

Father Harris' Story and a Call for Vocations

Every institution and religious and social movement that wants to live, survive and thrive into the next generation places great emphasis in the grooming and support of its leaders. That is why almost every document that discusses the evangelization of African Americans promotes indigenous leadership and the importance of African-American vocations.

During this "Year of the Priest," Father Raymond Lee Harris Jr. celebrates a 15th anniversary of ordination. What joy is had for him and his ministry and what hope is still anticipated for more African-American men to join the ranks of priesthood. It has been 15 years and our church still needs folks to "work in the vineyard" and join the order of priesthood.

No doubt prayer is warranted. No doubt racial sensitivity is needed. No doubt explicit and culturally relevant invitations must persist. No doubt acute listening of our young to "the call" must be engaged. However, these words of Franciscan Sister of Perpetual Adoration Thea Bowman still ring true. "If you want vocations, then you need to raise vocations in your family We've got to place into the imagination and heart of our young ones the awesome blessing and joy of serving God and God's people as priest, brother, deacon or as a religious women."

One way to raise awareness about vocations among African Americans is to invite all, especially our young, to the anniversary celebration of Father Harris. The celebration will also serve as an opportunity to pray for vocations. Mass will be celebrated on Oct. 2 at 7 p.m. at Father Harris' home parish of St. Joseph's Passionist Monastery Church in Irvington (Old Frederick Road and Monastery Avenue). A reception will follow in the church hall.

Jo Anne Harris, mother of Father Harris, said she saw something in him when he was young. "In a spiritual sense, since youth, Ray was an 'old soul,' providing wisdom and inspiration to many."

Here is Father Harris' story.

Father Raymond Lee Harris was born in Baltimore to Jo Anne Cecilia Bradford and the late Raymond Lee Harris Sr. After attending Gilman School, he matriculated at Princeton University, receiving a Bachelor of Arts degree in religion in 1989. Then he attended St. Mary's Seminary and University as a seminarian for the Archdiocese of Baltimore. During this time, he served several parish internships in Baltimore: St. Anthony of Padua, St. Cecilia, St. William of York and New All Saints. Father Harris' areas of focus were liturgy, adult religious education, evangelization and the pastoral care of the sick.

He graduated from the seminary in May 1994, receiving the Master of Divinity and Baccalaureate of Sacred Theology degrees. He was ordained by then Archbishop William Keeler on June 4, 1994 in the Cathedral of Mary our Queen. Father Harris is the third African American to be ordained for the archdiocesan priesthood in Baltimore.

Father Harris served as an associate pastor of: St. Anthony of Padua Parish from 1994 to 1995; St. Anthony of Padua and Most Precious Blood Parishes from 1995 to 1997; and the Church of Immaculate Conception in Towson from 1997 to 2000. While serving the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Father Harris was responsible for the following areas of parish life: liturgy, evangelization, the Order of Christian Initiation for Adults and the adult religious education program. In addition, Father Harris was the coordinator of parish outreach to the Greater Baltimore Medical Center.

Father Harris served as the chaplain and director of campus ministry of Mount St. Mary's University from 2000 to 2005. He has served as an executive officer of Mount St. Mary's Seminary as the director of pastoral field education from 2005 to 2007.

Since 2007, Father Harris has been studying to obtain a Licentiate in Canon Law at the Catholic University of America. God willing, he will finish his course of studies in December 2009.

Father Harris is a former member of the archdiocesan presbyteral council, archdiocesan priest personnel board, and the board of African American Catholic

ministries.

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