

‘Martin Luther King’s dream is coming true’

The morning after Barack Obama became the first African-American ever elected president of the United States, Skipp Sanders and fellow black Catholics in Baltimore rejoiced.

Mr. Sanders’ mind flashed back 40 years to the old Edmonson High School, where he taught English and drama, and he remembered the hurt and rage on the faces of his students after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr.

On the morning of Nov. 5, however, Mr. Sanders, an associate superintendent for Archdiocese of Baltimore schools, saw hope among the faces of the estimated 100 who attended a celebration of Black Catholic History Month at the Catholic Center.

“You can actually tell every child in this room, ‘You could be president.’ What a remarkable thing to say,” Mr. Sanders said. “Up until last night, I could never say that with conviction, even to my own son.”

The Cardinal Shehan School choir sang “We’ve Come This Far By Faith,” then its members tried to grasp the magnitude of what had just happened.

“I just think the country has come very far, and Martin Luther King’s dream is coming true,” said Amahdiya Muhammad, a 13-year-old eighth-grader.

Classmate Theron Edwards’ thoughts turned to generations not yet born. “I feel like I’m a part of history - that I’m living through this,” Theron said. “And I can tell my children to tell their children, and that’s what’s so great.”

Auxiliary Bishop Denis J. Madden said it was fitting that the archdiocese's annual celebration of Black Catholic History Month came a day after the election.

"Now we celebrate that today a landmark change has come to our country in our first African-American president," Bishop Madden said, drawing loud applause. "We pray for President Obama and look forward to supporting him throughout his presidency."

A display at the celebration, "Saints, Pioneers and Trailblazers - Leaders and Witnesses for All," featured Jesus and Mary with African features, along with pictures of famous black Catholics, including Mother Mary Elizabeth Lange, the founder of the Oblate Sisters of Providence.

Cloths made of mud from West Africa graced tables, and participants poured water onto a green plant, symbolizing the scriptural libation ceremonies in which water represents God's unending acts of love and nourishment of his people.

Father Donald A. Sterling, pastor of New All Saints, Liberty Heights, delivered a reflection focusing on African spirituality's influence on Christianity, from ancient Egypt to the three African popes.

In an interview, Father Sterling said Mr. Obama's election sends a clear, if long overdue, message.

"Black Americans typically have lived with the reality that there are just certain things that we will not be allowed to do," Father Sterling said. "We never dreamed that a black man really would be elected president of the United States. I mean, that was just a fact of life."

On the momentous night when Michelle Obama, a descendant of slaves, became the first lady-elect, Sister Virginie Fish watched the election returns on TV and thought

of her great-grandmother, who was a slave in Southern Maryland.

“When Obama was chosen, I thought that we have acted as a people of God and not as a people who are subjected to the shallowness and the degradation of class distinction,” said Sister Virginie, an 80-year-old Oblate Sister in Baltimore.

“I think God is going to use Obama for great good,” Sister Virginie said, “and I thank God I am alive to witness what has taken place in this country.”