

## Reflecting on a lifelong ministerial engagement

One may wonder as a Black immigrant Catholic woman what prompted my engagement in theological work. This summary would give an example of my lay ecclesial ministry experience since my adolescent years. I have worked as an elementary school teacher because that's what I've wanted to do since grade school. Though my lifelong acquired knowledge had not been used to its full potential, my entire life had been spent studying both Education and Theology formally, and history, cultures, and women informally. My situation is an example of "Brain Drain" in the US Black diaspora and the Haitian community in particular, both in and out of Haiti.

As aforementioned, I have wanted to be a teacher or a nun since elementary school. After high school, I went to college, obtained a Bachelor of Science degree (BS) in Education at the former Boston State College. I worked as a public school teacher for 27 years while getting graduate degrees and/or pursuing post graduate work in Bilingual/ESL/ELL/EL Education, Special Education, School Administration, and Theology.

In regards to theology, in 1977, one of the Brooklyn based Haitian Fathers priests exiled by Haiti's dictator Francois Duvalier known as Papa Doc, the late Rev. Antoine Adrien brought copies of a Haitian Creole magazine called Sèl (Salt in English) in his lecture on the Role of the Catholic church in Haiti's history. I started reading that magazine and bought a subscription. From that reading, I started reading The Pilot which is the Boston weekly diocesan paper, religion related articles in the Boston Globe, in Time magazine and in other mediums like US Catholic magazine. I have also bought faith related books in French on trips to France, Rome, Canada, and French speaking African countries. From years of reading about the Church and religion, I kept saying to myself, "I want to study theology." However, as a Catholic immigrant educator, evolving in the Black and immigrant communities, I never heard or seen, or met of any Catholic women with theological formation or doing any visible ministerial work besides the Caucasian women cantors in church. The CCD teachers in my immigrant ministry didn't have any formal religious education training. By the 1990s, I heard of one Haitian Protestant pastor, Soeur or Sister Zette, whom I haven't met up to today. I knew there were few female African American ordained ministers in the Boston area. However, I didn't start meeting them until attending meetings in the predominantly Black Baptist organization, Black Ministerial Alliance while a theology student in the early 2000s.

What brought me to formal theological school? In my Cambridge based Haitian immigrant church, Notre Dame de Pitié (Our lady of Pity), a Jesuit deacon who noticed my curiosity and comments during the Parish council meetings and my visions about youth, education and ministry in general invited me to dinner in his Jesuits' community circa 1999, 2000. From there, he invited me to study theology and I applied for admission. While still teaching public schools, I started studying theology in September 2001 and graduated in 2005 from the former Weston Jesuits School of Theology that merged with Boston College in 2008. After graduating, I entered Xavier University in New Orleans where classes in the Institute of Black Catholics are held in the summers. I started taking classes Summer 2006 when the program was held at Notre Dame campus in Indiana due to Katrina. I've flown from Boston to New Orleans every summer, except Summer 2009 until Summer 2012. However, due to taking care of my ailing late mom, losing my tenured teaching job, and lack of support in my own community, I didn't go any more and didn't complete the final requirements for the Th.M. degree (exit exam and thesis).

I never formally work at any ministerial capacity. With a Jesuits theological formation and as a trained, experienced educator, my attempts to do faith formation work and Community based

Education related activities since 1995 had never been supported by clergy and lay members in the Boston archdiocese. In regards to faith formation, I usually get some vague responses from the letters or emails I would write to the chancery or a representative in the US Conference of Bishops cultural diversity department. I did a presentation once for the Brooklyn based National Haitian Apostolate annual conference in 1998 or 1999. Subsequently they didn't show support of my theological interest or studies to the point they didn't mail me a card let alone come to my graduation in 2005. So I went to their 2006 conference to tell them that I didn't like their lack of support and stopped attending their annual conferences that I started going to around 1992. I used to travel to Brooklyn for the Apostolate conference planning and evaluation meetings twice a year and stopped going in the Fall 2005. However, in the wake of Facebook, I am their Facebook "friend." However, my DM questions or comments in their FB threads never get a response or like or anything. I never got a reply either to requests to put me in touch with their presenters who had done Zoom presentations on similar research that I have worked or working on.

In 2001, I started building a portfolio with a three-hole binder full of comprehensive notes and sessions I had planned to do with an ad hoc parish council I was part of. With technology, I have started multimedia productions of two Creole books on Haitian Women in History and Women in the church I had updated and revised. When churches closed due to COVID, couple friends, relatives, and myself have started Zoom Reflections/*Lectio Divina* meetings based on the Sunday readings. It's challenging to get more of the brethren engaged in Scripture readings and reflections without the support of a clergy member or a staff from the diocese. So I stopped bi-weekly Zoom *Lectio Divina*/faith sharings as well. However, I continue the multimedia production work on the two aforementioned books.

The Marian research has been an eye opener in terms of the various ethnic and cultural appropriations of the Virgin Mary. The lack of support as well from friends and relatives who are more tech savvy than I am is also a learning experience. The only available person is someone I pay in India to update and post things on my website/portfolio. An IT friend also helps when he can. The lack of tech/multimedia as well as financial support hinder my multimedia production project and a focus on faith formation. I have been working for three years (since 2020) in a project that should take three months. Though I took a multimedia production class, I still need support at times. If I can't find the trouble shooting help for two or three months, I just stop until a friend has time. My immediate nephews, nieces, and tech savvy family members are not motivated to help me either.

With the internet, Zoom, YouTube, I remain hopeful, my skills and learning about the Church since my teenage years would be financially and emotionally supported and used one day in the universal church.

That was in a nutshell a little about my professional and theological background. Thanks for taking the time to read my experience and for browsing at the link provided below.

Warm regards,

Nekita Lamour- July 2023, originally written as emails between 2021 & 2022

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