

Baltimore mom prays for racial healing, solutions to social injustice

Crystal Morris is a busy woman. The 55-year-old West Baltimore resident makes sure her neighborhood church is always open for those who seek Jesus.

Nestled near the corner of Bloom Street and North Freemont Avenue, sandwiched between an elementary school and a catchall grocery, she answers God's phone calls and doorbells, researches baptismal records, and even washes and irons his altar linens.

"This church has been a beacon of hope for a lot of people in our community," she told Catholic News Service from St. Peter Claver Church's rectory. "We have people coming in and out of here asking for help with rent, gas, electricity - they come here for food and clothing."

Poverty is no joke in the Sandtown-Winchester neighborhood. Door after door, window after window, homes are boarded up with a sadness associated with war.

In 2015, residents took to these same streets near the African-American church to feud with police after 25-year-old Freddie Gray died in their custody.

"Some people are not grounded and rooted in Christ," the mother of three adult children said about social injustices. "I tell my two daughters to keep praying. Pray because God can do anything but fail."

Prayer and song, Morris makes sure her devotion is heard during Mass as a choir member.

“She loves herself some Smokie Norful!” her youngest daughter Cierra, 20, said about her mom’s appreciation for the Grammy-winning gospel singer. “She sings all around the house like 24/7.”

“She thinks she’s Whitney Houston!” Candace, her eldest daughter, 23, said jokingly.

Church life and church employment have been a blessing for the Morris family. Crystal told CNS that she thanks God for her time on earth because she, too, has lost friends and family to drug and alcohol addiction, and violence.

“It takes a village,” Morris said when asked about raising kids under these circumstances. “The older women in the parish always had an eye out (for each other’s children) and the kids did not like that. Sometimes they would get a little puffy and give you a look, but they stayed respectful.”

“I think it’s a good thing that mom works at the church,” Candace said.

“We can tell it’s a big part of her, and it feels good,” Cierra said.

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