

Africentric: Power of a Catholic education

Something miraculous happens every day when children come to learn and pray in our Catholic schools. Lives are changed, minds are stretched and relationships with Jesus are secured.

For decades across the United States, African-Americans came into the Catholic Church through Catholic schools. Conversions of whole families to Catholicism grew everywhere there was a Catholic school. Not only were lives transformed intellectually, but also spiritually.

Nestled on the east side of Baltimore, we find an oasis of education, a well spring of knowledge, a fountain of grace called St. Frances Academy. For more than 180 years, the Oblate Sisters of Providence, with the help of God, changed the landscape of hope for thousands of students entering their corridors of academic achievement and spiritual formation.

A light of recognition and appreciation for the sustained outreach of education, discipline and faith formation showed brightly on St. Frances Academy when Drs. Camille and William Cosby came to town. A celebration of education and community outreach danced through East Baltimore when the St. Frances Academy Community Center was named after the Drs. Cosby.

The Oblate Sisters of Providence made history when they opened the doors to educate black students. In 1828, the founding year of St. Frances Academy, it was against the law to educate people of color. It was against the law for more than three to four people to gather as the “Black Code” was enforced. At that era, the Oblates knew the radical nature that education could provide for a people, so desperate to attain equality and a quality of life that other Americans could attain. Education was a key and faith formation could open the door to confront challenges and sustain a people.

From the early days up until the mid-1970s the school was opened to boarders who travelled far and near to attend the school with day students. A ledger of 1830 indicates that families sacrificed to send their daughters to St. Frances Academy. Some were able to give the nuns at least 10 quarters upon entrance for the

education of their daughters. Those who sent their children were bootblacks, barbers, cigar makers, cooks, washers and musicians. From the beginning there was always a cadre of “children of the house” and even widows under the care of the Oblate Sisters of Providence. These students were taught various languages, religion, music, writing, needlework and household mathematics, always under the banner of excellence.

Today the school continues to forge academic excellence, evidenced in the 100 percent of graduates who will attend college, many securing full and partial scholarships. This has been a recurring statistic over the past five years with one year having 99 percent go on to college – the other student entered the military.

In this modern era of economic challenges, the Oblates and their supporters and educational leaders continue to assist students who are vulnerable, providing financial support through the generosity of the Cosbys as well as the strong religious support rendered to those in most need. This gives evidence that a Catholic school education can transform lives into a landscape of hope.

Catholic education continues to be a value within our community. Many can attest to the fact that their Catholic education made all the difference in the world in obtaining spiritual strength for the journey, greater academic achievements and professional attainments.

The office and board of African American Catholic Ministries have established a Daniel Rudd Scholarship Fund to assist three Catholic students in acquiring a Catholic education. To generate funds, a raffle is under way. Each ticket is \$100, with only 200 tickets being sold. The only winner of the raffle will be awarded \$10,000. The remaining \$10,000 will go toward awarding of scholarships and an endowment. Your kind support is appreciated. Tickets can be obtained through the Office of African American Catholic Ministries, call 410-625-8472.

Therese Wilson Favors is the director of the Office of African American Catholic Ministries.

Copyright (c) May 31, 2012 CatholicReview.org