think that uncontrolled anger is violent, whether it is against one person or against the world, and I don't want to do that. I want to learn to be controlled angry. And I think I saw controlled anger in Minneapolis.

The anxiety the night before wasn't enough to make me say, "No, I don't want to be in the action." But as it turned out the next day, I decided to be in a group of people who would just be standing on the sideline. I think we had signs and were supposed to talk and [engage bystanders] but I think I just didn't know enough. I didn't feel in control. I don't want to say I didn't. I didn't trust them, but it was [an issue of] control and if I stayed on the sidewalk instead of going in the street I was more in control of myself.

Lydia: During the actual action, what stuck out for you when you were standing with the signs on the sidewalk?

Rosalie: Um . . . I remember feeling really guilty when Greg [Naar-Obed] led the blind Black woman out to the middle of the street to stop the traffic, and I thought, "Jesus, Rosalie, you're such a chickenshit! She's out there and she can't even see!" I also felt that the people in our little group on the sidewalk had a chance to do more than we did but we didn't. After the banner drop didn't happen because of the high wind, I didn't know what we were supposed to do but I remember thinking, "Gee, I'm [just] *looking* at an action."

Lydia: It seems like a common theme with this is trust and if you were able to trust organizers or movements. How has it affected your involvement with the BLM locally? Has it impacted your trust in the organizations and what you are willing or not willing to do?



Rosalie: I haven't done a whole lot since then [with BLM protests]. When I think about it, I could have trusted more than I did and I think that [the retreat] has made it easier to trust since then. You know, I really learned more in the Minneapolis action than I've learned in writing two books about this stuff because it was experiential learning.

After Minneapolis, I haven't really risked arrest. I've been in several protests and I've actually enjoyed not being in control, which is kind of new for me. It's kind of nice that someone is taking care of it. Part of it is my age, but I also don't ever want to be part of a huge protest where there might be people running. I'm not sure enough on my feet to be a part of a protest like that.

Lydia: What are some of the takeaways that the larger CW movement has experienced from this? Or things that you hope that they come away with?

Rosalie: Every day white people learn more about how racist they are, and I think that the learning that happened to me personally in Minneapolis made me more aware of my own feelings when something surprising happens. I think I'm a little more self-analytical since being in Minneapolis, that plus trying to come to terms

with the idea of controlled anger.

When I think about my part in it, or rather, my non-part, I am ashamed of myself. I didn't really trust enough on Saturday night when we had to decide what we were going to do. If I had trusted more on Saturday night, I wouldn't have felt I wasted my time [during the action].

I've been to probably 8 or 10 faith and resistance retreats and the two that have changed me the most were the ones when I was arrested [in Omaha] and risking 6 months, and this one. As far as changes in my spirituality and in my life as a Catholic Worker, I think the Minneapolis one was more impactful, even though I wrote two books because of the other one. The changes are still going on inside me - and it isn't just about Minneapolis, it's the continuing discussion about racism [in me and in the Worker as a whole]. For instance, [at the fall Catholic Worker Sugar Creek retreat last weekend] there were two workshops on our racism. It's not like the CW's have decided that we're a racist group so on to the next battle. People are still working on it.



Dan Wilson

Participant in the Minneapolis Faith and Resistance Retreat

Dan Wilson moved into the Winona Catholic Worker in 2010. Initially planned as a gap year between college and medical school, being there changed his life trajectory. He met his partner, Rachel Stoll, at a School of the Americas protest. After living briefly together at the Milwaukee Catholic Worker, they biked to Tucson, AZ to provide humanitarian aid on the U.S./Mexico border. Returning to the Midwest, they worked on an organic farm and moved to an intentional land co-op south of Winona, MN. Dan currently volunteers at the Winona Catholic Worker, raises grass fed beef, and became a father in Feb 2021. He was interviewed in October 2018 by Lydia Wong.

Dan: The Faith and Resistance Retreat in St Louis in 2015 was a real punch in the gut. It made me begin to question the core values of the Catholic Worker. It was uh...a critical take on how the Catholic Worker inhabits racism but also has a history of challenging those rac-

isms.

I remember Joe Kruse giving a really good talk about the specific ways the Catholic Worker history has been racist [and] ways in which Dorothy Day had not acknowledged Black leadership. Then Lincoln Rice gave a talk about Arthur Falls which was super-interesting.

In 2016 in Minneapolis, it was interesting to see how our movement fit into the larger movement, especially from the presentations by those heavily involved in Black Lives Matter. This was anti-racist theory grounded in concrete organizing, whereas in St. Louis it was anti-racist training in general, dealing in the abstract. There it felt kind of messy when they tried to apply it to the real world because different people were applying it in different ways. [In Minneapolis] it was nice to have presenters give us specific examples and talk about how the principles work in the real world.

One of the women from BLM in Minneapolis talked about why BLM had been so insistent on being women-led and women-focused and accepting of the sexuality spectrum. If an inclusive movement is built that way, it doesn't have to be built again. The Civil Rights era got a lot done but it was all men who were pushing women and student leadership down and lifting up heterosexual men. Inevitably, this [weakened] the movement, so if we start on all the right feet now, we won't have to go back later and re-examine our beginnings. I've seen the fruit of that in the ways that BLM is still incredibly relevant to all these conversations.



Lydia: You mentioned that you were struggling to reconcile CW core values with what you heard at the St. Louis retreat. Can you be more specific?

Dan: Well, I was living in Tucson, and I visited the St. Louis house about a month after Mike Brown had been killed. When we got back to Tucson, we were organizing with different groups and kind of getting a sense of the culture of Black Lives Matter and what this new organizing for change looked like. It was young, it was vibrant, it was critical, it was action-forward. It didn't pay a lot of attention to some of the CW ideas that we've always held onto like planning action months in advance, greeting the police when they show up and shaking their hands, holding out your hands for the handcuffs, stuff like that. In my interactions with BLM, that was definitely not the case.

So then I moved back to Minnesota. At the St. Louis retreat, I felt this tension between what the BLM movement is and was at this moment, a tension between that and what the Catholic Workers had been comfortable with. A dichotomy, really. A lot of the BLM actions were beyond the CW comfort zone and Catholic Workers were just starting to struggle with that. If it's beyond our comfort zone, does that mean it's bad or is it just different?

I definitely feel I saw some communities stumble in talk-

ing about race or interacting about race. At that St. Louis conference, we were sitting in a conference room at a high school and talking about how as white people we take up space and feel we're entitled to take up space. We're having these heart-to-hearts and then in the next room there's a birthday party going on—primarily black

kids and their parents—and they all started dancing. Well, some of the CWs went in there and started dancing as well, and I just felt. . . . really cringe. I remember I got up and left and other Workers did, too. That felt like a perfect example of how white people feel they can just walk into a room and take up space.

Photo by Vanessa Shuck

That one interaction kind of framed the retreat for me. The Worker was confronted by the fact that we don't do anti-racism work very well and that we needed to do something about that. It felt like there was a lot of resistance, not a little bit of resistance but a lot, because, "Hey! We're radical, we're super-radical, so obviously we care about anti-racism stuff."

Lydia: In Minneapolis, did you feel any of the same pushback?

Dan: Not strong pushback. I remember feeling sad that some of the older Workers weren't fully participating in some of the workshops. I realized that it might be better if they didn't, and that they might have known that. I definitely felt there was more wanting to listen and to move forward.

Lydia: How did you feel about not knowing the details of the action ahead of time?

Dan: I didn't have a problem with that because I understood the tactic. I think I might have been super-wary if it had been the first time I was going to be arrested and if it wasn't in my home state.

Lydia: Can you talk a bit about what role you played in the action?

Dan: I was just a participant, and that speaks to being able to use our bodies as a resource. We blocked the light rail from coming into the Twins' Station and that blocked train ended up blocking the whole system. We were at one of the main entrances for the stadium, and along a parking ramp, kind of across the street [from the stadium]. A lot of people were walking into the stadium [for the game]. There were mixed reactions. I think probably one in ten was supportive. I'd say about one in five was openly disdainful, and the majority were just being "Minnesota nice" about it, like clenching their teeth and not saying anything.

I felt happy about the action. It was a good action in the sense that the police had to actually pull us off the line instead of just tapping us on the shoulder and saying, "You're arrested. Walk along with me." I think folks did a better job of making the police work for it. That may feel like a technicality, but that's one of the things that came out of the St. Louis retreat This [action] felt more true to the experience of BLM, where it wasn't antagonistic, but it was, "We're going to be here, and if you want us to leave, you're going to actually have to do your job and put my hands behind my back and push me off the line." Which felt good.

Lydia: What's your major takeaway from the Minneapolis retreat?

Dan: Well, I remember leaving the St. Louis retreat not knowing what an anti-racist movement would look like in the CW or how the movement could move forward on it. I left Minneapolis being really excited and proud of the Minneapolis Worker, feeling that they had kind of found that third way. People were throwing around the term "followership" a lot during the retreat and that's what it really came down to. During the months of organizing with folks, they had really built a good relationship. They weren't coming in saying, "I'm Catholic Worker. I've had ten years of doing this, let me show you how to organize for social change."

Lydia: Are there any other takeaways from the weekend that we haven't talked about, something that's important to you?

Dan: Well, I remember during jury selection for our trial, the majority of the [potential] jurors thought police brutality was an issue and that something should be done about it. I think that speaks to the strength and capacity for BLM Minneapolis to change the narrative around policing. And the fact that I was acquitted—there was a reasonable doubt as to the relation between where I was standing and the train car. Even though I was obviously standing in a line (and no one has seen it as reasonable doubt in other trials like this), there was enough sympathy with the jurors to acquit me. I think that sympathy was related to the on-the-ground work BLM Minneapolis had been doing. It really speaks volumes about

their capacity to effect change and to move the conversation forward. I'm excited to think that our action enabled them to keep the narrative in tension and also that we were able to give them a low-energy action, in that they didn't have to do jail support. We were kind of self-contained so that was helpful to them as a movement.

One thing I'm wondering about is where anti-racism work falls into—or fall with—anti-sexism work. I'm wondering how the Catholic Worker is going to interact with the resurgence of "Me Too." It feels like the Worker is perpetually about a half-step behind what's happening in the larger culture as far as activism

goes. The Worker now has a better sense of its relationship to racism, and I'm wondering how our community will interact with sexism. Will we begin to view ourselves as an anti-sexist organization and an anti-sexual violence organization? I hope we still have capacity and flexibility for self-examination.



Source: Just Seeds Artist: Kaitlynn Radloff



The Catholic Worker Anti Racism Review

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