Hello! My name is Nancy Shane and I am this year’s Staff Council President. As a middle-aged, heterosexual, cis-gender, able-bodied white woman, I must be a member of the most common demographic groups among UNM staff. So it is disconcerting to write for this series although its creators are adamant of their desire to hear from everyone. Many others can, and have, given better instruction on how to be a good ally. I can only share some thoughts about my own process on that journey, mid-stream.

In college, I took an ethnic study course or two. When I moved to New Mexico, I volunteered with an organization working for ethnic and racial equity. An interest in criminal justice made the racial disparities in that system obvious to me long ago. I even married a Hispanic man and raised a biracial son. Yet I cannot say that I started to deeply explore racial injustice and my own privilege until recently.

A few years ago, I read The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness by Michelle Alexander. As asserted in its opening pages, ‘Once you see it, you cannot unsee it.’ The careful explanation of how racism is intentionally and cleverly institutionalized made a big impression. Not long after, the national leadership in my church told a highly qualified Latina applicant that she was ‘not a good fit’ for an upper management position. That sent waves of moral reckoning around the denomination; and my local church initiated the reading of White Fragility by Robin D’Angelo. In those weeks, my fellow congregants and I were served heaping dishes of humble pie. I tried to take advantage of that. I considered my interactions with people of color and conversations around race; I asked many people what I might do differently. (Perhaps Facebook was not the best way to do it.)

I still ask questions, and still find the answers often are not apparent. So, I keep studying. I listen to podcasts: Code Switch, Seeing White, White Lies. I was lucky enough to be assigned to analyze, along with a coworker, the experiences of students of color in the UNM Medical School—one of the most powerful learning experiences of my life. I have attended some of the recent demonstrations held by Black Lives Matter. I put a sign in my window. I exercise with Running Medicine. I go to presentations and dialogues that are offered on campus. I’m reading An Indigenous Peoples’ History of the United States by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, along with other staff, for the Inclusion Book Club. I try to apply these lessons to my life and work. I fall down a lot.

It is crushing to learn the extent to which racism defines our social fabric. One can scarcely find a measure of influence or power for which racial disparities do not exist. Many microaggressions escape me, I am certain. But I am also struck by how many injustices are unhidden; they are right on the surface. Yet they remain unknown to too many of us. All we need do is focus our lenses.