

A faith-filled journey

This year's holy season of Lent offered us a chance to journey on an Inter-Church Spiritual and Cultural Lenten Pilgrimage. Our four sacred journey stops were St. Matthew, St. Ann, St. Edward and New All Saints. The spiritual part of our journey began with praying the Stations of the Cross. Each sacred place offered a unique perspective on our stations. Through prayer we mediated on the final steps of Jesus' own journey. Realizing that each step Jesus took allows us to reflect on the importance of steps taken in our own lives. Each step we take affects us as individuals, and as members of groups at large. Our decisions and the actions we partake in affect present and future circumstances. This part of the pilgrimage provided the link for the next step in our journey.

The reflection part of the journey allowed us to explore in detail black Catholic issues, our history and our culture. Striving to become more like Jesus during the Lenten season is always an objective. We obtained wisdom and strength from the conversations. This journey of exploration in faith we were afforded gave us the opportunity to search for a deeper understanding of past, present and to some extent our future circumstances. Our discussions allowed us to examine the characteristics, which our ancestors possessed, in being spiritually healthy and strong and the role that played in their survival. We examined instances of racism, division and prejudice. Our purpose and mission in the Catholic Church were talked about and analyzed. We recognized the need for inclusiveness. We gave recognition to the contributions and the gifts and talents that our heavenly Father has graciously bestowed upon us as a spirit filled people.

This journey provided a wonderful complement to the increase in prayer, repentance and reflection we do during Lent. These reflections added a new and fresh dimension to our yearly Lenten pilgrimage. Many of us in addition to fasting and depriving ourselves of things chose also to stretch a bit more, or leave the comfort zone during Lent. We focused our attention on spiritual growth and serving God unselfishly. We traveled with Jesus in Scripture to thoroughly understand our role and become more rooted in faith.

The community of worshippers who came together during this special season of Lent

embarked on a powerful journey. Exploring our faith and experiencing the power of God's word and his promises proved to be rewarding. Nurturing the desire to want to do more in the name of Jesus Christ was exceptionally gratifying.

I experienced the uniqueness of this journey. It birthed a renewed commitment of steadfastness and courage to stay committed and spirit filled. I clearly heard a bell sound for me at each stop. It revealed the many difficult and challenging issues facing our black churches and our communities at large. I feel as though we are in the midst of a defining moment, with so many of our predominantly black Catholic schools closing, the fear of losing many of our predominantly black churches can't be far behind. These closures affect more than just the students who attend the schools. Additionally, it affects more than the families who support these schools. It reaches beyond the communities in which they formally operate. There are job losses, cut backs, reduction of services and the immeasurable spirit losses. And still I stay encouraged to turn to God for direction and strength. "I have the strength to face all conditions by the power that Christ gives me". (Philippians 4:13.)

This beautiful reflective journey and pilgrimage through Scripture exploration, theme selection and prayerful discernment, provided a deep examination of our present conditions as well as a faithful look into what lies ahead. It enabled us to set the stage and create the future forum relying on our resurrected Lord for divine direction, guidance and strength to journey further.

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