

in a

Word™

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**THE BLACK CATHOLIC COMMUNITY
CAN NO LONGER BE THE STONES
THAT THE BUILDERS REJECTED!!**

-Bishop Fernand Cheri, OFM

BLACK CATHOLIC REVELATION

The following reflection is from workshops given by Bishop Fernand Cheri, OFM in various venues to African American parish ministers

As I stand before you my brothers and sisters, my hope and dream for you who are Black and those who minister in the African American Apostolate, is that people will say of you, “not in any diocese, not in any religious community, not even in the Catholic Church, have I found such great accompaniment in ministry as witnessed by Black parishes in this Archdiocese.

Like Paul, who found in Joseph, also known as **Barnabas**, a defender of his Christian conversion, his benefactor for his ministry and a fellow missionary disciple to the Gentiles, I look to you, “THE MAINSTAYS” (*the persons on which something is based or depends*) as being so proudly and so profoundly Black and Catholic, so intentional and so richly endowed, rooted in your Black Catholic tradition, I call you to hold fast to the faith and join me in proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ the Lord. I pray that your testimony will be so forcefully Black and Catholic that all will see **A NEW PENTECOST: HARVEST TIME IN THE BLACK CATHOLIC COMMUNITY!!**

I appeal to you for the Black Catholic Community, whom I have begotten in my episcopal ministry. I am souled out - that's **S-O-U-L-E-D** OUT - my mind is made up. See, highly favored, justly proud, intentionally convicted as a Black Catholic Bishop, daring to offer “**who I am and whose I am**” to build up the kingdom of God. I look to you to courageously vouch for our testimony as children of God. For in building the kingdom of God, **THE BLACK CATHOLIC COMMUNITY CAN NO LONGER BE THE STONES THAT THE BUILDERS REJECTED!!**

Affirming Black Catholics, you shine not only as being consistent, faithful, brilliant and dazzling, but you are sensitive, thoughtful and deliberate. You found the African American Catholic Community to be **advantageous, living up to its heritage and the faith it professes**; as you demonstrated the love of Christ in worship, willing to risk who people see you to be. You are instigators of God's justice, agents endorsing African American spirituality, not only with intellectual prowess, but also with cunning investment of resources and deep respect of the African American community. **Yet**, we have much more to do!!

As a Black Bishop, one of 8 still active in the Catholic Church with over 440+ bishops, I must confess, and, like each African American, I can attest,

*I been through the fire, been through the flood,
Broken in pieces and left all alone,
But through it all God blessed me,
And through it all God kept me,
And I still have a praise inside of me.
Yes, I still have a praise inside of me.
Although I've been wounded, and I've been scorned,
I never gave up. I trusted in God.
But through it all God blessed me,
And through it all God kept me,
And I still have a praise inside of me.
Yes, I still have a praise inside of me.
There's a praise in my spirit, a praise down in my soul.
A glory hallelujah that cannot be controlled;
And I still have a praise inside of me.
Yes I still have a praise inside of me.*

I Still Have a Praise Inside of Me – Georgia Mass

Dismissed and discounted at every level, yet we can say like St. Paul in the second letter to the Church at Corinth

“We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed, always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.” (2Cor 4:8-10)

So, let's look at what state the African American Catholic Community presently exists in the Catholic Church:

* The African American Catholic Community is not on the agenda and has no influence in our church. We are a people, who settle for being able to drink the Kool-Aid of being Catholic, for getting Eucharistic lollipops and having family get-together as Catholics. We have returned to the "Negro" position of trying to "fit-in," a posture of assimilation; a position of being "missioned to;" and worst, a stance of taxation without representation as fellow Catholics.

* The African American Catholic Community is talked about, **'buked and scorned**; and the Catholic Church does not advocate for us. We are not at the table as our churches are closed, our schools are lost, when health care is denied and education fails to provide hope.

* The African American Catholic Community is pinned against one another, in competition with each other or surviving in a state of denial. We accept and are glad to receive Halloween candy affirmation that just patronizes us; or Mardi Gras bead relics of devotion from our church leaders and society; **because**, if we say Black too much, we are invited off the diocesan board, the church commission or the parish committee. We don't have a voice. We are put in an auxiliary position, but only as an extreme necessity.

*A group of African American Catholic leaders, who represented Black Catholic national organizations and Black Catholic institutes and institutions met in New Orleans in January 2019. The African American Bishops, who called for the meeting, were challenged to pull the community together, be supportive and advocate for justice, voting rights, the education of local leadership in the Black community, and more importantly, to bring about collective work and responsibility of Black Catholic leaders. You see, no two Black Catholic organizations worked together. No Black Catholics are in charge and decide aright about money for Black Catholics, except the Knights and Ladies of Peter Claver. We can apply for money but we don't decide, not even about the Black and Indian Mission Fund. The Catholic Church tells us that we can be missioned to, but we can't be in charge. I wonder what it would be like for all the mission groups to be treated that way.

*I know of a diocese in the U.S. where the Black Catholic population makes up 27% of the diocesan Catholic population and 25% of the parishes are predominantly Black. Yet, the Office of Black Catholic Ministry operating budget – salary, benefits and programs make-up .2% of the operating budget of the entire diocese. The office clearly offers services to the diocesan offices, as well as to the parishes, especially in the Black Catholic community. Priests of that diocese are clamoring that the office be closed to save expenses.

* The African American Catholic Community is in a state of colonization where **white folks let us but we don't have a voice**. You let me sing my gospel song, have a good time, but we have no voice. And the real crazy thing about this is that black folks themselves participate in this behavior because we want to blend in and be supported. We can't bring all our gifts as they are to the fellowship table – we can't sing too long, play our drums too loud, rattle our tambourines too much, sing our spirituals too often, and move with the Spirit too freely because we just might address the trauma that plagues us and heal the wounds that cry out.

*The African American Catholic community's existence is not accepted for who it is and for whose it is. We are in a position of being nice – Bishops and church leaders want us to be "**nice Catholics**." We need to get rid of NICE – **Jesus was never nice** - I dare you to find that in the Bible.

THE BLACK CATHOLIC COMMUNITY, celebrating a New Heaven and a New Earth, just might bring about the transformation that leads all to the kingdom of God!! Let's believe it!! Let's achieve it!!

I am challenging you to be Barnabas for us. Barnabas' ministry and effectiveness was to empower leaders to preach God's Word with God's heart and empower pastors to train others in the Scriptures as well. While praying, fasting and worshiping, Barnabas was called to straighten out Jew/Gentile tensions. Can you pray, fast, and worship to relieve African American/ Catholic Church tensions, not just as a worship site, but as missionary disciples sticking up for what is truly Black and authentically Catholic? We need a new awakening, a new mindset for 2020 **with the Holy Spirit as our driving force**.

OUR BLACKNESS AND CATHOLICISM IS THE FIRE SHUT UP IN OUR BONES. Like the Prophet Jeremiah, we are growing weary holding it in. The Black Catholic Community's Sanctified Spirit and Sanctified Mind demands that we speak; demands we act!!

THEREFORE, I PROPOSE:

Bishop Cheri's proposals will be found in the next issue of IN A WORD

Sister Chappell: Church needs to address disparity in ethnic communities

By Rhina Guidos Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON (CNS) -- The way ethnic communities have been disproportionately affected by the coronavirus is a common topic during New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo's daily news conferences on how the state he runs is handling the pandemic.

"Why are more African Americans and Latinos affected?" Cuomo asked in his April 8 press briefing after detailing how some ethnic communities in the state have higher death rates from COVID-19 than others. "Why do the poorest people always pay the highest price?"

Bill de Blasio, New York City's mayor, had also talked about the disparity in early April, pointing out that 34% of those who died in the city because of COVID-19 were Latinos, who are 29% of the city's population, and African Americans made up 28% of the city's deaths while being 22% of the population.

And yet similar statistics are playing out coast to coast and points in between. By April 27, figures out of California showed that Latinos made up 64.9% of the state's deaths from the virus among patients age 18 to 49, though Latinos are 43.5% of the state's population and similarly 15.3% of the people who died of COVID-19 in the same age bracket were black, though they're 6.3% of California's population.

The figures didn't surprise Sister Patricia Chappell, former executive director of Pax Christi USA and a member of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, who long has been involved in various church initiatives dealing with race and racism. The Catholic Church and its leaders, she said, must do more to call on the government to look at the disparities and do something about them.

"I continue to be baffled by the silence on the part of our institutional church," she said in an April 23 interview with Catholic News Service. "We do have a responsibility to reach out," she said.

From immigration issues to lack of fair wages and access to affordable health care, "disparities in black and brown communities have escalated" and become more pronounced during the pandemic, she said.

"There are many reasons as to why that this the case," she said.

While authorities stress the need to isolate, even from their families if they suspect they have the virus, for ethnic communities in places such as California and New York, where housing costs have skyrocketed, there is no place to self-isolate, she said.

And some of them are janitors, sanitation workers, part of the cleaning staff, grocery store workers or holding any number of other jobs where employers aren't providing them with the equipment they need to protect themselves from a health situation such as the one the world is facing.

"They have to show up not having proper equipment and they can't afford to take time off because there may be no leave time built up or sick leave to take, in some cases," she said. "If they don't show up, they don't get paid and there's rent to pay and they don't have a slush fund."

And it's a situation of disparity that many ethnic communities have dealt with historically in the U.S., she said, so it's become puzzling to be told to wash your hands

often when in certain places, such as Flint, Michigan, people of color don't even have access to clean water.

"So, how can you ask people to use water when the water coming out of faucet is contaminated?" she asked. "To ask those communities to shelter in place when people have no homes to shelter in? I know there are many organizations passing out food, passing out sanitizer and masks, but it's still not providing those individuals a place to come inside, where they can shower or bathe. That's basic human rights."

So, the disparities going on in communities of color that the coronavirus figures show are not surprising, she said.

"These are communities that live paycheck to paycheck," she said.

And when it comes to certain members of those ethnic communities, there's the added element of dealing with an atmosphere of fear because of a family's immigration status, making some of them reluctant to seek medical help for fear of being deported, she said.

Though the church has been responsive in helping with some of the material needs of those communities, more needs to be done to address the disparities that have come to light during the pandemic, she said.

"Certainly, the church can continue to advocate on behalf of those who have less than," she said. "The church can continue to call out these systems, saying that with this disparity, we need to make sure those in these communities have the resources they need in order to fight the pandemic."

They need testing, particularly in settings where they're not afraid of authorities such as immigration, free or reduced cost care for those who may not have insurance, and alternatives in case there is no proper way to isolate at home, she said.

"The church needs to continue to raise the issue around injustices that we see in these communities of color, to advocate for low-income workers who are on the front lines as janitors and housekeepers, and other essential workers and low-income folks," she said. "They should have access to some kind of financial assistance. The church certainly can continue to raise the issues around why is it that people have clean running water and others do not. This goes back to Catholic social teaching, which continues to say that every human being is valued, every human being is worthy."



Sister Patricia Chappell, SNDden

(CNS photo/courtesy Ignatian Solidarity Network)

in a word or two



Bishop George V. Murry, SJ

YOUNGSTOWN, Ohio (CNS) --

The Diocese of Youngstown announced May 26 that Bishop George V. Murry has submitted his resignation to Pope Francis for reasons of ill health.

Diagnosed with a form of acute leukemia, in April 2018, Bishop Murry underwent intensive chemotherapy at the Cleveland Clinic. In July 2019, he reentered the Cleveland Clinic for a recurrence of leukemia. At that time tests confirmed that he was in remission and that doctors were not recommending a bone marrow transplant.

“This past April, his leukemia returned and he resumed treatment,” the diocesan statement said. “With this third bout of leukemia, his present state of health leaves him less able to fulfill the tasks entrusted to him as bishop of the Diocese of Youngstown.”

Bishop Murray, 71, has headed the Diocese of Youngstown since 2007. Born in Camden, New Jersey, Dec. 28, 1948, he was raised in the African Methodist Episcopal Church. He became a Catholic as a child while attending a parochial school in Baltimore.

He was ordained in 1979 as a priest for the Society of Jesus and has served as auxiliary bishop of Chicago, and bishop of St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands.

Three U.S. bishops condemn racism in context of COVID-19 pandemic

By Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON (CNS) -- The chairmen of three boards of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops have issued a joint statement expressing their deep concern about incidents of racism and xenophobia against Americans of Asian and Pacific Island heritage amid the coronavirus outbreak.

The May 5 statement was released by Archbishop Nelson J. Perez of Philadelphia, chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee for Cultural Diversity in the Church; Bishop Oscar A. Solis of Salt Lake City, chairman of the USCCB's Subcommittee on Asian and

Pacific Island Affairs; and Bishop Shelton J. Fabre of Houma-Thibodaux, Louisiana, chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee Against Racism.

“The pandemic resulting from the new coronavirus continues to sweep across the world, impacting our everyday behavior, practices, perceptions, and the way we interact with one another,” the statement said.

“While we have been heartened by the countless acts of charity and bravery that have been modeled by many, we are also alarmed to note the increase in reported incidents of bullying and verbal and physical assaults, particularly against Americans of Asian and Pacific Island heritage,” the bishops said.

They pointed out that “a high percentage of Asian Americans work in the health care sector -- risking their own health to save lives” and that “some have experienced rejection and requests to be treated ‘by someone else.’”

The bishops also emphasized that “way before state and local ordinances brought to a halt almost every economic sector in the country, communities across the country -- from Oakland, California, to New York City -- reported a sharp decline in the patronage for businesses owned and operated by Asian Americans,” adding that these are only “a few painful examples of the continuing harassment and racial discrimination suffered by Asians, Pacific Islanders and others in our country.”

The bishops said they find these actions unacceptable and called on Catholics, fellow Christians and all people of goodwill to help them combat such acts of racism and xenophobia.

“They are attacks against human life and dignity and are contrary to Gospel values,” the statement said. “As we wrote in our (2018) pastoral letter ‘Open Wide Our Hearts,’ racism is ‘a failure to acknowledge another person as a brother or sister, created in the image of God.’”

They called for a firm rejection of racial categorizations or presumptions, racially based verbal assaults or slurs, and for an end to all forms of violence.

“We ask our elected officials and public institutions, as well as all public figures, to do all that they can to promote and maintain peace in our communities,” the statement continued. “We encourage all individuals, families and congregations to assist in promoting a greater appreciation and understanding of the authentic human values and cultural contributions brought by each racial heritage in our country.”

Divine Word Missionaries is an international missionary community of over 7,000 brothers and priests. In 1905 the SVDs began working among African Americans in the Southern United States. Today, Divine Word Missionaries work in over 35 parishes in Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas, Florida and Arkansas.

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