

Join a season of action, hope and representation

Do you feel you are adequately represented by your Congressperson?

When President Obama delivered the State of the Union address, there were 433 of 435 members of the House of Representatives present, roughly one for every 700,000 American citizens. The U.S. Constitution requires a much smaller ratio of no more than one representative for every 30,000 residents. This number of House members has not changed since 1912 though the population of the United States has increased substantially. In a recent New York Times op-ed article, co-author Professor Jacqueline Stevens of Northwestern (Ill.) University argued that “the House itself is too small, and that it’s time to add more representatives to the legislative body.”

The same can be said about our church representation. Good people, are you assured that our future in the Catholic Church will be represented? Efforts to mentor and encourage young people must be on the agenda now. Adults must represent in every Godly way possible in support of our parish, school and community youth ministry programs. Adult advisers are desperately needed. As Therese Wilson Favors, director of the archdiocesan Office of African American Catholic Ministries, says often, it is time for us “to step up, show up and speak up.” It’s that serious. Every church in our network can benefit from the added support. Our existence as a faith community depends on it.

Much like our system of representative government, Harambee’s effectiveness can best be measured when its collaborative efforts are products “of its young people, by its young people, and for young people.”

Youths citywide are attending church services, Bible study and youth enrichment activities to varying degrees, principally because of a faithful few conscious parents, dedicated advisors and youth ministers. Are there not others among us as willing, as concerned, as capable of donating a few hours of our time weekly, initially for training and then subsequent planning and implementation, of youth initiatives? We

need faith-filled adults to represent so that a consistent, holistic approach to program planning and faith development for youth may occur. Simply said, we need you to represent.

The reality is that there is no substitute for a trained, full-time coordinator of youth ministry programs. None currently exist in our predominantly African-American parishes. There is an approach to youth ministry that can and has been effective. This strategy involves a team of volunteers who share responsibilities, are consistent in their efforts to engage with youth at the parish level, and collaborate with sister parishes to identify enrichment opportunities sponsored on all fronts.

My prayer is that, until we all begin to consciously and consistently pool our resources, share responsibilities, hire and train the gifted among us for this vital ministry, we must do our best until our best is not good enough. We all must represent.

Did you notice that the Christmas card from the Office of African American Catholic Ministries signed off with the words, "Let us continue to pray and work together to win the lost, build the believer and equip the workers"? That's a mouthful and a lot of work to do, to say the least. You should know the work is ongoing and still much to do. There's plenty of room at our table, so please consider joining city sister parishes and schools as we gather to work until the work is done. Consider the following upcoming collaborative youth ministry initiatives in need of your support. Plan now to encourage your parish, school and community youth's participation. My thanks in advance, for your continued prayers and support of Harambee.

The African American Youth Liturgical Celebration will be held Feb. 12, starting at 9 a.m. with a 3-on-3 basketball tournament, at the St. Frances Academy Community Center at 501 E. Chase St. Vocation information and virtual history tour at 11 a.m., liturgy with Bishop Denis J. Madden at 2 p.m.

The Harambee Lenten Youth Retreat will be held March 4-6 at Catoctin Mountain Park in Frederick County. Youth in grades 8-12 are invited, \$40 fee includes transportation, food and lodging.

For more information about both events, call 410-258-6920 or e-mail Howard W. Roberts, director of Harambee, at hwr259@aol.com.