

Some Restructural Reflections Generated after Sunday Liturgy at St. Polycarp's on 8-18-02

Main Ideas

- Reconfigure/Merge St. Ann's / Our Lady of Pity (OLP) Sunday night 5:00 masses and/or Our Lady of Grace (OLG) twice a month mid-day (1:30) Haitian Liturgies in Chelsea/Everett line
- Reaching out to college students of African descent, as well as African, Caribbean, and African American Young Adults, and middle class black professionals in the diocese
- Having some community based parish centers for Black Catholic students in higher education institutions since students of African descent tend not to participate in Newman Centers' activities or Catholic life on campuses. Moreover, a significant number of those students live at home and therefore, off campus. Our Lady of Pity (OLP) and successful predominantly black parish(es) in the Boston diocese may become such centers.
- OLP in Cambridge would reach out to MIT, Harvard, Tufts, Lesley, Bunker Hill students
- Other Black parish (es) may focus on Northeastern, Emmanuel, Simmons, B.U., Wheelock, U/Mass Boston, Roxbury Community College, Fisher College, and other Boston campuses.

Rationale : Due to high cost of real estate, Haitians have moved out of Cambridge. Besides the parishioners who live in subsidized apartment complexes or housing projects, and a handful of home owners (I know of only 2 in OLP), Our Lady of Pity faithful reside primarily in Medford, Malden, Everett, and Somerville. A few live in Revere, Brighton, Allston, Arlington, Stoneham, Waltham, Watertown and other surrounding Boston area towns. Our Lady of Pity is no longer a parish that serves the spiritual needs of Haitian immigrants who migrated to the Cambridge/Somerville area during the early migration of the 1970's or the mass migration of the 1980's. After thirty years, it has become primarily a gathering place for established working class Haitians to engage in popular religiosity practices and socialize. Is this the Mission of the Church?

One needs to face the reality that Cambridge is a "college town", with educated middle and upper middle class residents, including black Catholic students and young adults from the U.S, the Caribbean and many African countries. Based on observations and interactions with that particular population, the latter group need to be reached since they are not engaged in the ecclesial life of the parishes or in Newman Centers in various campuses. I would like to suggest some structural changes with the understanding that St. Ann is going through some changes and Our Lady of Grace in Chelsea already serves a Spanish speaking population. I believe if we explore available resources, the Holy Spirit will guide us through. Moreover, the same people go from one mass to another. Everett-Chelsea parishioners would go to Cambridge after the 1:00 liturgy. When St. Ann's had the Creole liturgy at 6:30, many would go to Somerville after the OLP 4:30 mass.

Some Schedule Changes to Consider

St. Ann's and Our Lady of Pity would share 5:00 Sunday masses in Somerville. There could also be a 1:00 liturgy every Sunday at OLG in Chelsea.

Our Lady of Pity would hold a 5:00 "cross-culturally black" liturgy in English geared to students, young adults and professionals. Intercessions and readings in French, Haitian Creole, and other African languages would occur at times or all the times. Communication, consultation, collaboration with the Black Catholics office, a vibrant black parish, the predominantly Nigerian ministry, professional musicians, liturgists, theological school(s) may help in creating a successful "cross culturally integrated black" ministry in Cambridge where Euro Americans would also be welcome. Catholics may do like protestants - use vans to transport college students to liturgies.

Resources to "tap on"

Ten Haitian Priests in the Boston area - 5 employed (1 of them a religious) and 5 studying from Haiti including a Haitian cleric who previously ministered in a U.S diocese

French and English Speaking African and Haitian seminarians/priests /deacons/ and other non-black clerics in graduate programs to help in a comprehensive catechism/evangelization/adult faith formation for everyone

Missionary of Charity (Mother Theresa's order) and other African nuns studying in the Boston area who are already helping in another ethnic parish to assist in Catechism for English speakers in grades K-10

Four Haitian seminarians (3 religious- 1 diocesan) 2 prospective seminarians - 1 lay educator studying theology

Some Concerns and Suggestions

Though there is an African ministry, an increasing number of French and English speaking Catholics from African countries residing in the Boston area either as students, or permanent immigrants or refugees are not being reached.

Ethiopians meet at OLP twice a month from 2:00-4:00. They would have to change to a morning time if a "cross cultural" mass to occur in the afternoon. Somehow, sometime Latin Catholics maybe exposed to Coptic (Alexandria, Ge'ez) rites and vice versa.

Since many black children attend mass with their parents, separate liturgical activities after the liturgy of the Word and until the Liturgy of the Eucharist may need to be developed.

Two parishes in Roxbury may be approached for consultation. One that serves Cape Verdean, Hispanic, and black English speakers and another predominantly African American parish with West Indian and Euro parishioners.

Haitian priests would help with lay formation and facilitate deemphasizing popular devotions and spending less time in charismatic prayers. During the two to sometime four hour Pentecostal gatherings, they would organize faith formation sessions. They would also train Creole speaking catechists, communicate with the Pastoral Ministry office and adapt some of the AIM courses to the Haitians.

Haitian and African seminarians/deacons/priests and nuns would be more involved with youth groups and young adults. Young blacks need to see more Catholics of African descent wearing "collars" and habits.

Service Project

Tutoring / ESL / Literacy, after school programs by undergraduate or graduate students at OLP church hall from 9:00 A.M to 7:00 P.M.

Communicate with Catholic and secular neighboring school (s) in using their facilities or the diocese in occupying a recently closed North Cambridge school for educational service projects and catechism.

A skillful person would have to be in charge of coordinating this educational endeavor and the changes that need to occur in the Haitian ministry.

Nekita Lamour (originally written 8-23-02, last revision 11-28-02)

