

# **Eyewitness account of the third National Gathering for Black Catholic Women**

A grey Friday morning, foretelling the storms of the weekend suggests the mood of the women silently boarding the bus whose destination is Charlotte, N.C. Servant women weary from the Gospel work, which includes service to parish, family and community.

Gospel work in response to the Jesus' instruction as cited in Matthew 25:35-36 "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me."

Thank God it's Friday the 13th, day of August, the first day of the third National Gathering for Black Catholic Women. Black Catholic Women from Baltimore travel to Charlotte, N.C., to "Commemorate, Celebrate and Commit" to the legacy of service to the church, family and community.

## **History**

The gatherings are sponsored by the National Black Sisters' Conference. Founded in 1968, the conference a national organization representing black Catholic religious in the United States pledges to work unceasingly for the liberation of black people. The religious women recognize and embrace the role of black Catholic lay women in the "spreading of the Good news in spirit and in action." They sponsor and organize these gatherings to provide a welcoming, culturally sensitive "spiritual space" that provides for spiritual renewal!

## **Commemorate**

Black Catholic women from Baltimore exit the bus. The "drums of welcome" call us to the gathering space. We observe a "sea of faces" representing black Catholic women from across the nation. We are reminded these women share with us in the

Gospel work. Work that Sister of Social Service Eva Lumas reminds us, “for which we have a genuine passion but work we could resent when burned out.”

The gathering space becomes “Holy Ground” consecrated by scent, sounds and the service of black women to God’s people. The women beam with pride and break into wild applause as the black religious women march into the gathering space.

Baltimore women are ecstatic when Oblate Sister of Providence Magdala Gilbert, representing Mother Mary Lange’s daughters, enters the room. All women gathered remember and are grateful for the example, sacrifice and leadership of black catholic religious women!

### **Celebrate**

The women gather to experience the scholarly remarks of Kathleen Dorsey-Bellow. A proud recipient of Baltimore’s historic black Catholic tradition and experience lives her life “Celebrating the Faith of Black Catholic women.”

Dorsey-Bellow teaches “women are the carriers of culture and the creators of community.” She goes on to remind us that during “the difficult and dark days” the faith of black women encouraged us to “fight the good fight” versus succumbing to despair. Participants were taught the Gospel work of building up a black community of faith is essential to the liberation of black people. Hence, it is no surprise the Civil Rights Movement faith champions include a humble black religious woman, Franciscan Sister of Mary Antona Ebo, who attended the gathering and exemplifies the faith we celebrate.

### **Commit: Black Catholic Women Transforming Family and Community**

Understanding we cannot “rest on the laurels of a triumphant past,” participants were charged with the need to act. Our communities are facing unprecedented violence, deterioration of the family structure, unemployment and disproportionate devastation related to national disasters.

Therese Wilson Favors taught we must resolve to be the transformation in our communities, boldly acting on our faith. She reminded prayer warriors that transformation is not our work but God’s work counseling the reality that, “God’s

grace keeps pace with whatever we face! Favors brought to mind that the recurring nightmares that haunt our families and communities warrant our attention. “These nightmares keep repeating themselves because we refuse to wake up and get up, working in the name of Jesus.”

### **Invitation**

In Baltimore we have an opportunity to experience the spirit of the gathering, during “Keep on Teaching” scheduled for Sept. 11 from 9:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. at St Cecelia Parish (Hilton and Windsor Avenue) when Sister Eva, a spirit-filled “tell it like it is speaker,” will bring the message.

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