

Archdiocese of Philadelphia

Traditionally, the Archdiocese of Philadelphia has held an ecumenical gathering to honor Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in one of our inner-city parish. While this has been happening for over 30 years, we have observed that there was not a lot of participation from our brothers and sisters of other faiths. This year, in light of the many societal issues that we are faced with as brothers and sisters in the Lord - and in response to the USCCB's call for an ongoing conversation about race, poverty, housing, violence, education, & policing, we invited the entire Catholic community to join us for a different type of gathering: one of prayer and direct dialogue between individuals. Our gathering was held on Monday January 16, 2017, as part of the MLK Day activities.

We chose a new suburban location and bused in the faithful from the urban parishes. We titled this gathering: *A Dream in Black and White - Growing in Understanding as Catholics.*" At this service of prayer and conversation, we offered prayer and praise to God, and began a serious dialogue seeking to further our mutual understanding across divides of race and color. We began with a choral prelude at 6:30 PM, and started the formal prayer service at 7:00 PM. We estimate that over 800 people of all races were in attendance. We intentionally directed the congregation to sit with someone of a different race or someone they did not know. After Scripture and prayer, we had three different short presentations followed by discussion questions for dialogue among those in attendance.

The first presentation revisited the challenges of the civil rights movement. The speaker asked the question: "Which Way America, Which Way to Go"

Here is the *discussion question* we had the congregation address:

- Discussion Question One (1:1 with the person next to you)
 - In a few days we will witness the inauguration of President Elect Trump. There has been a lot of discussion in our nation about "what needs to happen" in the United States on lots and lots of topics. Of course, throughout the Presidential Campaign there have been many very tense conversations about race and ethnicity. As we look forward to the months of 2017 and to the next 4 years, which way should we go on the issues related to race and ethnic diversity? If you were invited to give advice to President Trump on these topics – what would you suggest?

The second presentation was from a young African American seminarian who was profiled right on the campus of the seminary by a guard. He discussed the significance if the Black Lives Matter movement and the need for radical change. Here is the *discussion question* we had the congregation address:

- Discussion Question Two (1:1 with the person next to you)

- We live in a time in which the Church has many Cardinals and Bishops with black skin. We have had a President with black skin. We have numerous other political leaders, physicians, teachers and business leaders with black skin. Yet in 2017 we still have people saying “some people are uncomfortable when they see a black man on campus”. Where does this fear come from and how can we as individuals and as the Church in Philadelphia help those with this fear overcome it in this new year?

The third presenter was an educator, who, as a young white high school student from the suburbs, was introduced to the civil rights movement by marching in the protest marches in Philadelphia. She went on to teach in the inner city for many years. She tells the story of how she came to racially profile a young African American and how surprised and embarrassed she was at how it happened. Here is the discussion question we had the congregation address:

- Discussion Question Three (that leads to a 1:1)
 - Jesus once taught that instead of focusing on the splinter in our brothers' eye we ought to remove the plank that is in ours. We have shared a good bit tonight but let's make it even more personal. Anne shared her own experience of realizing she had a prejudice. It was inside of her even though she did not think it was there and that she didn't want to admit it. What about you? Maybe it is not against blacks or whites; maybe it is against immigrants or the poor or the rich or people that live in certain neighborhoods. Maybe you have a prejudice against Democrats or Republicans or Jewish people or Muslims? In this “safe place” are you able to admit that there is some prejudice in you?

Afterward, we had a time of refreshment and fellowship in the school hall.

We have planned 3 follow-up sessions called *-Continuing the Conversation*. These sessions are scheduled for February, March and April and will be held in our urban Balcl Catholic Parishes. The will continue the dialogue about race, prejudice and social justice.

We also have a parish, that has sponsored a diversity discussion modeled after the teachings of Sr Thea Bowman. This discussion travels from parish to parish each month.

We hope that we will be able to conduct the BICM course at the Seminary and in parishes throughout the Archdiocese.