

Church's impact on youth more important than ever

Anyone who needed indication that all is not lost with the youths in Baltimore City would have gotten their fair share of reassurance at a church in northwest Baltimore recently.

On April 17, youths and young adults from Catholic parishes across the city came together for an African American Youth Liturgical Celebration held at New All Saints.

From the altar servers to the ushers, the youths participated in every ministry of the Mass. Youth choirs and praise teams set the tone as they sang for God's glory, eliciting shouts and applause from those in attendance. The singing was complemented by the dance ministries, as individuals danced to African tribal drums while placing incense before the altar.

The youth gathering on that Saturday afternoon confirmed that the younger generation is not a lost cause as some would believe. Clichés such as “the children are our future” are regularly thrown around, but more often than not, young adults seemed to be viewed negatively by their elders. The youths are “tomorrow's leaders” (yet another cliché), but ironically some are reluctant to help them become the leaders they need to be and are more inclined to watch them destroy their lives at such an early age.

If there was any significance in the Youth Liturgical Celebration at all, it was that it reinforced the importance of God in the lives of those young adults. The hundreds in attendance showed those young people that they are all loved and appreciated.

I can personally say that being involved with my church as a young adult was very important. I did not realize how important it was, however, until I became older. The teachings I received in Sunday school, the messages I heard in sermons – none of them truly sank in until I applied them to my adult life. Lessons that I learned in church or advice given to me from my pastor would creep into my mind, almost like

déjà vu. Not only that, but the bonds that I formed with members of my church made me consider these people family. It's almost surreal that people at my church have literally seen me grow up over the years, and that people I grew up with are now parents and are married. Being around my church as a teenager would influence my adult life before I even realized it.

Fortunately, I am not alone with my testament to how important the church is in a young person's life. In his own words, Enoch Attenoukon recalled the impact the church had on him and the importance of the aforementioned youth mass:

"When I was growing up, my church always served as a bright spot in my neighborhood and my life as well. St. Ambrose [Catholic Church] was a place I could call home and I enjoyed being part of the parish family. As things changed and as I dealt with the challenges that life brings, the faith, love, and dedication of my church remained constant. Our youth group helped me grow spiritually as I was growing into my own as a teenager. The lessons and support I received as a youth at my church helped shape the morals and values that I believe in today.

"However, when I looked back at this period of time I realized that I did not get the chance to regularly interact with youths from other parishes. After being a part of the African American Youth Liturgical Celebration, it was amazing to see the youths from so many different parishes work together and learn from each other. This celebration was powerful in the way it showcased the strengths and talents of our urban parishes. All our youths are blessed with different gifts and when they are given the chance to unite and share their gifts while growing in faith, we all benefit."

The church has always been the cornerstone for African Americans for countless generations. In order to ensure that our youths can become competent leaders, it is vital that the church is a part of future generations as well. The showing at the African American Youth Liturgical Celebration proved that youths are listening and waiting to be guided; it is now up to us to guide them.

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