

st Ignatius Parish



Illustration by Golden Cosmos

BRAIDING SWEETGRASS

ROBIN WALL KIMMERER



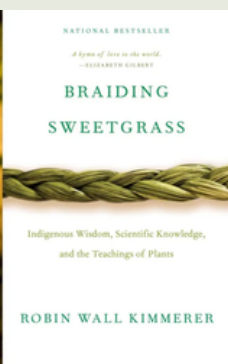
Summer 2026 Reading Guide

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Photo by Nancy J. Turner



AVAILABLE AS/ AT:

- **FREE pdf:** <https://ccncsj.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Braiding-Sweetgrass-Robin-Wall-Kimmerer.pdf>
- **San Francisco Public Library** (including on Libby and as an audiobook)
- **Amazon** (\$23 Hardcover; \$15.17 Paperback; \$9.99 Kindle)
- **Young Adults** edition

Summer has arrived! And the ARC (Anti-Racism Committee) joyously invites the entire parish community to join us in reading Robin Wall Kimmerer's *Braiding Sweetgrass* (2020).

Summer invites us to slow down, notice the beauty of Creation, and become more aware of our relationship with the natural world. The ARC has been exploring how care for creation is inseparable from care for one another—how Pope Francis's vision in Laudato Si' and the Jesuit Universal Apostolic Preference of Caring for Our Common Home cannot be untangled from the Preference of Walking with the Excluded, with “those whose dignity has been violated.” So, *BG*, Kimmerer's radiantly-written, award-winning book seemed like the ideal book for us to encounter and reflect on in community. By centering Indigenous wisdom alongside scientific knowledge, it invites us to notice whose voices and ways of knowing have been historically excluded, and to consider how their recovery might help us better imagine how to move forward.

We feel that recognizing that “everything is connected”—that our relationships with God, one another, and the earth are woven together, and that environmental degradation and social injustice often share the same roots—is an important part of the parish's anti-racist work. So, we hope and pray that you not only delight in reading *BG* together, but are able to use this guide to think about how justice includes honoring diverse cultures, histories, and perspectives, and to help prepare and inspire you to join in our book discussion later this summer (**September 20, 11a-12p**, during Hospitality).

Until then, happy reading and reflecting!

St. Ignatius Parish ARC

Welcome and Invitation

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This reading guide is rooted in the Ignatian tradition of prayer and discernment.

In Ignatian contemplation of Scripture, we are invited to enter a scene with your imagination—to see what the people in the story see, hear what they hear, notice our own emotional responses, and listen for God's invitation. Rather than remaining an outside observer, we become participants in the story.

Since you are reading *BG* as ARC's Summer 2026 Read, you are invited to approach it in much the same way. Enter Kimmerer's stories not simply as a reader or critic, but as someone whose own life has been shaped by land, culture, history, and relationships. Let this reading journey be about more than enjoyment or learning new information. Take this opportunity, instead, to become more aware of the stories that have shaped you: *What you have been taught about land, ownership, belonging, difference, gratitude, and community?* Some of these stories may have been passed down to you without your ever consciously choosing them.

Ignatian spirituality also invites us into the practice of discernment—paying attention to the experiences, assumptions, and influences that have formed you, and asking where God may be inviting you to grow in greater freedom, truth, justice, and love. So, as you move through each book section, we hope you will draw on this guide to spend time with these questions in prayer:

What memories arise for me?

What surprises, challenges, or unsettles me?

What relationships are coming into view?

Where might God be inviting me—and our parish—to grow?

May engaging in prayerful reflection, honest conversation, and communal discernment as you read *BG* help all of us discern how we are called to deepen our relationships with God, one another, and our common home.

How to Use This Guide

PART ONE: PLANTING SWEETGRASS

Remembering the Places That Formed Us



Irene (Canby) LeRoy and her daughter Peggy at the Presidio, 1926

PRAYER

Imagine yourself as a child in the place you first called home.

Walk through it slowly. What do you see? What grows there? What sounds do you hear? Who is with you? Who first taught you what nature was for? Who taught you to love—or ignore—the land?

Stay there for a while.

REFLECTION

What did I learn about land as I was growing up? Was it property, playground, livelihood, wilderness, gift, or something else?

Who taught me those lessons?

What stories about this place did I hear? Whose stories were absent?

How did this landscape shape the person I became?

ANTI-RACIST REFLECTION

Consider the people who lived on that land before your family did.

What do I know about them?

What have I never wondered about?

How might my relationship to place have shaped my relationships with people whose histories of this land differ from my own?

PART TWO: TENDING SWEETGRASS

Gratitude and Reciprocity



"The Holy Family" by Lucas Southerton

PRAYER

Bring to mind someone who has given generously to you without expecting repayment.

Now bring to mind a place that has done the same.

Hold both images together.

REFLECTION

When have I received gifts I did not earn?
What practices of gratitude shaped my life?
When have I confused ownership with relationship?
What does it mean to give back rather than simply take?

ANTI-RACIST REFLECTION

Think about the many people whose labor has contributed to your life.

Who grows my food?
Who cares for my community?
Whose work often goes unnoticed?
How might gratitude become not only a feeling, but also a commitment to justice?

PART THREE: PICKING SWEETGRASS

Learning Interdependence



At Magaña Farms, an organic farm in the Salinas Valley; photo by the Latino Community Foundation

PRAYER

Imagine yourself as one member of an ecosystem.

Not its center.

Simply one participant among many.

Notice what depends upon you.

Notice what you depend upon.

REFLECTION

When have I experienced genuine interdependence?

What relationships have sustained me?

When do I struggle to receive help from others?

What gifts have I overlooked because they came from unexpected people?

ANTI-RACIST REFLECTION

Kimmerer challenges hierarchies within the natural world.

What hierarchies have shaped my imagination about people?

Whose voices have I instinctively trusted?

Whose wisdom have I overlooked?

What would it mean to become more attentive to voices that have long been ignored?



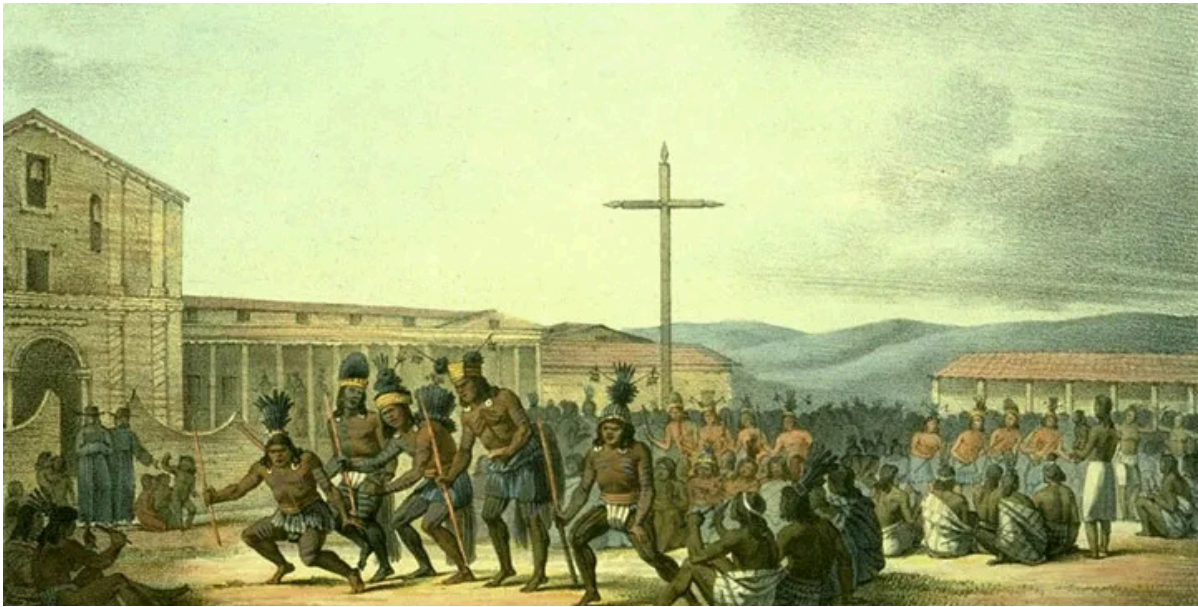
PART FOUR: BRAIDING SWEETGRASS

Restoring Relationships



Detail from Glen Park mural by Josué Rojas

Braiding Sweetgrass



Scene of Alta California by Louis Choris, 1816

PRAYER

Imagine yourself standing on the land where St. Ignatius Parish now gathers.
First, imagine this place long before the parish existed. What do you see? Who lives here?
What relationships—with the land, with water, with plants and animals, with one another—
are already present?

Now imagine the same place one hundred years from now.
What relationships have been restored? What wounds have begun to heal? What new life has
emerged?

Remain with the image.

REFLECTION

Recall a relationship in your own life that required patient healing rather than quick repair.

What made restoration possible?

What relationships has our parish intentionally cultivated?

What relationships have we inherited but never examined?

Are there neighbors—past or present—with whom we have little or no relationship?

ANTI-RACIST REFLECTION

If reconciliation is more than resolving conflict—if it's the restoration of right relationship:

What relationships with this place might God be inviting our parish to restore?

What truths would we need to tell before healing could begin?

What might restoration look like if it were guided by humility rather than guilt?

PART FIVE: BURNING SWEETGRASS

Becoming Good Ancestors



Our parish during Easter 2025; photo by Nano Visser

PRAYER

Imagine Christ arriving at St. Ignatius on an ordinary Sunday morning.

Before entering the church, Christ pauses outside.

Christ looks at the trees, the soil, the birds, the surrounding neighborhood, and the people gathering for worship.

Watch Christ's face.

What fills Christ with joy?

What causes Christ sorrow?

Then imagine Christ turning toward our congregation and asking:

"How are you loving this place and all who belong to it?"

Listen before answering.

REFLECTION

Now imagine someone seven generations from now asking about St. Ignatius:

"What did this community love enough to protect?"

"What relationships did they help restore?"

"What legacy did they leave?"



Instagram photo from @415urbanadventures

If St. Ignatius Parish desires to become a better neighbor—to the land, to Indigenous peoples, and to our wider community:

What **practices** would reflect that desire?

What **relationships** should we begin cultivating?

Would creating a **land acknowledgment** help us tell the truth about this place?

If so: What commitments or relationships would need to accompany those words so they express who we truly are and who we hope to become?

If not: What further listening, learning, or relationship-building is God inviting us into first?

Finally, pray with one question Kimmerer's writing asks again and again:

**If we have received so much from this place,
what are we called to give in return?**

Communal Discernment



CLOSING EXAMEN

To help prepare for our parish discussion on **September 12, 11am-12pm** (during Hospitality), you might spend a few minutes with each section, reflecting on these questions:



“Everything is connected. Concern for the environment thus needs to be joined to a sincere love for our fellow human beings and an unwavering commitment to resolving the problems of society.”

Pope Francis “Laudato si” (24 May 2015)

- 1 For what am I most grateful in this section?
- 2 What challenged, surprised, or unsettled me?
- 3 Whose perspective did I encounter that I usually overlook?
- 4 Where did I notice God's invitation toward deeper relationship—with creation, with my neighbors, or with myself?
- 5 What is one concrete practice of reciprocity, justice, or reconciliation I am called to live before our gathering?