



2025

ADVANCING THE NEEDS OF  
**BLACK CATHOLIC  
YOUNG ADULTS**

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM A YOUNG ADULT GATHERING  
AT XAVIER UNIVERSITY IN LOUISIANA

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Office of  
Black Catholic Ministries



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# INTRODUCTION

In January of 2019, the Black Bishops of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) convened a meeting of Black Catholic Leaders from around the country in New Orleans, Louisiana. The purpose of this gathering was to see how various Black Catholic organizations could collaborate better to advance the needs of the Black Catholic community. This gathering was cosponsored by the Black and Indian Mission Office and the National Black Catholic Congress office.

Following this gathering, the USCCB coordinated the “Journeying Together” conference, in which young adults from various cultural families gathered to share their perspectives and concerns as a way to “educate” the USCCB and other cultural groups about the needs of their generation from the Church.

What was very noticeable from both of these gatherings was the lack of participation from Black (specifically African Americans) Catholic young adults (ages 18-40 years old). This demographic has been in a mass exodus from the Church for many years for a variety of reasons. During the Black Catholic Leaders meeting, the struggle to keep Black youth and young adults was a topic that was brought up by the various organizations as a cautionary tale of the relevance and existence of these organizations, including Black parishes, in the future. During the “Journeying Together” process, there was a struggle not only to locate but also to encourage Black Catholic young adults to participate in this process when they were found.

The unfortunate reality with this issue is that the Church never really hears the “truth” about what is going on with this demographic of young adults because they have been ignored, hurt, or do not see the Church as relevant in the reality they live in as Black, specifically African American, young adults. Also, when these young adults do take the risk of becoming involved, they eventually leave again because, when they challenge the Church, they are seen as hypocritical and thus ignored, silenced, or reprimanded by others around them.

We, the Church, only tend to hear from the ones that are already committed to the faith, which does not represent the majority of this demographic, thus outcomes are skewed, inaccurate, or even irrelevant to the Church’s ministry in this community.

# U.S. BLACK CATHOLIC FACTS

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Only 25% of Black Catholics worship at a Black Catholic Church



47% of Black Catholics believe Catholic parishes should offer racial affirmation

77% of Black Catholics say opposing racism is essential to their faith



9 in 10 Black Catholics prioritize welcoming atmosphere and inspiring homily in new congregation

52% of Black Catholics are under 50 years of age



All statistics from Pew Research: <https://tinyurl.com/y4mkvv2s>

# ISSUES WITHIN THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC CHURCH

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## 1 No Representation

**Audience:** USCCB, Dioceses and Catholic Organizations

**What is the Problem?** Lack of Black people represented in leadership, communication, and in media/art.

**Why is This Important?** Black people need to see themselves represented so that they feel more welcome in the Church.

**What is the Plan?** Include black people in leadership and design teams, dioceses and media organizations. Hire qualified black candidates who understand diversity issues.

**Timeline:** 1 year to ongoing

## 2 Too Much Focus on Charity, Not Enough on Social Justice

**Audience:** USCCB, Dioceses, Parishes, and Catholic Organizations

**What is the Problem?** We are not doing enough social justice in the community.

**Why is this Important?** Social justice issues take a backseat, but they are important to our community's growth.

**What is the Plan?** Defining the difference between social justice and charity and defining social justice. Creating task forces through CCHD, and implementing what they are already doing in the dioceses. Teach comprehensive Catholic Social Teaching.

**Timeline:** 1-5 years

## 3 Not Talking About Racism and White Supremacy

**Audience:** USCCB, Dioceses, and Catholic Organizations

**What is the Problem?** Marginalized people do not feel seen or heard in the church. Brushing issues under the rug to avoid uncomfortable conversations because of White fragility.

**Why is this Important?** In order to heal the Church, you have to treat the root of the injury to prevent further injuries.

**What is the Plan?** Every diocese would have true faith-based diversity training about White supremacy's impact. Having a progressive, robust campaign, a year of prayer for racial harmony.

**Timeline:** 3-5 years

## 4 Fear of Progress

**Audience:** USCCB, Dioceses, Parishes, and Catholic Organizations

**What is the Problem?** Clinging to Eurocentric tradition is stopping the possibility of better systems and ideas.

**Why is this Important?** The church must adapt in order to grow and fulfill its mission.

**What is the Plan?** Focus on the teaching of Jesus Christ and go by the spirit of the law and the letter of the law. Putting more diverse/marginalized people in leadership who are actually aligned with Pope Francis' vision for the Church.

**Timeline:** Immediate

## 5 Political Polarization and Culture Wars

**Audience:** USCCB, Dioceses, Parishes, and Catholic Organizations

**What is the Problem?** The Church has become a battleground for our vote and civic duty.

**Why is it Important?** Politics is influencing church life rather than church influencing political life.

**What is the Plan?** Further edit the Faithful Citizenship to include Catholic relevant issues interests outside of abortion. Better catechesis.

**Timeline:** Ongoing

## 6 Lack of Cultural Expression

**Audience:** USCCB, Dioceses, Parishes, and Catholic Organizations

**What is the Problem?** European Americans believe their cultural expression is the standard.

**Why is this Important?:** Because non-European Americans' cultural expressions

are viewed as inferior or heretical. We want to feel that our culture is respected, authentic, and accepted.

**What is the Plan?** Diversify liturgical expressions at national conferences, cathedrals, and diocesan cathedrals. Instructions and teaching on why cultures express as they do.

**Timeline:** 1-2 years

## **7 Acknowledging Church History in Segregation, Racism, etc.**

**Audience:** USCCB, Dioceses, and Religious Institutions

**What is the Problem?** There is a lack of acknowledgement and complicity in America's original sin. Additionally, the efforts to rectify it continue to cause harm and destruction.

**Why is this Important?** In order to heal and grow we need to know what we're growing from. The US Catholic has always promoted justice and human dignity through teaching that will help increase morality.

**What is the Plan?** Teaching Black history in schools and church events. Encourage Church leadership to instruct history, apologize, and heal, as well as provide better religious education. Removing slave holder names off of buildings.

**Timeline:** 1-2 years

## **8 Too Focused on Tradition Instead of Missions**

**Audience:** USCCB, Dioceses, and Religious Orders

**What is the Problem?** When overly focused on tradition, we take energy, time, and resources away from the actual mission of the church.

**Why is it Important?** We lose people, particularly young Black people and we continue to create Golden calves and divisions.

**What is the Plan?** To be mission focused, to know the mission, and to be welcoming and administer the sacraments. Get young, black, open-minded people into leadership positions to make changes.

**Timeline:** Immediately

## **9 Lack of Accountability/Clericalism**

**Audience:** USCCB, Dioceses and Religious Orders

**What is the Problem?** People have lost their faith and trust in the Church due to the

lack of accountability in the actions of clergy.

**Why is this Important?** It erodes unity. Accountability maintains a mission focus. It allows for people to have a safe space.

**What is the Plan?** Lay people should be empowered to report religious ordained individuals who promote harmful ideologies contrary to Catholic teachings, such as white nationalism, racism, discrimination, and opposition to the teachings of Pope Francis. Transparency and accountability are key to rebuild and renew trust between the Church and the laity.

**Timeline:** Immediately and ongoing

## 10 Lack of Investment in Education

**Audience:** USCCB, Dioceses, and Religious Orders

**What is the Problem?** There are educational deserts where Catholic schools were shut down. This causes an educational problem for some students. Catholic schools are also not affordable to those who need them the most.

**Why is this Important?** The lack of investment in education in Black communities ultimately leads to the closing of Black Catholic schools that leads to the closing of Black Catholic parishes which in turn decreases evangelization.

**What is the Plan?** Financial investments in Black neighborhoods with Catholic schools, increasing scholarships to attend Catholic schools, and investments in trade skills.

**Timeline:** Immediately and ongoing



The Sankofa bird African symbol represents learning from the past to inform your future.

# ISSUES WITHIN THE BLACK COMMUNITY

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## 1 Gerontocracy

**Audience:** Black Catholic Parishes and National Organizations

**Why is This Important?** Representation is important. Everyone wants to feel like their needs are met and encourage REAL synodality. The next generation needs to be entrusted.

**What is the Plan?** Term limits and have co-leads to promote mentorship. Advise national organizations to hire younger individuals with a focus on collaboration and partnerships (national level).

**Timeline:** 1-5 years

## 2 LGBTQ+ Issues

**Audience:** Black Catholic Parishes and National Organizations

**Why is this Important?** Lack of representation and acceptance puts lives and souls at risk. People feel unwelcomed.

**What is the Plan?** Listening to Pope Francis; incorporating LGBTQ+ ministries at black parishes; educating parishioners about the community; ongoing dialogue with black, queer Catholics.

**Timeline:** 1-5 years

## 3 Cliques/Bullying/Ostracizing

**Audience:** Black Catholic Parishes and National Organizations

**What is the Problem?** Facilitates bullying, gossiping, and division. The people that challenge the status quo get shunned, blackballed, or attacked.

**Why is this Important?** Church bullying casts more people out than church teachings.

**What is the Plan?** Anti-harassment and bullying training along with community relation training at the parish level. Encourage accountability amongst leadership.

**Timeline:** Ongoing

## 4 Not Enough Black American Priests

**Audience:** Black Catholic Parishes/Institutions and Vocation Departments

**Why is this Important?** Black priests understand the history, expressions, and culture of the black community. Seeing representation on the altar helps with representation in leadership and community.

**What is the Plan?** To invite religious orders to come from different parishes to give advice regarding vocations. Pressure vocation directors, priests, and laity to encourage vocations from the BCC. Give those who enter vocations the opportunity to work in BCC. Give financial funding to those entering vocations. Provide education on religious life and priesthood, safe spaces in seminaries and religious institutions. Outreach from national black catholic clergy. Bias training in seminaries.

**Timeline:** Ongoing

## 5 More Mentoring and Leadership Priorities

**Audience:** Parishes and Black Catholic Organizations

**Why is this Important?** To encourage the passing of the torch, to fix gerontocracy issues, and to allow fresh breath of the Holy Spirit to enter.

**What is the Plan?** Retreats, lock ins, mentorship programs that are not about controlling but fixing the problems. Advise national organizations to hire younger individuals with a focus on collaborations and partnerships. Have national organizations create young adult advisory boards.

**Timeline:** Ongoing

## 6 Mental Health Stigma\*

**\*There is already a national plan approved by the bishops. We need to call on national orgs to get this information out to Black Catholics.**

**Audience:** Parishes and National Organizations

**Why is it Important?** To save lives and to avoid burnout especially among clergy, religious, and laity. To provide a space for pastoral care. To promote wholeness of the church.

**What is the Plan?** Trained crisis teams at each church. Make people aware of community behavioral health resources. Mental health resource awareness for parishioners. Show vulnerability. Have social workers come in for health fairs, create

create mental health ministries at parishes, and robust campaigns.

**Timeline:** Ongoing

## 7 Worldly Priorities

**Audience:** The Black Catholic Community Overall (BCC)

**What is the Problem?** Low Mass attendance, community involvement, and families not prioritizing church.

**Why is this Important?** Loss of moral compass and community/church involvement.

**What is the Plan?** Better religious education and education on why the Church is important and how worldly priorities provide only temporary satisfaction (Proverbs 3:5-8). Parent formation - workshops on how to raise the future church and on Christianity. Retreats. Give God One Hour a week.

**Timeline:** Ongoing

## 8 Rejection of Culture

**Audience:** BCC

**What is the Problem?** Whitewashing and not being inclusive of various forms of worship. Self hate.

**Why is it Important?** Whiteness/ European Culture does not equal holiness.

**What is the Plan?** Education about cultural expressions. Promote liturgical training. Attend the Lyke Conference and Institute of Black Catholic Studies to learn about theology from a Black Catholic perspective.

**Timeline:** Ongoing

## 9 Lack of Religious Education and Formation

**Audience:** BCC and National Organizations

**What is the Problem?** Young adults are leaving because they have not been properly catechized.

**Why is it Important?** A lot of misinformation exists and people are leaving because they don't understand what we believe.

**What is the Plan?** Training, the Catechetical Institute, promoting formation in Catechism.

**Timeline:** Ongoing

## 10 Lack of Community Engagement

**Audience:** Black Parishes and National Organizations

**What is the Problem?** Parishes aren't involved in their own communities.

**Why is this Important?** We need to draw circles of inclusion and not of exclusion. Pope Francis says we need to go to the marginalized. We need to be living out Catholic social teaching.

**What is the Plan?** Teaching the doctrine of Catholic Social teaching and supporting the campaign for human development (CCHD). Our national organizations need to share this information and our BCC needs to TEACH this information. We need to seek out building relationships within our community.

**Timeline:** Immediate and ongoing



# IDEAL QUALITIES OF ALLIES FOR THIS WORK

- 01 Non-racist Catholic in good standing
- 02 Accepting, open-minded, and a good listener
- 03 Active in ministry
- 04 History of working with Black Catholic young adults (BCYAs) within the last 10 years, with proven results
- 05 Keeping the needs of the BCYAs as a priority
- 06 Non-Black organizations that have a strong minority outreach and representation in leadership
- 07 Track record of leadership abilities/qualities including effective communication of priorities
- 08 Dedicated to social justice issues
- 09 Alignment with Pope Francis's priorities for the Church
- 10 Suggested young adult or someone with the above qualifications

# CONCLUSION

From November 16-19, 2023, the committee gathered with Black Catholic Young Adults from around the country representing various demographics of the 18-40-year-old range (single, students, divorced, employed, underemployed, unemployed, left the church, involved in ministry, parents, married) to get diverse perspectives. During this gathering at Xavier University of Louisiana, there were many hours of reflection on what it meant to be Black and Catholic in 2023, along with the realities that Black Catholic Young Adults face in today's world. There were many robust discussions and debates on what the Church is doing correctly and incorrectly to connect with this demographic. The fruit of this time together is this document.

The group is hoping this document is a call to action for the Church as a whole, and the Black Catholic Community, to address the ever-increasing reality of Black Catholic Youth and Young Adults' disaffiliation from the Catholic Church. This is not an attack, but a reality check. The hope is that institutions and organizations take a hard look at themselves after reading this document and use the suggestions/plans under each section to create effective change to address this reality.

Since the initial gathering in 2023, there have been similar listening sessions held in **Birmingham, AL**, and the metropolitan area of **Washington, D.C.** in 2025.

In Birmingham, Black Catholic young adults met with Black Catholic leaders from the community to see how they can work better together. This dialogue has been implemented in subsequent Listening Sessions. For the gathering in Washington, D.C., young adults met with executive directors of various departments of the USCCB to raise awareness of the needs of this demographic.

Although the people gathered represented different walks of life, and were in various spaces in regards to their faith journey, everyone gathered shared their passion for a Church where Black Catholic Young Adults were genuinely welcomed and accepted as their authentic selves.

# NEXT STEPS

Additional listening sessions have been coordinated with:

- Yale University
- University of San Francisco
- Archdiocese of New York
- Archdiocese of Los Angeles
- Diocese of Oakland
- Archdiocese of Galveston/Houston
- Diocese of Beaumont
- Diocese of Wilmington
- The Knights and Ladies of Peter Claver, Inc.



**Photo of Black Catholic Young Adult Gathering at Xavier University in New Orleans, LA (November 2023)**

**Gye Nyame is an African Adinkra symbol meaning "Except God." It speaks to God's omnipotence.**