



**We are
Called**

TO HEAL. TO UNITE. TO JUSTICE.

Team Reflection—Huddle

No. 8 Maternal Mortality

Attention –Content covers sensitive topics pertaining to maternal mortality. Feel free to dismiss yourself from in-person participation if at any time if you feel uncomfortable or feel the need to give yourself space.

Lamentably, about 700 women die each year in the U.S. during pregnancy, at delivery or soon after delivery. While there is some dispute over reporting, what is not in dispute are the grim disparities when stratifying these data by race/ethnicity. Black women experience the highest risk, 3 to 4 times that of their peers. [8.1] Many speculate that this disturbing and perplexing disparity is due to "weathering." That is, the daily lived experience of Black women enduring continuous discriminatory behaviors — however subtle — which produces increased and sustained levels of toxic stress-induced chemicals in the body that causes cumulative and harmful effects. [8.3]

Catholic health ministries have a cherished hallmark of caring especially for those marginalized by society. Indeed, while the solutions to these highly complex problems will emerge from the collective work of many gifted people with full hearts and minds, it is invaluable that we come to understand more deeply the shared suffering experienced by BIPOC families.

Dr. M. Shawn Copeland, a retired professor from Boston College, offers this reflection on suffering from a womanist perspective: "Suffering always means pain, disruption, separation, and incompleteness. It can render us powerless and mute, push us to the borders of hopelessness and despair." Therefore, she continues, "Suffering in a womanist perspective is characterized by remembering and retelling, by resisting, by redeeming." In short, it reminds us of those who "came through" and those who have "gone on to glory land." [8.4] May the suffering and frustration of disparities in maternal mortality lead us all to a shared suffering, to remembering and to greater human flourishing for all parents, babies and families.

Consider

Are you aware of support that your organization or community partner provides to surviving family members and spouses when infant or maternal death occurs at your facility?



Let us pray together,
*Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.
Lord, hear my voice!
Let your ears be attentive
to the voice of my supplications!*

De Profundis, Psalm 130 (NRSV)

[8.1] <https://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/maternal-mortality/pregnancy-mortality-surveillance-system.htm>

[8.2] <https://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/maternal-mortality/disparities-pregnancy-related-deaths/infographic.html>

[8.3] <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/07/health/pregnancy-deaths-.html>

[8.4] M. Shawn Copeland, "Wading through many sorrows: Toward a theology of suffering in womanist perspective." *Feminist Ethics and the Catholic Moral Tradition*, (New York: Paulist Press), 1996, 136–163.