



A RESOURCE OF THE NATIONAL RELIGIOUS VOCATION CONFERENCE

TRANSFORMING RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES TO BE ANTIRACIST AND INTERCULTURALLY INVITING

WELCOMING THE CULTURAL ABUNDANCE
OF AFRICAN AMERICAN AND BLACK CATHOLICS



BY SISTER JOSITA COLBERT, SNDdEN
WITH A FOREWORD AND AFTERWORD BY SISTER ANITA BAIRD, D.H.M.

FOREWORD

Let's ask hard questions

RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES must always honor and celebrate their unique charisms, histories, and stories of faith. Still, we cannot become wedded to the past and unwilling to create a new model of community, where we reach out, invite, and welcome women and men of color not only to enter our institutes, but to transform them and recreate them while remaining faithful to our living charisms.

Too often we talk the talk but fail to walk the walk in our communities. We give lip service to diversity but do little to make it a reality. We must ask the hard but necessary questions.

Are we intentional and deliberate in our vocational mission to invite young people of different cultures to journey with us? Are we willing to receive people of color with authentic, genuine hospitality? Are our motherhouses bathed in Whiteness in art, music, food, literature, etc.? Do we find it uncomfortable to accept cultural differences in the way others pray, celebrate life, eat, and recreate? Do we cover ourselves in green on the feast of St. Patrick but express discomfort when our members dress in Afrocentric garb during Black History Month or when our Latino and Latina members desire to speak their native language?

Are we open to praying in different ways, and not just on the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe or Martin Luther King Day? Are we willing to become more flexible in our community living, or do our members of color often find themselves isolated and alone after professing vows? Are we willing to listen to their pain? Are we willing to be vulnerable enough to admit we don't have all the answers, and that we need to be pa-

tient with ourselves? Are we humble enough to ask others to be patient with us, as we embark upon this journey of learning new ways of being a community?

Are we willing to admit to our stereotypes, biases, and prejudgments of those we consider different? Are we willing to learn from our members of color, who have so much to offer our communities?

Embrace the gifts of members of color

"What does it mean to be Black and Catholic?" Sister Thea Bowman, F.S.P.A. famously asked when she spoke to the U.S. bishops' conference in 1989, a few months before her death: "It means that I come to my Church fully functioning. I bring myself, my Black self ... all that I am, all that I have, all that I hope to become. I bring my whole history, my traditions, my experience, my culture, my African American song and dance and gesture and movement and teaching and preaching and healing and responsibility as gift to the Church."

Our members of color come with gifts that can enrich and strengthen our communities if only we are open to receiving them. Our prayer life will be deepened. The way we worship will be enriched. Our community

celebrations will be enhanced. Until we are willing to openly discuss our biases, fears, and apprehensions as we enter unknown territory, our congregations will continue to be impoverished by our own limitations and misgivings.

In our predominately Eurocentric congregations, we need to ask ourselves what we are willing to do both individually and corporately to move beyond our limitations and fears in order to address the sin of racism, to acknowledge how White privilege and power have shaped us and therefore have shaped our communities.

Are we open, honest, and accountable to our members of color? What concrete steps have we taken? In our discomfort how often do we try to deflect the conversation from racism to other “isms,” like sexism? Is the commitment to the work of antiracism given major consideration in choosing congregational leadership?

What holds us back?

If we are truly serious about becoming inclusive, we must understand what keeps us from wanting to be inclusive. We must understand the cultural indoctrinations that have shaped and defined who we are both individually and as a community. We need to be honest with one another in challenging our very identities.

We spend too much time waiting for people of color to come while knowing that we have done little to transform our congregations to receive them if they are being called to embrace our charism.

Many of our congregations are solidly White and middle-class in worldview and values, and too often this shapes the way we see the poor and people of color, not as equals but as those who need us to show them the way.

Most of our houses of formation are in largely White, suburban, or rural settings that may not be inviting to people of color. We cannot remove people from their support systems, from what is familiar and nurturing to their souls, replacing it with what is foreign and often hostile, and expect them to stay and thrive.

When people of color leave, do we say that “they did not have a vocation”? Perhaps a better response would be to acknowledge that we have failed to honor the distinctiveness of their vocation. We have failed to be communities of transformative grace.

True discipleship does not come without cost, and working to create antiracist, intercultural communities will not happen without a cost. It will require a prophetic vision of the future that we want to create. It will demand that we die to the old ways of being and believing in order that we might be reborn for such a time as this to bear witness to our Catholicity, our oneness in the body of Christ, becoming a visible sign of the transformative, Eucharistic power of God’s grace.

Our members of color come with gifts that can enrich and strengthen our communities if only we are open to receiving them.



TIP FOR VOCATION INVITATION

We can choose to make the extra effort it may take to seek out, invite and welcome our African American brothers and sisters.

for religious congregations that are predominantly European American to extend a sincere invitation to people of color, [they must] engage in a process of designing an intentional plan to address inherent weaknesses in the current approaches to the ministry of invitation to new members.

—SISTER GWYNETTE PROCTOR, SNDdeN



OUR EFFORTS AS VOCATION MINISTERS to invite and welcome all racial and ethnic groups requires a conscious effort. It is unlikely to just happen because we are people of goodwill. The cultural patterns and habits that exist in the United States have emerged from a long legacy of slavery, Jim Crow laws, segregation, and discrimination.

It is hard to escape the racism, both subtle and blatant, that is part of our larger culture and Church; however, we can choose to become more aware. We can choose to open our communities up to the whole Church; we can choose to make the extra effort it may take to seek out, invite, and welcome our African American brothers and sisters. Our communities and our Church will be the richer for it.

Many religious communities are comfortable with serving African Americans, but to authentically follow Christ, we must invite that same population to become part of us, to minister alongside us. This is one of several messages Father Bryan Massingale, a renowned social ethicist, shared in a presentation at the 2010 convocation of the National Religious Vocation Conference: “Our faith calls us and empowers us to be the compassion of the Risen Christ. If candidates for religious life are unwilling or unable to relate to people of color and socially stigmatized groups as equals and not just paternalistic benefactors—this is an indisputable sign that they do not have a vocation to serve the Church as it exists today.”

Many African American scholars agree on what it will take to bring about greater diversity in congregations where the majority of members, leaders, and vocation and formation personnel are of European heritage: They must explore and accept that there is an African American culture with its own practices and its own values. In her booklet, “Toward Cultural Competence and Incorporation of People of Color into Predominately European American Religious

Communities” (2000, published by the National Religious Vocation Conference), Sister Gwynette Proctor, SNDdeN stressed that the need for congregations to reverence diversity and recognize the Afro-centric approach.

Where to begin a conscious effort to build greater diversity? We can all agree that the call to religious life comes from God. Religious congregations must be intentionally conscious that the call for African American candidates emerges out of their particular experience within the Black community despite the many obstacles that still exist. Sister Proctor listed some of those obstacles: the withdrawal of the Catholic Church from Black urban areas; the reluctance of white brothers, priests, and sisters to invite African American people to Catholicism and to religious life; and the growing deterioration of education in public and parochial schools.

These are significant hurdles, but the call to religious life continues to go out to African Americans. Vocation ministers can do a great deal to help the call be heard and to support those who respond. The following tips are drawn, with permission, from Sister Proctor’s booklet.

The call to religious life continues to go out to African Americans.

Tips for vocation and formation personnel

- Enroll in courses and workshops at the Institute for Black Catholic Studies at Xavier University in Louisiana.

- Worship in predominantly African American parishes.
- Enroll in courses or workshops led by African Americans.
- Acquire knowledge and experience in African American communities.
- Contact the National Black Sisters Conference, The National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus, or the National Black Catholic Congress (see page 14) to assist your congregation in inviting and, more important, in nurturing African American candidates in ways suggested here.

Tips for vocation promotion

- Publish print and online materials using graphics that include African Americans depicted as equals, not just as people being served.
- Publicize congregational activities in outlets that reach African Americans: in social media used by diverse young adults, African American newspapers, in the bulletins of African American parishes.
- Sponsor vocation awareness days in historically Black colleges and universities.
- Take out ads in promotional booklets for events within African American communities.

African Americans who are considering or who have joined a Eurocentric religious institute can use support.

- Contact the diocesan Office of Black Catholics—enlist help from the staff in spreading the word.

Nurturing discerners and new members

African Americans who are considering or who have joined a religious institute that is mostly of European heritage can use support in dealing with the cultural and racial concerns they'll encounter. Here are ways to help provide that support.:

INQUIRERS, CANDIDATES, DISCERNERS

For persons formally contemplating entrance and in structured contact with the religious community:

- Arrange for a sister, brother, or priest mentor who is Black.
- Have the candidate's assessment to be done by an African American professional.
- Schedule periodic interactions with Black religious (correspondence, visits, personal conversations, retreat/prayer experiences).
- Allow for participation in ministry experiences with African American religious.

For affiliates and postulants (those persons who have formally entered at the pre-novitiate level):

- Provide regular interaction with Black religious, even if they are from different congregations. The emphasis here should be on reflection and discussion, but you may want to arrange opportunities for shared ministry or prayer, such as working in places where Black religious are employed or attending retreat or prayer experiences within the African American Catholic community.

NOVICES

The canonical year is still accepted as a year apart, yet it should not be a year of isolation. The canonical year should set a model for living, not stand as an antithesis to it.

- Involve African Americans directly in the formation program throughout this period. Their presence allows the novice to stay connected to his or her own culture while adapting to religious life.

WHAT HAS WORKED WELL

Pre-entrance experiences with the community can be helpful, such as:

- living in a community for a short time.



WHAT HAS WORKED WELL

- Openness within the community to welcoming different styles of cooking, relaxing, celebrating
- Incorporating African American faith experiences
- Honest dialogue about fears, biases, and prejudices



Enroll in courses or workshops led by African Americans.

- attending community gatherings.
- having assigned contact persons from a local house or community.
- spending time with other religious congregations that are comfortable interacting with African Americans.

Once a candidate has entered, helpful support systems might include: encouraging the candidate to maintain ties to the Black community, using national Black Catholic organizations as resources, or joining parishes with other Black Catholics.

OTHER SUPPORT SYSTEMS INCLUDE:

- ministering among African Americans.
- sharing his or her culture with the religious community, such as helping to develop within the religious community an attitude of openness to learn about other cultures and welcoming in the religious community different styles of cooking, relaxing, celebrating.
- incorporating into the religious community faith experiences rooted in African American culture, including liturgies, retreats, spirituality, prayer groups.
- visiting with the candidates' family as appropriate.
- being sensitive to the family and extended family and friends.
- initiating honest dialogue about community members' attitudes, biases, prejudices and fears.

Taking individual action

REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUALS

1. What are my prejudices, biases, values, criteria for women and men of color? What do I need to change within to truly welcome a person of color?
2. What attitudes and behaviors must

I change to deal with my unconscious racism? To become more aware of this persistent reality, it may help to read books such as *Silent Racism: How Well-meaning White People Perpetuate the Racial Divide* by Barbara Trepagnier or *Understanding White Privilege: Creating Pathways to Authentic Relationships Across Race* by Frances E. Kendall.

3. Do middle-class white values impede me in welcoming a person of color?
4. Can I name any racist attitudes and language that are present in me?
5. How do I appreciate, encourage, affirm, and support the cultural gifts that Asian, Native American, Latino, African American women or men bring to our community and allow them to continue to live their culture?
6. How am I open to others' cultural or ethnic forms of prayer, ritual, and liturgy?
7. Do I have expectations that the African American candidate will "fit-in" and adapt to the dominant culture of our community?
8. How would I consider adapting my lifestyle to meet the cultural expression needs of an African American man or woman?
9. How do I see the charism of the institute/religious community lived out in a culture other than my own? How would I envision that charism being lived out by an African American woman or man?
10. Do the province policies, formation plan, and structures include people of color?

Helpful support includes encouraging candidates to maintain ties with the Black community.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INDIVIDUALS

- Read works by African American authors.

- Pray daily for vocations among women and men of color.
- Take a course in intercultural awareness, or study one or two specific ethnic groups.
- Learn about your own culture and its unique gifts.
- Become aware of racist language and expressions, and erase them from your speech.

Taking collective action

REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR LOCAL COMMUNITIES

1. What does it mean to be an intercultural community? To be pluralistic?
2. If we are intercultural, what does our community look like? (Prayer styles, food,

recreation, dress, theology, liturgy, spirituality, and so on.)

3. What kinds of reading and visual art exist in our residences that are not from the dominant culture's perspective?

What needs to change in our religious community to make it more welcoming to African American members?

4. What opportunities are available for African American men or women to share their stories and culture with the community?
5. How is our religious institute involved in ministry in the African American community?
6. In what type of ethnic neighborhood is our community located? What is our witness to people of other cultures by living here?
7. In what ways will our community welcome the families of our African-American community members?
8. What needs to change in our religious

community to make it more welcoming to African American members?

9. What do we, as a community, think about our province's formation policies and programs regarding women or men of color? Do they support the unique gifts of people of color, or do they attempt to "bleach" them to be more like the dominant culture?

10. Are we as a religious institute willing to allow African American members to have the necessary support systems to grow and flourish, even if that means going outside of the community?

11. How and to what extent are we willing to prepare ourselves to accept African American women or men to form community, to serve, to proclaim the Gospel?

12. How does our congregation encourage and support African American members to develop their own spirituality in the light of the charism of the religious institute and their charism as a person of color?

13. Do we really want African Americans among us as community members?

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LOCAL COMMUNITIES

- Invite African Americans to celebrations and to be resource people.
- Experience the African American woman or man's way of praying, relaxing, cooking, and conducting meetings.
- Contact local African American men and women religious for guidance in learning how to become a welcoming community for an African American candidate.
- Provide opportunities for cross-cultural spiritual and educational celebrations and experiences.
- Examine the values of the dominant culture and the African American culture.

"A powerful and painful song of hope in our dance with mortality." —Cornel West

THE CROSS AND THE LYNCHING TREE

AMANDA GORMAN

THE HILL WE CLIMB

AN INAUGURAL POEM FOR THE COUNTRY

FOREWORD BY OPRAH WINFREY

KNOWING CHRIST CRUCIFIED

The Witness of African American Religious Experience

BRYAN N. MASSINGALE

Their Eyes Were Watching God

Zo Nea Hurs

NOTES OF A NATIVE SON
JAMES BALDWIN

THE HISTORY OF BLACK CATHOLICS

—IN THE UNITED STATES—

CYPRIAN DAVIS

RACIAL JUSTICE and the CATHOLIC CHURCH

NO CRYSTAL STAIR
WOMANIST SPIRITUALITY

Let It Shine!

THE EMERGENCE OF AFRICAN AMERICAN CATHOLIC WORSHIP

The Essential
Gwendolyn Brooks

EDITED BY
ELIZABETH ALEXANDER

New Int

Four Poems Celebrating Women

Maya Angelou

PHENOMENAL WOMAN

Diana L. Hayes and Cyprian Davis, editors

Taking Down Our Harps
Black Catholics in the United States

THE SOULS OF BLACK FOLK
W.E.B. DU BOIS

Subversive Habits

Black Catholic Nuns
in the Long African American
Freedom Struggle

SHANNEN DEE WILLIAMS

M. Shawn Copeland
Jamie T. Phelps, O.P.
Bryan N. Massingale
D. Reinalda L...

Toinette M. Eugene
Giles Conwill
Clarence Rufus J. R...

RECOMMENDATION

Read the works of African American authors

Sister Thea
Songs of My People
Piano • Vocal • Guitar



TAKING COLLECTIVE ACTION

Provide opportunities for cross-cultural spiritual and educational celebrations and experiences.

Based on the values of the Gospel, discuss which values are negotiable and which are not.

- Celebrate major holidays of one or more ethnic groups.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROVINCES OR REGIONS

- The province formation plans can state clearly a value for diverse approaches to the formation plan that would serve to meet the specific cultural and ethnic needs of the candidate.
- Formation and vocation personnel can engage in a process of training for cross-cultural ministry, such as courses at Xavier University's Institute for Black Catholics or seminars conducted by African Americans.
- African American women and men can be actively engaged as planners, facilitators, and consultants at province level assemblies and projects.
- Provinces can implement a policy to establish business relationships with and purchase goods and services from African American entrepreneurs.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR CONGREGATIONS

- 1) What is the definition of "intercultural" in our congregation as it currently exists in the United States?
- 2) Is there a genuine interest and commitment to engage in cross-cultural sharing and discussion in our religious congregation?
- 3) Can a discussion be advanced about how our institute can include members from diverse cultures and ethnicities?
- 4) Understanding one's own culture helps in inviting other cultures. How can we foster a process for this to begin?
- 5) How does our religious community

witness the faith among African American people?

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONGREGATIONS

- Vocation and formation personnel can engage in a process of training for cross-cultural ministry. This could involve taking courses or workshops at Xavier University's Institute for Black Catholics, taking advantage of webinars, or engaging in the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' intercultural training.
- African American women and men in religious communities can be encouraged to gather and create networks to support one another for life in mission. Further, it is recommended that ongoing financial, emotional, and psychological support be directed toward this effort.
- Province vocation and formation personnel can devise a national plan to use support networks such as those found on the "Resources" list above.

Religious congregations need to begin serious reflection on the ways that unconscious racism causes barriers.

In general religious congregations need to begin serious reflection on the ways that unconscious racism causes barriers that result in the absence of earnest invitations and responses from men and women who are African American.

In a 2010 address to the National Religious Vocation Conference, Father Bryan Massingale shared his vision of the role of vocation ministers in instituting change: "I believe that women and men religious are called to be agents of social reconciliation, healing a divided Church and world. To do that, religious need a cultivated stance of unease ... a transformative love that Christian tradition calls "compassion" and that Catholic social teaching calls "solidarity."

If this vision is true, the implications, according to Father Massingale include: relating equally to

and with people of color, tackling the issue of unconscious racism personally and corporately, and realizing that this change must begin with compassion and solidarity. "Our task as vocation ministers," says Father Massingale, "is to seek and call forth women and men who radiate the hope of a world made new."

In the quickening Spirit of our good God, vocation ministers must recognize, reverence, and nurture God's call of African American women and men to religious life for our good and the good of all the Church.

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https://nrvn.net/horizon_library.

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RESOURCES

National Black Catholic Congress
| nbccongress.org |

National Black Catholic Sisters Conference
| nbsc68.com |

National Black Clergy Caucus
| nbccc.cc |

Institute for Black Catholic Studies,
Xavier University
| xula.edu/ibcs |

NRVC African American Vocation Committee
| tinyurl.com/NRVC-board-committees |

United States Catholic Conference,
Subcommittee on African American Affairs
| usccb.org/committees/african-american-affairs |

Knights of Peter Claver
| kofpc.org |

AFTERWORD

Eucharist unites us



WE ARE INVITED into a body of love where the weak are at the center and no longer is there a hierarchy of power where people of color are always at the bottom. In the beginning is communion, and in the end is communion. The Eucharist makes us one race in Christ Jesus.

The Eucharist enables us to work tirelessly for justice. The Eucharist allows us to celebrate our diversity while embracing our unity. The Eucharist loves us from the point of tolerance to genuine acceptance.

Once we truly come to understand the mystery of the Eucharist, we cannot continue coming to the table if we do not desire from the depths of our hearts to stop treating the other as a stranger and begin to love the other as our sister and brother in Christ.

We can only hope to learn to dwell together in God's love through the power of the Eucharist, which invites us to the one banquet table, where all are equal, and all are welcome. This union with God in the Holy Eucharist makes us interdependent on one another.

The Eucharist compels us to live lives of truth, built on justice and animated by love, to build a new heaven and a new earth where all of God's children can live with human dignity and respect regardless of the color of their skin. Through the power of the Eucharist, we are one in him. The common denominator is no longer color, ethnic origin, common language, or common interests. As St. Paul wrote to the Galatians (3:26-28):

For through faith, you are all children of God in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

To become what we eat is to receive the power of the Holy Spirit and become disciples and witnesses, not only in Jerusalem but throughout Judea and Samaria and indeed throughout the world. Nothing is more powerful than the image of the table where we gather day after day, week after week, year after year, to celebrate the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. We come to be fed and transformed.

With this Eucharistic vision in mind, it is my hope that religious congregations will seriously acknowledge that addressing White privilege and power is self-work and that they will commit to the long-term effort of redefining and restructuring their own institutions to address the legacy of racial superiority and systemic injustice. People of color have not been afforded equality and favorable circumstances, even in religious life.

Now is the time to create an inclusive table of welcome. Our congregations must speak and act boldly, honestly, and prophetically against systemic racism. This is our appointed work as women and men of the gospel, to preach, not with words but deeds that will transform our Church, religious communities, institutions, nation, and world. May the One who has begun this good work in us bring it to completion so the prayer of Jesus might truly be our own, that all may be one in the Eucharist, which is at the heart of racial justice.

We can only hope to learn to dwell together in God's love through the power of the Eucharist, which invites us to the one banquet table, where all are equal, and all are welcome.

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