

Black priest says pro-life, African-American communities must unite

CHARLOTTE, N.C. – An African-American priest who graduated from the University of Notre Dame in 1989 told the National Right to Life convention June 19 that he was “heartbroken” when he learned that Notre Dame planned to honor U.S. President Barack Obama at its 2009 commencement.

“I was heartbroken to hear that my alma mater was betraying the church and her bishops and selling her spiritual birthright for a mess of presidential pottage,” said Josephite Father John Raphael, principal of St. Augustine High School in New Orleans.

Father Raphael spoke on “The Impact of Notre Dame on the African-American and Pro-Life Communities” at the convention’s prayer breakfast.

As the principal of a predominantly black, all-boys Catholic school, Father Raphael said he felt the tension of being an African-American who celebrated the historical significance of the first African-American president but who as a Catholic was dismayed over the fact that the unborn would not be protected by this president’s policies.

His convictions led him to speak at an alternative commencement ceremony at Notre Dame in May and gave him greater motivation to reconnect African-Americans with their pro-life roots.

His presence at Notre Dame was seen differently among most of the African-American and pro-life communities.

“I was welcomed with open arms by my pro-life brothers and sisters, and I was an enigma at best and a traitor at worse to many of my African-American brothers and sisters,” he said. “I found myself at the intersection of two communities who in many areas, even concerning the sanctity of life, have much more in common than one might imagine.”

Father Raphael said he believes these two communities need to connect because they need each other, as they stand on “different banks of a mighty and destructive river.”

“African-Americans need pro-lifers because African-Americans and minority communities are being systematically targeted by anti-life forces,” he said. “Our future is being destroyed by the genocidal magnitude of legalized abortion.”

Pro-lifers need the African-American community, he said, because blacks with their unique American history provide new energy to the movement.

Father Raphael said the ice needs to be broken and the bridge to be built in a culturally sensitive way that respects the past and future of each community as they fight for the same ideas – the equal rights and protection of all.