

Financial Challenges For Evangelization In The Black Catholic Community Focus On National Gathering In Birmingham

By Dawn Crutchfield

Bishop Robert J. Baker welcomed more than 40 leaders in the Black Catholic community representing over 20 dioceses/archdioceses across the United States to the “Building Relationships for the Future” meeting at the Tutwiler Birmingham hotel. The gathering was sponsored by the National Black and Indian Mission (BIM) and the National Association of Black Catholic Administrators (NABCA).

The annual spring meeting of NABCA also took place during this gathering. Participants consisted of a diverse group of diocesan administrators for offices of Black Catholic Ministry and Catholic schools in the Black community. The primary focus was to discuss collaborative ways of addressing the future of evangelization in the Black community and solutions for financial challenges the ministry is currently facing.

James Watts, director of the Birmingham Diocesan Office of Black Catholic Ministry, served as the host for the event.

This historical gathering between the two national organizations was the idea of Father Wayne Paysse, executive director for the Black and Indian Mission. Kathleen Merritt, president of the National Association of Black Catholic Administrators and Father Vernon Hugley, vicar for Black Catholics for Diocese of Birmingham, teamed up with Father Paysee in creating an agenda that provided the opportunity for professional growth and greater collaboration to participants.

The agenda included a panel discussion on the Black and Indian Mission and presentations on websites as tools for evangelization; resources for creating a better understanding of the purpose, various structures and the importance of maintaining Black Ministry under emerging diocesan models of multicultural ministries offices; and the role of stewardship, leadership development and collaboration in developing a strong foundation for evangelization.

During a panel discussion on the allocation of funds received from the Black and Indian Mission grant, Bishop Baker stressed the critical need and importance of providing financial support for Catholic schools in the African American Community and how generous grants from the Black and Indian Mission Collection has assisted in

keeping the doors of many of these schools open.

In the end, a collaborative agreement was made among those present to work on initiatives that would increase financial contributions to the Black and Indian Mission Collection, especially from the African American Catholic Community. Father Paysse affirmed the efforts being made in the few remaining historically African American Catholic schools to keep them Catholic in identity, academically excellent, supported by the community, and with much creative struggle, financially sound. He also encouraged everyone to be more outgoing and direct in inviting back those who have walked away from the church and not to hesitate to welcome the many “unchurched” with whom we work to become informed about our Faith. “An increase in support to the mission collection will result in an increase in support to the various evangelization programs in the African American community” said Father Paysse.

Sister of St. Joseph Catherine Noecker had this to say about the gathering; “It was a gift to be a participant in the ‘Building Relationships for the Future’ workshops held recently in Birmingham. Being able to re-connect and to make new acquaintances with the members of the offices of Black Catholics was enriching; the prayer services each inspiring and soul-filling; the workshops practical and timely. It is a privilege to be a part of the awesome network of this integral group within the Catholic Church.”

Since 1884, proceeds from the Black and Indian Missions Collection (BIM) are distributed as grants to dioceses supporting and strengthening evangelization programs, which would otherwise be in danger of disappearing among the Black, American Indian, Eskimo, and Aleute communities of the United States. The BIM collection is taken up in most parishes on the first weekend in Lent. This is the first and oldest collection in the United States. The main goals are to raise funds and the conscientiousness of bishops for evangelization. For more information, please call 202-331-8542.

(The National Association of Black Catholic Administrators provides the setting for discussion on the Roman Catholic Church’s efforts for human development in the United States. Focus is on strengthening African American persons involved in authentic roles in dioceses for community building. For more information visit the website at www.nabcaonline.org.)



(Courtesy Photograph)

Participants in the National Black and Indian Mission (BIM) and the National Association of Black Catholic Administrators (NABCA) conference gather on the steps of the Cathedral of St. Paul with Bishop Robert Baker and Father Wayne Paysse for a group photo after the Mass.