

in a

Word

*Historic Convocation of
African American Catholics in
Chicago
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Archbishop Eugene Marino, SSJ, DD
May 29, 1934 - November 12, 2000

Summoned by the Holy Spirit: A Call to New Life

By Michael Wamble
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First, there was the beat of the African drum; then the dance began. Bare black feet bounded down the center aisle, as gourds and dried horsetails shook, and arms were raised toward the heavens above. Four young women adorned in white received both smiles and curious glances from the crowd.

As a biographical litany of figures of black Catholics in the United States was recited, the 1,600 parishioners and pastoral ministers opened the first night of Black Catholic Convocation 2000, held Nov. 3-4 at DeLaSalle Institute, proclaimed, "Ashe!," the Swahili term for "we agree."

In this litany, the recently canonized St. Katherine Drexel and St. Josephine Bakhita, clasped the outstretched hands of Father Augustus Tolton, the first recognized black Catholic priest in the U.S., who served in the Chicago Archdiocese, as Deacon Morris Bohannon, poured libations into the gourd in remembrance of their contributions.

The first steps of this dance were celebratory-Afrocentric and Gospel-centered, incorporating old-time black spirituals and personal testimonies.

What followed next was a bit more choreographed. **It was a process in which delegates from parishes with a predominantly black Catholic population voted on structural changes in those parishes and schools.** It was a "dance" requiring delicate steps around mentions of mergers and clusters.

While specifics of those changes must be detailed, then approved by Cardinal George, a process without a definitive timetable, one thing is certain for black Catholics in Chicago: the beat goes on.

MERGE, CLUSTER OR KEEP THE STATUS QUO?

DeLaSalle Institute, site of this first-ever Black Catholic Convocation, stands but two blocks away from the original site of St. Monica Church, Chicago's first black Catholic church. This Christian Brothers' school is located in the Bronzeville neighborhood, a near South Side area in the midst of financial and structural redevelopment.

Beneath the convocation's colorful cultural trappings-the sashes of red, black and green, the Gospel music and references to Nguzo Saba, the seven principles of Kwanzaa-the two-day event focused on the need for change within the black Catholic community.

When black Catholics inherited dozens of large

churches as a result of "white flight," they received infrastructure nightmares. There were, among others, increasing maintenance costs of parishes and a lack of resources, both personnel and financial.

"If you have a church built for 1,000 people and you have 200 people there, the winter heating bill will be something else. It can be a tremendous drain on a parish," said Joyce Gillie, a member of the convocation's steering committee and pastoral coordinator of St. Peter Claver Mission, Robbins.

Daughter of the Heart of Mary Sister Anita Baird, archdiocesan director of the Office for Racial Justice, put it more succinctly: "It's difficult to evangelize when you're working to pay the light and gas bills."

That was a reality understood from the beginning by those who planned the event. The question has always been who would initiate a change.

Would it be the Archdiocese of Chicago dictating what should be done? Or would it be an opportunity for black parishes, through their delegates, to exercise kujichagulia (self-determination)?

The message sent by the archdiocese was black parishes would be given a historic moment to determine their future.

During his homily at the convocation Mass, Cardinal George spoke about the need to become "actors" and "agents of change" in the life of the local church. In his convocation Mass homily, Cardinal George assured participants that he would await their decision. "There is no hidden agenda," he said, calling on black Catholics present to be "agents of change in this local church."

Those comments were echoed by Auxiliary Bishop Joseph Perry. "Let me say here, as the cardinal did earlier, that there is no preconceived plan before we start tomorrow, for which this convocation would be an exercise in foolishness," said Bishop Perry in his address.

"Nothing has been put down on paper. Nothing has been decided upon. You, brothers and sisters, are asked your opinion on matters of church. We shall take your recommendations to the table in hopes that some plan for the future can be etched to the benefit of the entire church and the glory of God. This represents just a beginning," he said.

Bishop Perry offered delegates three options. They included a "re-mapping of parishes that com-

bines resources and personnel," or clustering parishes so those with "small memberships would exist under a team of priests, deacons, religious, and lay ecclesial ministers." The third choice would give delegates the option to "maintain the current configuration of parishes, with each independently responsible for their own future."

Given the rocky history of closures and mergers, some found the choices hard to accept, saying they felt "singled out and insulted" that these decisions were only being asked of black Catholics, and not white-ethnic Catholics or the archdiocese as a whole.

Other delegates were visibly angered by the thought of re-mapping, fearing this might send black Catholics into vibrant mega-parishes, especially on the city's South Side.

Joseph Taliaferro of St. Gelasius, formed in 1990 from mergers, said a larger number of African-American priests could have prevented these limited options. "If we had more black priests, we wouldn't be discussing this today. We'd probably be talking about how to build more parishes," said Taliaferro.

The future of parish schools brought strong comments from Father John Calicott, pastor of Holy Angels, home of the largest black Catholic school in the nation. "Every school in the archdiocese receives some form of subsidies in some way. Let's set that straight," he said, questioning if parish schools are providing the education "we say we are," describing religious formation programs in many locations as "woefully inadequate today." The South Side pastor said more training, more personnel, more materials and more money could address this problem.

Summarizing the "very, very sensitive" history of Catholic schools in Chicago, Calicott noted the number of black Catholic converts produced by those institutions. "And I am proud to say that I am one of them," he said.

Listing changes that have affected these schools-the absence of women religious, who worked for "slave wages," the end of segregated housing in the city, and the once "inferior" status of local public schools-the priest wondered if the Catholic school model used in the black community for decades was still relevant.

As of June 1999, there were 19,909 black students

in archdiocesan elementary schools. While 5,093 were Catholic, 14,816 were non-Catholic. In Catholic high schools, there were 3,914 black students, nearly a quarter of all students.

Delegates were asked if they felt they should support parish schools including those "with a majority non-Catholic student enrollment," or "retain only those schools with majority Catholic student enrollment and close all others" or "get out of the school business completely since schools simply drain our resources."

Many parish delegates, like Alice Matthews, wouldn't consider the last option. Regardless of the numbers, said Matthews at her table, "We have to be in the school business." She said that religious instruction must be a priority.

Also to be considered is the desire of many educators and parishioners to return to "old-school" values and criteria once present when black Catholic schools

were at their apex. At their peak, Catholic schools provided the first step toward Catholic conversion for Calicott, Baird and other black Catholics. To attend a Catholic school the child, and at least one parent, had to take religious instruction classes.

WANTED:BLACK PRIESTS!

Lively discussions throughout the convocation often touched on the declining numbers of black vocations.

Even proposals to re-map parish boundaries and reconfigure parish schools were held together, at least for many delegates, by the common linchpin of where the local church's precious commodity of black priests might be assigned. It was an oft-repeated call for more black priests-or just one black priest-at their parish.

The reasons for lack of locally-fostered black vocations given by Bishop Perry are four-fold. They include: a history of exclusion; the size of Chicago's black Catholic population; societal changes in black families; and the rise of a black middle-class.

Presently eight of the 43 predominantly black parishes are headed by black pastors. There are 11 additional African or African-American priests ministering within these parishes.

We thank Catholic New World, the Catholic paper of the Archdiocese of Chicago, for permission to reprint parts of this article..Because of space constraints we were unable to print the entire article. The full, unedited article can be found at the Catholic New World web site under the Archdiocese of



"I am grateful to you for your life of faith," Cardinal George tells more than 1,600 black Catholics gathered at the Black Catholic Convocation Nov. 3. Photo by David V. Kamba

in a word or two

Archbishop Eugene A. Marino, SSJ, died in Manhasset, N.Y., at a retreat house November 12, 2000 of an apparent heart attack. He was 66.

The third archbishop of Atlanta, Archbishop Marino was the first black archbishop in the United States, serving Atlanta from May 1988 until May 1990. The archbishop was at St. Ignatius Retreat House in Manhasset for a retreat, which ended the evening of Nov. 11 with Mass and the anointing of the sick. In the course of the Mass, the archbishop himself was anointed by a concelebrating priest. He retired for the night and the following day he was discovered dead in bed by a housekeeper.

Archbishop Marino had been working for the past five years as spiritual director in an outpatient program for clergy at St. Vincent's Hospital in Harrison, N.Y. The program works with clergy in the areas of substance abuse and sexual behavior issues. He has been living at a Salesian Fathers residence in New Rochelle, N.Y.

The archbishop found his work "very fulfilling," said Father Robert M. Kearns, superior general of the Josephites, the order to which Archbishop Marino was ordained in June 1962. At the Mass the night before he died "the priest anointed the archbishop, then the archbishop anointed the priest," said Father Kearns. Before he went to bed, Archbishop Marino said he was going to leave early the next morning to visit his brother in New Jersey, so no one was surprised when he did not appear for breakfast, the Josephite leader said. He was discovered dead in bed later that day.

The Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated Monday, Nov. 20, at 11 a.m. at the Cathedral of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Biloxi, Miss., the community where Archbishop Marino was born and raised.

Born May 29, 1934, Archbishop Marino was the son of Jesus Maria Marino, a native of Puerto Rico, and Lottie Bradford Marino of Biloxi, the sixth child in a family of eight. His maternal grandfather helped to build Our Mother of Sorrows Church and the parish was staffed by Josephite priests, who serve the African-American community. Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, the order founded by St. Katharine Drexel, staffed the parish school. Archbishop Marino went to elementary and high school at Our Mother of Sorrows before entering the Josephite minor seminary in Newburgh, N.Y.. He was ordained to the priesthood June 9, 1962.

In September 1974, when he was 40, Father Marino was named an auxiliary bishop of Washington, becoming the third black priest in modern times to achieve the rank of

bishop in the U.S. Catholic Church..

Archbishop Marino was the ranking African-American member of the Catholic hierarchy when he stepped aside as archbishop of Atlanta in May 1990, stating that he was suffering from exhaustion and stress. He submitted his resignation to the pope in July 1990 and Bishop James P. Lyke, OFM, was appointed as apostolic administrator and later as the next archbishop of Atlanta.

The members of the Marino family would like to express our sincere and profound gratitude for the outpouring of love, concern and prayer for each of us, from people all across these United States of America, at the death of our brother, the late Archbishop Eugene A. Marino, on November 12, 2000. We acknowledge the Archdiocese of Atlanta, the Archdiocese of Baltimore, the Archdiocese of New York, the Archdiocese of Washington and especially, the Diocese of Biloxi.

We have received hundreds of messages, cards, letters, telephone calls and flowers from the many cardinals, bishops, priests, nuns, lay people and even total strangers. They shared their deep love and prayers and reminisced with us the happy memories they had of the archbishop. This outreach, support and encouragement are more than we could have ever anticipated! While we have tried to respond to all of these expressions of love and concern, it simply has not been possible to answer every individual communication. We are therefore using this letter to say how grateful we are to all of you.

At this particular moment, words seem so very inadequate to convey our heartfelt thanks to the many clergy: brothers, sisters, priests and cardinal who remained steadfast with him over the past years. Also, to the many friends who maintained a relationship that sustained and comforted him.

We sincerely hope we have touched all who lent support at this time, but if we missed you, please accept our belated thanks and know that we deeply appreciate your kindness as we continue to pray for you and all your loved ones.

Please continue to pray for our brother, Archbishop Marino, and ask for his help and intercession. He can do ever so much for you now that he is filled with the light of heaven. Also, always remember his faith, his hope, his love, his wisdom, his wit and that beautiful smile!

Sincerely, Mrs. Claire Marino Rhodeman; Biloxi MS; Mrs. Juanita Marino Howell, Minneapolis MN; Mrs. Lillia Marino Patterson, Kinston NC; Sr. Eileen M. Marino, OSP, Baltimore MD; Mr. Joaquin J. Marino, Plainfield NJ; and Mrs. Lucille L. Johnson, Chicago IL.

Note:

(the tribute given Bishop Marino by his sister Claire Marino Rhodeman at the funeral mass can be found on the iaw website)

Divine Word Missionaries is an international missionary community of over 5,000 brothers and priests. In 1905 the SVDs began working among blacks in the southern United States. Today, Divine Word Missionaries work in over 35 parishes in Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas and Arkansas.

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