

New board members march into the future

In a historic meeting Dec. 1, Most Rev. Bishop Denis J. Madden seated new members for the Archdiocesan Board of African American Catholic Ministries. The new members “turned out,” carrying new dreams to accomplish the mission of the Office of African American Catholic Ministries as they were seated. In doing so, they tapped into an African tradition of asking the elder board members who have served in the past to pray for them and offer wisdom before they “claimed their seats.” Our “Turning Out Celebration” was an adaptive form of a ritual inspired by the Gullah people of South Carolina and Georgia whose foundation reached back to the Yoruba tribe in West Africa. It is a celebration of specific key points in a person’s life, oftentimes a welcome into or the return of someone back into the tribe. This “Turning Out Celebration” was led by Bishop Madden and concluded with Howard Roberts (coordinator of Harambee Youth Organization) asking the group through several questions, “Do you have the strength using your faith” to work in unity, with a sense of purpose and with the goal of empowerment.

During the meeting, members of the board were asked to share a dream, insight, effort or initiative that they have in mind to advance the mission of the Office of African American Catholic Ministries. It was exciting and rejuvenating to hear the passion exuding from them as they articulated dreams of creating catechetical resources that discuss issues experienced by young people, enhancing our understanding of African culture and symbols, calling forth new and empowered leaders to assume roles in our parishes and within the archdiocese, seeking ways and strategies to become a church that shares resources as seen in the Acts of the Apostles: “all of the believers continued in close fellowship and shared their belongings with one another ... they would sell all their possessions and distribute the money according to each one’s needs.” Other board members spoke of a hope of dialoguing with our hierarchy, designing campaigns that are culturally appropriate to raise vocations, seeking ways to assist our parishes in effective evangelization efforts, defining best practices in keeping our parishes strong both spiritually and financially. A strong advocate for Catholic schools dreamt of archdiocesan Catholic

schools and developing strategies that would attract Catholics back into Catholic education. Most dreams revolved around maintaining and attracting youth and young adults to the church. These dreams were manifested through an articulation of needs including rites of passage, establishing sports programs and alternative educational forums in the area of industrial electronics to help young people find employment, and a call for campus ministry where African-American young people go to college. Included, too, was a calling forth of an initiative that would enhance the study of Scripture among our people as well as celebrating the diversity within the Catholic Church.

The Archdiocesan Board of African American Catholic Ministries is an advisory body to the Office of African American Catholic Ministries appointed by the archbishop of Baltimore to generate ideas, and to establish and monitor goals that promote evangelization and leadership with and among African-American Catholics. The board plays a vital role in bringing diverse experiences, special expertise and perspectives to the overall direction of the office. It is the role of staff to translate prescribed goals into programs, policies and services. The board also makes recommendations to the office through committee work.

Board members include:

Bonaventure Chima Anyanwu

John Berkley

Bessie Black

Karen Bowens

Rodney Camphor

David Charon

Mary Clayton

Katherine Coleman

Paula Cullings

Eric Davis

Leon Epps Jr.

Doris Foster

Nina Harper, Interim President

Gloria Herndon, Interim Secretary

Ella Johnson

Dr. Paula Langford

Albert Mc Gill

Michelly Merrick

Gwendolyn Mullen

Janet Pettaway

Dr. Kellie Price

Kemit Price

Sr. M. Clarice Proctor, O.S.P.

Janice Rattley

Brenda Rigby

Kevin Rodgers

Rev. Mr. Paul Shelton

Kevin Simmons

Therese Wilson Favors is director of the Office of African American Catholic Ministries.