

Report on 2015 Black Catholic Young Adult Listening Session

Overview

A group of 23 young adults and 6 facilitators met at Bon Secours Retreat and Conference Center in Marriottsville MD from the evening of Friday May 29 through Noon on Sunday May 31, 2015. The primary objective was to exchange ideas about evangelizing and working with Black Catholic young adults. Findings from the 2015 Listening Session will enable African American Affairs, directors/coordinators of Black Catholic and Multicultural Ministry and other stakeholders to engage more effectively with the Young Church and Black Catholic young adults in particular.

Through facilitated discussions, unstructured conversations, reflection, journaling and group activities the participants explored the theme, *Transitions in the Life of Young Adults: Where is the Church in These Moments?* Five sessions were presented:

What is Your Experience of Faith? Clarified and distinguished universal and parochial perspectives on the Catholic Church

What is Our Faith? What Do Catholics Believe? Examined the Creed through the lenses of Church doctrine and personal witness

Finding Our Story in the Catholic Church. Explored Black Catholic History and personal faith stories

Our Role in the Catholic Church. Looked at the evolving roles of participants from sacraments of initiation through youth, teen and campus ministry to their current roles

Cultivating an Evangelizing Spirit. Discussed and reflected on challenges and opportunities for the New Evangelization in the Black Catholic community

Session participants, aged 22 through 35, came from 18 arch/dioceses, primarily from the South and Mid-Atlantic regions. Yet, Los Angeles CA, Omaha NE and Detroit MI were represented. We achieved the desired diversity of young adults within the target range in terms of geography, community size, parish community, educational level, skills, professions and ministries, as well as some diversity from the African diaspora. Some participants are married with children; two are college students; many work in education; others are in the legal profession, information technology, health care and the private sector. At least two work directly for their arch/dioceses. The nomination process yielded high quality results of participants currently serving on parish pastoral and finance councils, in music ministry, as lectors, catechists, youth ministers, young adult ministry leaders and teachers in Catholic schools.

The facilitators included Dr. Timone Davis, Fr. James Herring O. Praem, Mr. and Mrs. Ashley & LaSheka Morris, Ms. Brittany Borden and Ms. Donna Grimes. We met for several weeks to plan by phone.

A secondary objective of the Listening Session was to supply these young leaders with resources to enhance their contributions to the Church. Consequently, they received carefully chosen materials and information about USCCB Offices, Black Catholic sources and other national Catholic programs. Each received a paperback copy of the *African American Catholic Youth Bible*, a pamphlet for prayer and reflection, *Living Simply: Notes from a Monastery - The Sacred Way Every Day* (St. Meinrad Archabbey, 2009), prayer cards from the 4 guilds for Black Catholics in the U.S. with active causes for canonization, top resources from several USCCB offices, information about the *myUSCCB* subscription service and more.

Toward the end of the Gathering participants expressed a strong desire to remain connected through social media and future national and/or regional gatherings. Some participants indicated that they were tasked to report to their diocese and/or draft an article. USCCB desires to establish a private online community for continued dialog. Facilitators will meet quarterly by phone to discuss updates and possible next steps.

Here's what some participants had to say:

A. Concerning their role in the Church:

"Feel like I am the token young adult: elders are keeping me away from my greatness"

"We don't need to kick the older people out of the ministry. How do we help them become mentors? Nurture delicate relationships in our parishes."

"Strengths to offer our Church - technology, first perspective, connection with today's society, ability to communicate and crowd source information"

"We have a lot of things in our lives that take major commitment...poor time management, selfish, fear of commitment = fear of responsibility, we don't want to make a sacrifice"

B. Other insights feedback and concerns from notes and news print/post-its:

"Being part of the Mass matters."

"Parishes don't have the money to have people properly service them: liturgist, music director"

"How can people get involved when they don't even want to be there?"

"Being ashamed of who we are: we are always defending who we are as Catholics"

"Disconnected pastors, priests view it as a job not a passion"

"We used to have the involvement of the congregation, not today"

"African Americans are being pushed out of the inner city. New white folks don't want to be involved: different culture"

“Sometimes we need guidance and encouragement to go out and be disciples from older [people]; we are still trying to find our way.”

“For this generation church is no longer the center of our lives.”

“Many archdioceses have eliminated the Young Adult ministries”

“Closing down of black Catholic churches”

“We have to be accountable as Young Catholics”

“Don’t separate ministries”

“After we have big community events, can’t keep people coming back afterward.”

“Church doesn’t fit me: want depth, relation to culture, balance of why we are there and not just the theatrics”

“Older generation are stuck on tradition: but Jesus was the ultimate radical.”

C. Here’s what else they’d like to discuss:

“How can we improve the Catholic life of those in college?”

“The young adults in our parish are the second largest group, 18-40; there is a gap in our ages. How do you include everyone within this large age group?”

“What is your reason for coming to church besides the Eucharist?”

“We haven’t covered the fact that this is bigger than a young adult black catholic issue.

“How do you tell a member of the clergy that their homilies are too long and can use some work???”

“How do you get clergy involved with young adults, specifically in supporting bible studies and continued catechesis?”