

Aftermath Reflections/Email drawn from a Vesper Advent 2013 Experience

Email sent: Thu, Dec 19, 2013 3:45 am

Subject: Was in a vesper earlier

- Have shared this email with couple Haitian clergy, but had had no response or feedback.

Since the mid-1990s I've written or shared papers, books, articles or letters to new ministers in Lynn, Everett, Chelsea, Cambridge, Somerville as they arrive or as new ministries open. I've also shared with Dorchester, Mattapan since 2001 after Father Jeannot's passing. No clergy or lay minister had responded to faith formation or my attempt to work with them and/or give them a historical perspective of the North of Boston Haitian ministry which I was part of since its inception in 1973. Though St. Leo started in 1971, Pere Jeannot was instrumental in starting the Cambridge ministry in 1973 and both parishes did activities together. As a teenager, I was involved with youth groups in Dorchester as well. Other youth group members and I got married at St. Leo. Here is the email written on December 2013

This is a long e-mail - Can't go to bed without sharing this. The vesper ended up being like a mini retreat. At the Vesper, we had reflections, 20 minute silence. It lasted almost 2 hours - An hour and 45 minutes in an Anglo community is a lot. You always get something from those gatherings.

Luckily I had this mini centering prayer retreat. I had a three hour ordeal afterwards. My car had a flat tire and had to wait 2 and half hours for AAA. Though my daughter picked me up, her car was stuck for half hour in the ice. I have no cell phone. I went into a Seven Day Adventist church and used the pastor's cell. God always has a way to help you out when you trust in Him.

Back to the vesper/retreat. Two priests did it. One priest and a cantor did the half hour vesper and another priest did the reflections and the 20 minute silent section. The one who did the contemplative prayer is a hospital chaplain. He said something that makes sense. He says here in this country people always want results. At the hospital, they always evaluate, assess about what results the chaplaincy will bring/is bringing. He will tell them the results are long term, not overnight.

He said that to come to the importance that group reflections, contemplative prayers bring long term results in a community that reflects on their prayer practice. I am going to ask for the book he had as Christmas gift. This is true. I was in the Haitian church since it started 40 years ago as a high school student, went to college and came back as an adhoc Parish Council type of secretary. Since I have been an "auto-didact" reading, learning by myself, going to conferences since my teenage years, my first agenda item was faith formation. This agenda is what led me to leave church committees. Since 1995, I have been suggesting faith formation in the Haitian parishes that would have had reflective prayers. The written prayers I brought were ignored. I would bring copies like you see me sharing now via PDF. However, no one in the Adhoc parish council paid attention.

When I was studying at Weston Jesuits School of Theology, I used to say to committee members, you could do all the courses with me, except that you won't have to write the papers. They just stared at me. I had three liturgies classes all together. I remember during one of my

liturgy classes, I brought one of the books in the liturgy committee. They won't even look at it. One person said we have no time to read books and the missionary priest did not say anything. I went from copying chapters, to pages, to paragraphs, to strips of sentences which I still have. I also had books in French and Creole that they weren't interested either to read copies made from those books. A lady who is now leading Charismatic prayer groups said to me in Creole "You can bring things to read from January 1st to December 31st, we will never read them." In terms of being interested to bring MIT, Harvard and other college students to do educational after school projects in the church basement hall, another Charismatic prayer leader in the Adhoc committee said to me "If you want college students, just get them and deal with them yourself."

Once I organized the first training/reflection day with a top notch Haitian theologian, Father Micial Nerestant*. At the end of the day, the same lady from the charismatic group said to me, "It was nice. Next time we'll help." They objected at first, but I persevered. I'll never forget that day. There was a funeral. The deacon couldn't be at the wake. I did the wake on Friday night and Saturday made sure things went well during the workshop while the priest and the deacon were at the funeral. I still would like to go back to them 15, 18 years later, show them that booklet where those PDF pages are coming from to see their reactions.

Ten years ago (2003), I met a Haitian lady who is running a ministry 5 to 7 minute drive from my house. Since we had one class together at the MAM program, I did the same thing. In 3 instances, I prepared faith formation sessions which she found some ways not to let me hold. I ended up doing one of them two years later with another Haitian community where the priest is no longer there. I did not even try to put it together two other sessions. One was to be done during an Immaculate Conception celebration in 2004, their first anniversary, the other with the choir. I was in Brazil a year prior and got to see a Black Immaculate and a different church. The proposed 30 minute session would have been about Mary within the context of celebrating Immaculate. MIT students who were coming to volunteer in my class would have prepared a PowerPoint of Mary in different countries. An African Jesuit, one of the smartest guys I've ever met, would have presented Mary in Africa. African students are so smart. When in a class with them, I feel like I've never been to a library. In any event, the lady said people are not coming to conferences and wouldn't let me put together this 30 minute presentation somehow during a 4 hour show - mass and reception.

Though the earlier vesper was in the parish that has the longest running North of Boston Haitian ministry, I was the only Black person. I do participate in training myself when I want to do something, to learn of new developments. For instance, I remember in forming a choir last year (2012), I took three choir sessions with some young folks out of Berkeley School of Music and Longy in Harvard square. I went to a whole day Women music retreat led by a man with an Episcopalian group, and a Liturgical Day workshop at St. Katherine Drexel about the African American new Hymnal book, not counting articles I read. If you had a chance to read the PDF pages from The Little Blue Book six minute reflections, I probably have read a book about each of the topics, let alone articles and magazines that I am constantly reading from the internet, The Pilot, or the papers.

In any event, just wanted to share the semi Advent retreat before I go to bed. Sorry about this long e-mail.

In prayers

Nekita

They did not do the scripture sessions in 2015, only the nice 30 minute vesper.

Father Nerestant passed away in 2016. There was no fanfare about the most published active Haitian clergy. I found out two months after his passing while looking at the page of a seminarian who sent me a Facebook friend request. I was looking at his posts before replying to his friend request. It was mainly this young university student's posting RIPs, not the parish leaders or other Facebook friends church goers who posted about Father Nerestant. Very unfortunate that no one in church ever mentioned Father Nerestant's passing, such an erudite clergy who had come to Boston and had brought a group to a Holy land trip