Preserving Our History By Crossing the Digital Divide

Leading up to this month of celebrating Black Catholic History, God sent several interesting and innovative ideas our way along with partners. Here's the story and how you can become a partner.

Several months ago, Ms. Gwendolyn Mullen a member of the Archdiocesan Board of African American Catholic Ministries wrote an article for the Africentric Page of "The Catholic Review". The article discussed the ministry of the Board, announced the newly elected Officers and provided a description of the Sub-Committees established. Two of the Sub-Committees listed mentioned utilizing technology to advance evangelization efforts and organizing Black Catholic history research to benefit parishes in their evangelization outreach. The Black Catholic History Committee worked over the summer and developed a script and collected pictures for the production of a DVD to be released this month. The Sub-Committee on Black Catholic History tapped on the faith and historical knowledge of Mrs. Agnes Kane Callum and Sr. Reginald Gerdes, OSP. Ms. Alethea Braggs, a videographer and technological genius assisting the Oblate Sisters of Providence with several projects lent support for production. That was just one gift given by God, there's more.

Mr. John McFadden of the Knights of Columbus of the Loyola University of Maryland Council #15000 read the article that Ms. Mullen wrote. He was intrigued particularly with the two committees on history and technology. He explored possibilities of engagement and assistance with Grand Knight, Mr. Salvatore Lorenzo and the Loyola Council. Guided by the Holy Spirit discussions were held centering on how the young Knights at Loyola could lend support to the Office and Board of African American Catholic Ministries. I met with Mr. McFadden, Mr. Joshua Tarini and Mr. Stephen King from Loyola University. They proposed a partnership with this Office having the goal of Loyola providing assistance in our electronic evangelization efforts as well as archival support. Our initial effort is to kick-off a campaign to digitize historical pictures and documents collected within the African American Catholic community of Baltimore. We need to formulate a digital library and this partnership with the Knights of Columbus and the Experiential Learning Program at Loyola has unlimited possibilities.

To begin the journey, I was to supply a few pictures and documents to be digitized. I treasure a letter from Daniel Rudd to James Cardinal Gibbons written in 1888. Mr. Rudd, the founder of the National Black Catholic Congress movement (1889) was seeking permission to hold the first Congress in the Archdiocese of Baltimore. Fr. Paul Thomas, former Archivist for the archdiocese took a picture of the original letter and gave me a copy. One hundred years later in 1988 the historical positioning of the Secretariat for African American Catholics was established at the United States

Conference of Catholic Bishops. I submitted a full page article from "The Sun" on March 20, 1988 highlighting Dr. Beverly A. Carroll's appointment as Executive Director. Another document submitted is of an interview and photo appearing in "The Sun" newspaper by Frank Sommerville. The interview was with Most Rev. John H. Ricard, SSJ when he returned from South Africa serving as an Election Judge of which Nelson Mandela was elected President of South Africa in 1994.

These items were "treasures in my attic" and I know you have some too. You too can become a partner by submitting old documents, copies of baptismal records and photographs. Everything you share will be returned to you. You and your family tell an important story of African American Catholic life in the Archdiocese of Baltimore. We want parish stories as well as family stories. If you don't tell it who will? If you wish to submit your history for the digital library, please contact me at 410-625-8472 or at TFavors@archbalt.org. Your contribution is a step into the future, leaving a legacy for those to come.

I conclude with a quote given by Cardinal William H. Keeler from the book "What We Have Seen and Heard: Essays and Stories from Black Catholics of Baltimore"... "Our world today is in need of the testimony of African American Catholics who walk by faith and not by sight. Their testimonies bring hope."

Article written for **The Catholic Review** by Therese Wilson Favors, Director of the Office of African American Catholic Ministries