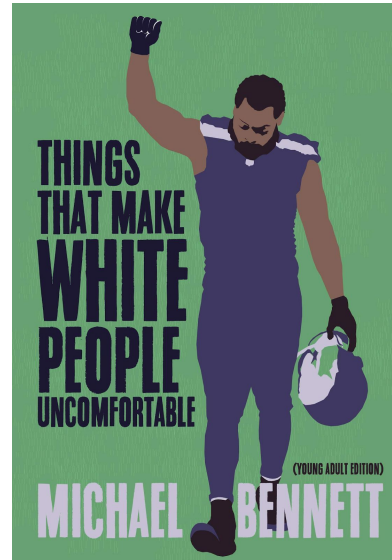


Thank you for joining us for the “Fall 2020 Coaches’ Shared Read” **Things That Make White People Uncomfortable** by Michael Bennett

Online discussion of the book will take place via Zoom and is open to the staff of St. Francis athletics. All are invited to join whether or not you have read all, part of very little of the book. This packet includes discussion questions from each chapter. You will also find links to related articles, prayers and a short video. Our hope is that Bennett challenged all readers in new ways and that his insights will prompt meaningful conversation about racism, bias, justice, forgiveness and more.



- *We have got to make the white population uncomfortable, because that is the only way to get their attention. —Bill Russell*
- *I’m not concerned with your liking or disliking me... All I ask is that you respect me as a human being. —Jackie Robinson*

Placed before the introduction, Bennett paired these two quotes together. What is the significance of their (collective) message?

Foreword

Brothers born just 15 months apart, Martellus and Michael both attended Texas A&M and now play in the NFL. The voice of the foreword, Tellus writes “So what is Mike’s superpower? It’s his unfiltered voice and ability to make people uncomfortable.” Respond

Introduction p 1-8

In referencing a quote by his favorite author, Pema Chodron, Bennett begins with the end in mind.

“We think that the point is to pass the test or to overcome the problem, but the truth is that things don’t really get solved. They come together and they fall apart. Then they come together again and fall apart again. It’s just like that. The healing comes from letting there be room for all of this to happen: room for grief, for relief, for misery, for joy.”

What does Chodron’s quote reveal to you about Michael Bennett the person, athlete, author and activist and why he wrote this book?

The Sit-Down/On Fear p 9-30

This chapter speaks to two separate, but corollary ideas.

The Sit-Down

“The Things That Make White People Uncomfortable” was published in 2018. Given recent events, some time and distance from the message of Colin Kaepernick as well as Sunday September 24 2017 (the day NFL players kneeled, locked arms or stayed in their dressing room during the anthem in protest against comments made by President Donald Trump), this chapter can’t help but be seen in a new light. What were some of the actions and reactions by NFL teams, players, coaches American politicians, and the public (in particular veterans) that stood out to you?

Quotes and statements from this section

- “At this point, I think if you are being silent, you’re making a choice & taking a side.” p 10
- “I want us to aspire to love one another, in all our differences.” p 11
- *It’s not about the flag man... Nobody is spitting on the flag or disrespecting it. We know you gave your life for it. We know that. And our gratitude in your services is deeply endeared. Understand that. But if somebody comes to your front porch and takes a piss, as a man, what are you going to do? Sit there and just watch him pee? Or are you gonna step outside and be like hey, what are you doing sir? You’re on private property. You’ve got to get off, or we’ll make you get off.* —Josh Normal p 16
- *Seattle Seahawks: As a team we have decided we will not participate in the national anthem. We will not stand for the injustice that has plagued people of color in this country. Out of love for our country and in honor of the sacrifices made on our behalf, we unite to oppose those that would deny our most basic freedoms. We remain committed in continuing to work towards freedom and equality for all.* p 17
- “There is no doubt that the original message of protesting racism in the criminal justice system, and showing solidarity with Colin Kaepernick got a little lost. How could it not?” p.19
- The struggle, the confrontation and the conversation that concludes with “And kind of like an after-school special, we expressed to one another that we could all understand what it means to be human with a need to protect our families.” p 22

On Fear

If demonstrating for these things makes you uncomfortable (human rights, fighting for injustice, fighting inequality), the question should *not* be “Why are you doing this?” The question needs to be turned around: “Why are you not?” What role does fear play in this conversation and how can we help young people “get in good trouble” (John Lewis) and abandon fear?

p 28: I told my coach Pete Carroll, “I feel morally wrong to be silent...”

- Do you think your athletes could have this conversation with you? Why and why not?

p 28: Bennett’s feelings about the game of football are not without contradiction. He writes “In an odd, funky way, football has prepared me for this more than probably any sports or other job could, save ones that hold the regular risk of physical danger. When you take the field you have to go out there with the mentality that any play could be your last, and you have to be at peace with that. You have to not just live in the moment but be in the moment. Full situational awareness.”

- What do you make of his complex feelings toward football both personally and professionally?
- What does your sport prepare athletes for outside of the game?

Roots p 31-48

p 38-39: “In school, we never learned how Black people built this country. We built America, for free, but in class our contributions were invisible...”

- Who else shares this burden of being invisible? What are young people learning about now that you did not?

p 39: “Being born Black is a preexisting condition in this society, with a set of stressors that you can’t understand without living in our skin.”

- What stressors are disproportionately placed on Blacks in the US.

The NCAA Will Give you PTSD p 49-68

P 50: “But for those top high school players, this sport is their identity, their culture, and their personhood. In college there is no preparation for what will happen to you, how it will feel when you’re done, when you don’t make the NFL or are just hanging on by a thread. Then the trauma hits you like a truck.”

- Bennett goes so far as to describe this reality as PTSD. Thoughts?

P 53-54: Many athletes have spoken out about being an athlete-student, not a student athlete and Bennett speaks passionately about this topic. Does he offer new insights? Perspective?

P. 50: We need to speak about the price we pay for these dreams—and failing. We need to talk about how this can result in chronic pain, depression, brain injury, and a lifetime of hurt (and pain addiction p 51).

- To what degree does sport intensify what is to be lost and what is to be gained for young people?
- How can we work with parents, families and athletes so these risks are mitigated?

P. 62: “I was half god, half property. But whichever half they were dealing with, I was never fully human.”

- The culture of professional sports is one where athletes are signed, traded and let go. Is this the nature of those games?
- Ought there be another way so male and female athletes can feel human? What might that look like? Is that possible?

Sports are NOT Integrated p 69-84

P. 71 Bennett speaks to feeling like a piece of meat at the NFL Combine. He takes issue with Fantasy Football in the way it takes the human side out of players. In light of the theme of this chapter, how do these characteristics of pro football contribute to the segregation Bennett sees in sport. He adds “even the word owner sounds terrible. I wish...we could call them CEOs or chairmen of the board like in any other business.” (NB: The NFL has no Black owners).

P 81: “The stupidest comments about Colin—the part that sets my teeth on edge—were people in the media saying he can’t be an athlete and an activist at the same like.”

- Now, Is there too much pressure for athletes to use their platform in this way? Not enough?

Soap Opera for Men p 85-102

P. 93-94: “Belichick is also more like Pete Carroll than people know. They are so opposite in superficial style, it’s as if they have come all the way around the circle to meet... Same ends, different means. They know how to reach players and they also understand the game. A lot of coaches don’t meet that description...”

- Are the two keys to success knowledge of the game and the athlete? Discuss.

P 100: “Today I’m going to work on this book, take my kids to the beach, attend a meeting about building a school in Africa, and run a science program for kids. You have to be able to do projects that impact the world or you’ll devolve into dust. You’ve got to be a human being. Enjoy yourself. It’s your life!”

- At times Bennett’s message is heavy and pointed, honest and direct, but not always in a way meant to make the reader (Black or white) uncomfortable. What other messages did you find joyful and playful?

Brotherhood p 103-126

P 98-101: Many athletes talk about the “brotherhood” or the sisterhood cultivated by their sport. Bennett speaks to the brotherhood’s strengths and limitations as it relates to football. Thoughts? Why was the Seattle Seahawks locker room successful? What was surprising to you?

P 107-125: “None of this brotherhood could have developed without our coach, Pete Carroll, the man who gets younger every year.” Bennett speaks at length about the way Pete Carroll respects and treats the players, in particular Black athletes. What strikes you as important?

Without Food, Your Ass is Going to Die p 127–150

Activism is important to Bennett. It’s why he’s involved in eliminating food deserts in black communities. What stood out to you about all has he learned from advocating for health and nutrition?

P 146: “In the same way, if I don’t like something that’s going on in society, I’ll let you know or I’ll try to do something about it. That’s not just how you find your voice. It’s how you keep from losing your mind.” How can we help others find their voice and sustain their minds!

“Food is war. It’s politics. It’s the environment. It’s culture. It’s peace. It’s family. It’s feast and famine. It’s all these different things.” Check out [this short video](#) about Kevin Longa and TASTE

- If people have good food and if people respect the people who make our food, we just become so much better as a community and as a world. Hopefully with these stories of *TASTE*, I’m able to share the story of not only food but also the story of us.

“N----r” p 151-162

P 156: This chapter might be the most important one in the book. Bennett explains the “magnitude and power” of this word, his use and misuse of the term, the danger of its normalization, the division it causes within the Black community and why he hopes to “drive it out of our vocabulary as a society...by looking honestly at American history. Respond and discuss.

***Time Out: A Moment of Silence for the Unarmed Who Died at the Hands of the Police* p 163-170**

Here is a [PRAYER FOR THE VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE](#) Offer your own

Loving God, you are the author and sustainer of our lives. You know the anguish of the sorrowful, you are attentive to the prayers of the brokenhearted. Hear your people who cry out to you in their need; strengthen their hope in your lasting goodness.

We pray today for those who have died because of violence. Draw them to yourself; let your face shine upon them. May they be greeted with choirs of angels and experience your eternal peace and joy.

Be near to all those who have been touched by violence: those who have been hurt, lost their loved ones or lost their sense of security. Be for them a steady comfort and safe resting place. Soften the hearts and steady of the minds of those who would do violence to others. May hate be replaced with love, violence with peace and darkness with your light. Amen.

Black Lives Matter p 171-194

Following the Floyd Mayweather—Conor McGregor fight in Las Vegas, Bennett is subjected to police brutality (p 179-181). He writes “Afterward, I went public with what happened. ...the Las Vegas police union accused me of lying. They called on the NFL to investigate my ‘false statements.’ ...I think the real reason for calling me a liar is that their whole worldview is built around the idea that racism in policing doesn’t exist. They would rather live in the comfort of that fiction than be forced to confront the uncomfortable truth: that racial profiling is a reality. For some, calling me a liar is also a cover for what they truly think: that I deserved to be brutalized and that Black lives simply do not matter.” p 182 This testimony isn’t unlike others we know and have heard. Where do we go from here?

Intersectionality Also Matters p 195-208

P 195: “Intersectionality is understanding that an individual can experience multiple types of injustice, which we need to acknowledge, and that although our struggles may be different, they overlap or intersect.” In what ways does Bennett model intersectionality?

P 198: “To practice intersectionality, I believe you have to remove yourself from the fear or discomfort of associating with certain groups or issues you’ve been taught to ignore. I know Black people who don’t care about immigrants, men who don’t care about women, and straight people who don’t care about gay people. Why are we like this?” Respond

Our Daughters and the Power of Women p 209-222

P 220-221: “The problem starts early, as high school sports stars are taught to see girls and women as objects, the sexual spoils of being a star athlete. Parents, coaches and schools often reinforce this, instead of working to change it....And when girls express an interest in football,

rather than saying, “Make them cheerleaders,” maybe we can start saying “Let’s teach them how to coach or become an executive or how to own a team.”

- How might parents, coaches and schools reinforce messages of objectification? What can we do to alter the culture?

Athletes for Impact p 223-236

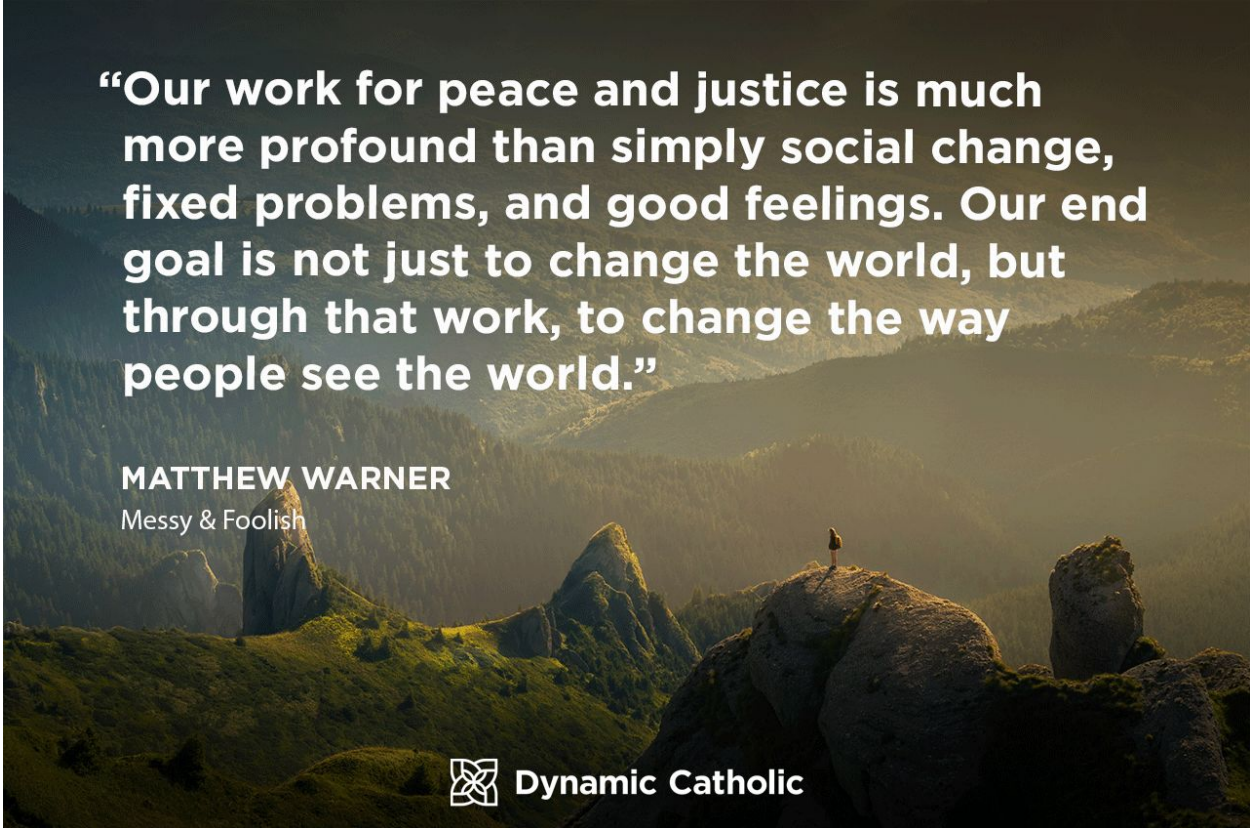
p 232-234: T Read A4I: Athletes for Impact’s Position Statement. What stands out?

You Have to Forgive to Grow p 237-248

Bennett concludes with the story of reconnecting with his birth mother Caronda. He wants a relationship with her and for his children to know her. He writes “This book is called *Things that Make White People Uncomfortable*, but forgiving your family? That is one thing that truly does transcend skin color. That’s on all of us to confront. If it makes us uncomfortable, that’s a sign we need to try harder.” I can’t help but think this testimony serves as a metaphor for the book and why it was written. What have you learned?

Afterword: Get Comfortable p 249

Consider reading the final editorial written by the late Congressman and Civil Rights activist, John Lewis [Together, You Can Redeem the Soul of Our Nation](#)

A scenic landscape photograph of a mountain range. In the foreground, a person is standing on a large, rounded rock peak. The background shows rolling hills and mountains covered in green vegetation, with a hazy atmosphere. The lighting suggests a sunrise or sunset, with warm tones.

“Our work for peace and justice is much more profound than simply social change, fixed problems, and good feelings. Our end goal is not just to change the world, but through that work, to change the way people see the world.”

MATTHEW WARNER

Messy & Foolish



Dynamic Catholic

Book Review: [New York Times](#), May 16, 2018