

Preserving our history by crossing digital divide

Leading up to this month of celebrating Black Catholic History, God sent several interesting and innovative ideas our way along with partners. Here's the story and how you can become a partner.

Several months ago, Gwendolyn Mullen, a member of the Archdiocesan Board of African American Catholic Ministries, wrote an Africentric column for The Catholic Review. The article discussed the ministry of the board, announced newly elected officers and provided a description of the subcommittees established. Two of the subcommittees mentioned utilizing technology to advance evangelization efforts and organizing Black Catholic history research to benefit parishes in their evangelization outreach.

The Black Catholic History Committee worked over the summer, developing a script and collecting pictures for the production of a DVD to be released this month. The subcommittee on Black Catholic History tapped on the faith and historical knowledge of Agnes Kane Callum and Oblate Sister of Providence Reginald Gerdes. Alethea Braggs, a videographer and technological genius assisting the Oblate Sisters of Providence with several projects, lent support for production.

That was just one gift given by God. There are more.

John McFadden of the Knights of Columbus of Loyola University of Maryland Council 15000 read the column written by Mullen. He was intrigued, particularly with the committees on history and technology. He explored possibilities of engagement and assistance with Grand Knight Salvatore Lorenzo and the Loyola Council. Guided by the Holy Spirit, discussions were held centering on how the young Knights at Loyola could lend support to the Office and Board of African American Catholic Ministries.

I met with McFadden, Joshua Tarini and Stephen King from Loyola University. They proposed a partnership with our office, having the goal of Loyola providing assistance in our electronic evangelization efforts as well as archival support. Our

initial effort is to kick off a campaign to digitize historical pictures and documents collected within the African American Catholic community of Baltimore. We need to formulate a digital library and this partnership with the Knights of Columbus and the Experiential Learning Program at Loyola has unlimited possibilities.

To begin the journey, I was to supply a few pictures and documents to be digitized. I treasure an 1888 letter from Daniel Rudd to James Cardinal Gibbons. Rudd, the founder of the National Black Catholic Congress movement, was seeking permission to hold the first Congress in the Archdiocese of Baltimore. Father Paul Thomas, former archivist for the archdiocese, took a picture of the original letter and gave me a copy. One hundred years later, in 1988, the historical positioning of the Secretariat for African American Catholics was established at the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. I submitted a full-page article from The Sun, dated March 20, 1988, highlighting Dr. Beverly A. Carroll's appointment as Executive Director. Another document submitted is of an article by Frank Somerville and photo in The Sun. Somerville interviewed Josephite Bishop John H. Ricard when he returned from South Africa, where he served as an election judge during the election of Nelson Mandela to president of that nation in 1994.

These items were "treasures in my attic." I know you have some too. You too can become a partner by submitting old documents, copies of baptismal records and photographs. Everything you share will be returned to you. You and your family tell an important story of African American Catholic life in the Archdiocese of Baltimore. We want parish stories as well as family stories. If you don't tell it who will?

If you wish to submit your history for the digital library, please contact me at 410-625-8472 or at TFavors@archbalt.org. Your contribution is a step into the future, leaving a legacy for those to come.

I conclude with a quote from the book, "What We Have Seen and Heard: Essays and Stories from Black Catholics of Baltimore," by Cardinal William H. Keeler: "Our world today is in need of the testimony of African American Catholics who walk by faith and not by sight. Their testimonies bring hope."

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