

A Perspective of Haitian/Black Lay Ecclesial Women Ministers in the Boston area

Between 2005 and 2015, the writer is aware of about 10 Black women, eight of them are foreign Blacks who have gotten formal theological ministerial degrees in the Boston area. The foreign women of African descent are from Haiti, Congo, and Jamaica. The other two African American lay women are Catholic and Episcopalian. She knew a doctoral student at Boston College who became an academic at the University of West Indies. One of the Boston College graduates became a pastor in a Caucasian Baptist denomination. A Haitian woman who graduated from St. John MAM (Masters of Art in Ministry) and probably the only Haitian female with a D.Min is in the chaplaincy field (nursing home and hospice to my knowledge) and spiritual direction. She also ran a Haitian immigrant ministry in Everett, MA from 2003 to 2018 or 2019. Though I have introduced her with priest classmates when she first started in 2003 to help with the liturgies and we had a class together at the St. John's MAM laity program, until she was forced to leave that ministry, she never showed interest to collaborate with me, an educator who has been involved in the Haitian ministry since my teenage years when the first North of Boston ministry opened in Cambridge, Massachusetts in the early 1970s. I attended my first Christmas mass as a teenage in 1973. This lay minister did not communicate or show willingness to collaborate with other Haitian or Black ordained/non - ordained ministers or professionals either.

A Haitian female was/is a youth prison chaplain at DYS (Division of Youth Services). A younger Haitian woman in her late 20s, early 30s at that time who ministered in St. Matthew's returned to her home parish in Camden New Jersey after completing her masters at Boston College. An African American woman convert who was at Weston Jesuit School of Theology (WJST) while I was there graduated in 2007. An Episcopalian African American female lay minister is/was teaching in a public school in Worcester. A Congolese who graduated from the St. John's seminary MAM program was/is doing pastoral work in the Worcester area. The MAM Master's (of Art in Ministry) opened in 2001 at the former St. John's seminary Brighton Campus, a program geared exclusively to the laity. Unlike Boston College, the Episcopal Divinity, Harvard Divinity or other BTI institutions (Boston Theological Institute), the laity at the MAM program do not get to study with those preparing for ordained ministry.

Personally, as an educator, my interest is combining Theology with Education, teaching Christianity and comparative religion to everyone, not just Catholics. I would also like to minister to commuting college students - something like a parish based campus ministry or a church that caters to university students, or professionals, or learners. There are people who don't have college degrees, but have written books or are lifelong learners. I'd like to minister to these independent learners as well.

The aforementioned professional lay women function in isolation, a phenomenon that is also seen in the Black church including Haitian churches. Nobody talks with each other. This "island" style of ministering makes it impossible to serve brethren of African descent. It also hinders a professional structure as women to articulate an immigrant female or womanist theology. It's unfortunate because if these Black women with formal ministerial/theological formation communicate and put their talents together, they could do marvel in the community and also contribute to the theological/ministerial discourse as Black women in the diaspora.

