

in a

Word™

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'What We Have Seen and Heard'

*A Pastoral Letter
on Evangelization
From the Black Bishops
of the United States*

Presentation to the National Council of Catholic Bishops on the Pastoral Letter: “What We Have Seen and Heard”

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Bishop of Biloxi

(editor's note: IN A WORD is proud to publish excerpts from Bishop Joseph Howze's address to the Council of Catholic Bishops on the Pastoral Letter: *WHAT WE HAVE SEEN AND HEARD*. We wish to express our gratitude to Bishop Howze for sharing this address with IN A WORD. We regret that space does not allow us to reprint the Bishop's remarks in their entirety.)

Beginning with the Second Plenary Council of Baltimore in 1866, nine decrees were issued by the Council regarding pastoral ministry to 100,000 of the 4,000,000 emancipated slaves who were Catholic, most of whom resided in Louisiana and Maryland. This action of the Council was the first official Church recognition of its mission to provide pastoral and missionary care for the slaves. The Black community in the United States has been a missionary enterprise for a long time.

The "Introduction" of the pastoral addresses the idea that there comes a time within the history of every Christian Community when adulthood is reached. There are significant signs that the Black Catholic Community in the American Church has come of age. Recognizing this fact, the Bishops feel it is timely to address the community about its responsibility to share its Faith and demonstrate its witness to the risen Lord: "The Holy Spirit now calls us all to the work of evangelization."

I perceive the introduction to this pastoral as being a boost to the morale of Black Catholics -- indicating that they are qualified to receive and respond to the call to evangelization. *What We Have Seen and Heard* is a pastoral letter on evangelization. The objective of the letter is to illustrate how the witness and mission of Jesus Christ is preached and represented in the Black Catholic Community in the American Church. Being addressed primarily to Black Catholics, the letter encourages them to move from the era of being receivers to the position of becoming evangelizers of the Faith.

A message of gratitude is expressed to those missionaries who have "borne the heat of the day", religious and lay, who have made personal and community sacrifices to minister to the Black community. Knowing the history of the struggle toward maturity in the Faith, recognition and gratitude must be paid to those missionaries who dedicated their lives to plant the seed of Faith.

At the same time, we must recognize the Faith of our fathers, mothers, families and ancestors, who kept the Faith alive despite the bitter days of slavery, discrimination, and racial segregation. Their dedicated commitment during those times is a strong witness to our reaching adulthood in the Faith.

Part One of the pastoral deals with the gifts we share. Sometimes long generations of deprivation, and the lack of opportunity for full participation, can leave a people in "a cowed state", where they feel they have nothing to offer. In order to establish a sense of confidence and worth in such a people, it is absolutely necessary to remind them of the gifts they have to share.

The gifts listed are: freedom, reconciliation and spirituality (contemplative, holistic, joyful, communitarian). Some other aspects of these gifts are in the area of community, the family and the roles of Black men and women. The subjects of abortion and ecumenism are also treated in this part.

The second and final part of the pastoral deals with the "Call of God to His People". This section calls for initiative among Black Catholics to shoulder the responsibilities of their baptismal vows, and to proclaim the Faith in building up the Church. In the meantime, the pastoral outlines the obstacles to evangelization which must be faced and overcome.

When becoming Catholic one does not abandon one's racial heritage. The Catholic Church is not a White or Euro-American Church. The Church is "universal", hence it is "Catholic"! Therefore, the Black presence within the American Catholic Church is a precious witness to the "universal" character of the Church.

The "Authorization and Encouragement" section of the pastoral letter addresses a concern to which a lot of criticism is often directed. If Black members of the American Catholic Church are to assume the responsibility to which the Church calls them, they will need authorization and encouragement to develop and use their expertise. It is pointed out that the major hindrance to the full development of Black leadership within the Church is still the fact of **RACISM**.

Racism weakens the Church's witness as a universal sign of unity among all peoples. Racism divides the human family, blots out the image of God among specific members of that family, and violates the fundamental human dignity of those called to be children of the same Father.

A demand for leadership roles in the task of evangelization is not to be seen as a call for separatism, but as a pledge of our commitment to the Church and to share in her witnessing to the love of Christ.

The opportunities for evangelization are: vocations to the priesthood and religious life; permanent deacons; the laity; youth; RCIA; Catholic education; liturgy; and the social apostolate.

Vocations to the priesthood and religious life are crucial to the cause of evangelization in the Black Community.

Recruitment of minority youth for the priesthood and religious life must have the highest priority. Vocation directors and clergy must take time to know and understand the concerns of youths of Black, Hispanic, Asian, and other racial or ethnic groups, and show how their ministry would be relevant to their lives and experiences.

Catholic Education: For many decades the Catholic school was the primary evangelizer in the Black community. Most of the conversions to the Church were a direct result of the Catholic school.

Nevertheless, we know, because of economic and personnel reasons today, the Catholic school has decreased in numbers throughout the United States. While we must continue trying to maintain our schools, we must, at the same time, be conscious of additional ways to respond to the work of evangelization in the Black community to which Holy Spirit now calls us.

The Liturgy: "From the standpoint of evangelization in the Black community, the liturgy of the Catholic Church has always demonstrated a way of drawing many to the Faith and also of nourishing and deepening the faith of those who

already believe. We believe that the liturgy of the Catholic Church can be an even more intense expression of the spiritual vitality of those who are of African origin, just as it has been for other ethnic and cultural groups:

'... the Church has no wish to impose a rigid uniformity in matters which do not involve the faith or the good of the whole community. Rather she respects and fosters the spiritual adornments and gifts of the various races and peoples.' (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, #37)"

This Pastoral Letter, written to Black Catholics, urges them to take to heart this message of encouragement, and to spread the message of Christ to their own people and all other ethnic and racial groups.

Bishop Joseph Lawson Howze is the Bishop of the Diocese of Biloxi, Mississippi. He is the only Black Bishop that has the title of "Ordinary". This means that he is in sole charge of the diocese. He was ordained a Bishop on January 28, 1973. He was appointed first Bishop of the Biloxi diocese on March 1, 1977.



The ten Black Bishops of the United States: standing (l. to r.) Bishop Wilton Gregory, Chicago, Ill.; Bishop Emerson Moore, New York, N.Y.; Bishop Moses Anderson, SSE, Detroit, Mich.; Bishop Terry Steib, SVD, St. Louis, Mo.; Bishop John Ricard, SSJ, Baltimore, Md.; seated: Bishop Joseph Francis, SVD, Newark, N.J.; Bishop Harold Perry, SVD, New Orleans, La.; Bishop Joseph Lawson Howze, DD, Biloxi, Miss.; Bishop Eugene Marino, SSJ, Washington, D.C.; Bishop James P. Lyke, OFM PhD, Cleveland, Ohio

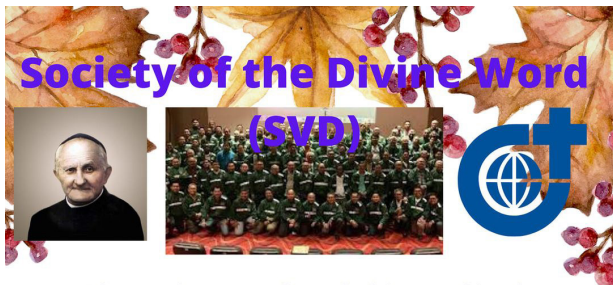
in a word or two



On September 8, 1875, Father Arnold Janssen inaugurated St. Michael's Mission House in Steyl, Holland, beginning the mission activity of the Society of the Divine Word. On that occasion, Fr. Arnold said, "Whether anything will come of it is known only to God."

Today, nearly 6,000 Divine Word Missionaries in 79 countries celebrate this date as Foundation Day -- so something did indeed come of that modest ceremony 149 years ago! And Fr. Arnold is now known as St. Arnold.

Today also begins a jubilee year for Divine Word Missionaries as we celebrate in anticipation of our 150th birthday a year from today. We hope you will celebrate along with us!



The Society was founded in Steyl in the Netherlands in 1875 by Arnold Janssen.

In 1882, the Society started sending missionaries into China's Shandong Province.

From humble beginnings, the SVD has grown into the largest international missionary congregation in the Catholic Church. Today, there are 5977 Divine Word Missionaries present in all continents working particularly in 79 countries.

The 2024-2025 school year at St. Mary's Academy kicked off with a generous gift from former NBA star and sports commentator Charles Barkley. Barkley has committed to giving \$1 million to the Academy over the next ten years.

Barkley's gift was sparked by a viewing of the "60 Minutes" segment that aired nationally in May, which told the compelling story of St. Mary's Academy and two exceptional students, Calcea Johnson and Ne'Kiya Jackson, who used trigonometry to prove the 2000-year-old Pythagorean Theorem, something once deemed impossible by mathematicians.

"We are forever grateful for Mr. Barkley's gift and his support of our students. This transformative gift will assist students as they excel and achieve whatever dream they create within the walls of St. Mary's Academy," says Pamela Rogers, President of St. Mary's Academy. "His generosity supports the mission of St. Mary's Academy and reinforces our commitment to educating young people."

"Mr. Barkley is thrilled to support St. Mary's Academy and is very focused on transforming future generations through education and opportunities. He has a love and passion for what the academy stands for and how it is shaping the lives and futures of young girls in New Orleans," a representative from the Charles Barkley Foundation shared.

St. Mary's Academy plans to use this ten-year gift to enhance its legendary educational experience and provide students with opportunities to grow and develop in the classroom and the New Orleans community.



Calcea Johnson and Ne'Kiya Jackson,

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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