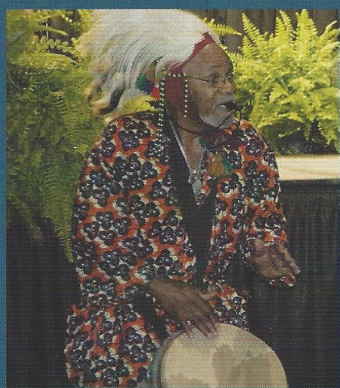
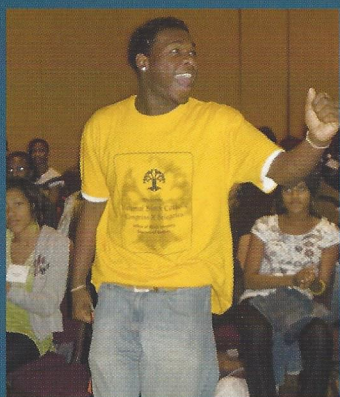
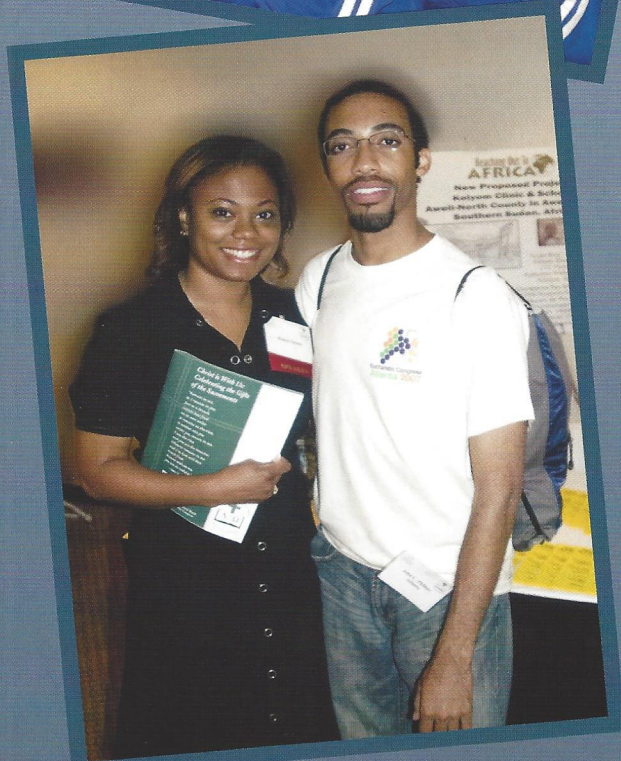
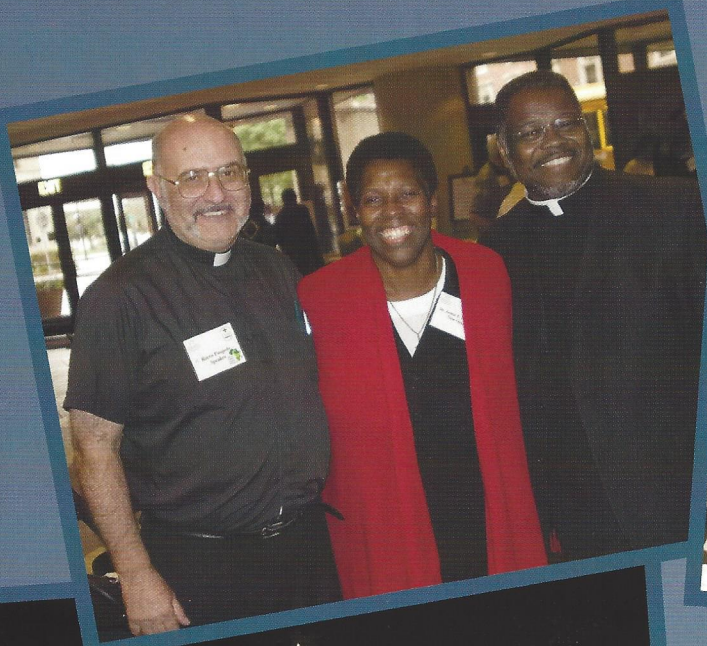


CONGRESS X

PLAN OF ACTION



BUFFALO, NY
JULY 12-15, 2007



*"Remain in me,
 as I remain in you.
 Just as a branch
 cannot bear fruit
 on its own unless
 it remains on the vine,
 so neither can you
 unless you remain
 in me.
 I am the vine and
 you are the branches.
 Whoever remains
 in me and I in him
 will bear much fruit,
 because without me
 you can do nothing."*

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A PROVEN FOUNDATION FOR FRUITFUL MINISTRY

December 1, 2007

Dear Friends,

The 10th National Black Catholic Congress met from July 12-15, 2007 in Buffalo, New York. It was an empowering and life-giving event (in my own experience and according to our post-Congress evaluation survey).

Congress X engaged hundreds of youth and over two thousand adults and affirmed the value and the vibrancy of the Black Catholic Movement. We affirmed that our Movement is grounded in the sacramental life of the Catholic Church and committed to working for positive change in our community, particularly regarding Africa, Catholic Education, HIV-AIDS, Parish Life, Social Justice, Spirituality, Racism, and Youth and Young Adults.

A Proven Foundation for Fruitful Ministry: Congress X Plan of Action is our guidebook for the next five years. You will find here theological insights and practical steps that your parish and diocese can use to carry out our shared commitments. Those commitments are rooted in the evangelization mission of the National Black Catholic Congress.

Evangelization is challenging. We need to reclaim apathetic or alienated Black Catholics, as well as to strengthen the faithful, by helping our people to appreciate what God has given to us in the Catholic Faith. We will continue to promote liturgical celebrations that are “authentically Black” and “truly Catholic.” Reports from Diocesan Days of Reflection affirm a continuing need, addressed in previous Congress documents, to reflect the genius of our cultures through our liturgies, catechetical instruction, spiritual direction, and pastoral counseling for formation in Christian discipleship.

The specific challenges to our mission of evangelization are many--some longstanding and well-known; others still evolving. My list here is not exhaustive, but I urge your prayerful awareness and active attention to the following realities:

The challenge of declining numbers of predominantly-Black Catholic parishes. This nationwide trend results partly from parish closures and mergers, but also from people moving to new neighborhoods and joining parishes there. In decades past, Black Catholics more often stayed with their parishes of origin regardless of where they lived. Consequently, today's Congress Movement encompasses Black Catholics from various parochial settings, including multicultural and predominantly white or Hispanic parishes. In some ways, it is progress that our people are feeling at home in many parishes. Nevertheless, Black parishes have been at the heart of the Congress Movement to evangelize Black Catholics, through inculturation of music, liturgy, and stewardship. We must discern how to sustain traditionally Black Catholic parishes and also how to bring our unique traditions to other parishes.

The challenge to promote vocations in the Black Community. Our community needs vocations to the priesthood, diaconate, consecrated religious life, and lay ecclesial ministry (such as the ministries of pastoral associates, directors of religious education, or youth ministers). Celebrating the Sacraments

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requires ordained clergy. A strong Congress Movement requires leadership rooted in our own experience (even as it welcomes solidarity by clergy, religious, and laity of non-African descent). Vocational discernment and training take several years, so we have no time for indifference or delay. Because God often calls men and women to ministry through family, mentors, and neighbors, Black Catholics must be proactive in identifying candidates for vocational ministries, helping them to discern whether God is calling them, and providing encouragement and support to those who are called.

The challenge to sustain Catholic education in the Black Community. Catholic schools have been a source of strength and stability in our community. Education is an integral part of the Catholic mission in a neighborhood, introducing many to the Catholic Church and inspiring many to academic achievements that create promising futures for individuals and their families. So the closure or merger of Catholic schools, often in urban areas, is a grave concern. Indeed, at Congress IX, we declared Catholic Education one of our eight Core Principles for action. After exhaustive study, the NBCC's commission of national educational leaders has made recommendations for tackling this challenge at the national level. Those recommendations are summarized in the present document.

The challenge to assure that Black Catholics are included in pastoral planning. Due mostly to budgetary concerns, a number of diocesan Offices of Black Catholic Ministry are being merged into offices for multicultural ministry. This is occurring, as well, at the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). We must discern prayerfully the ways that this trend helps or hinders the work of Catholic evangelization in the Black Community.

The challenge to incorporate immigrants of African descent into the Black Catholic Movement. Our primary reference point as a Congress Movement has been African Americans, yet today our challenge is to act with consideration of the diverse cultural backgrounds among Black Catholics in our pews. Immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean enrich the Church in the United States. Among these are many members of the clergy and the consecrated religious life, who bring their unique backgrounds to pastoral leadership.

Standing on the shoulders of our ancestors, the Congress Movement will meet these challenges. Let us explore new ways of evangelization that build upon the successes of the past and present. With hope in God, let us see challenges as opportunities rather than obstacles. With God's grace, we will rise to the opportunities.

I thank you for your prayers, your creative participation, and your time and energy. Together, we will continue to promote the freedom and growth of people of African descent as full participants in church and society.

Yours sincerely in the Lord,



Most Reverend John H. Ricard, S.S.J.
President of the Board of Trustees

CONGRESS X PLAN OF ACTION

National Black Catholic Congress 2007

[Jesus said,] "Remain in me, as I remain in you. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own unless it remains on the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me will be thrown out like a branch and wither; people will gather them and throw them into a fire and they will be burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you. By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples." John 15:4-8

INTRODUCTION

The Tenth National Black Catholic Congress met in Buffalo, New York from July 12–15, 2007 with this theme: "Christ is With Us: Celebrating the Gifts of the Sacraments." Formed by the convictions of the Gospel, filled with the Holy Spirit, and inspired by the witness of our ancestors, we are deeply grateful for the gifts of our Catholic and African heritage. Our contributions to our Church and society enrich the lives of people of every ethnicity.

We continually work to promote positive strategies for building the Catholic Church in the Black Community. Daniel Rudd, who convened the first congresses in the late 1800s, believed that the Catholic Church had a powerful message to proclaim in our community. Catholicism is completely compatible with our culture. Africans have been a part of the Church since its beginnings, shaping her message and advancing her mission (cf. Acts of the Apostles 2:10; 8:26-40; and 13:1-3). African nations, such as Ethiopia, were among the first Christian nations.¹ Africans are counted among those chosen to be the early Church fathers, mothers, and martyrs. Catholics of African descent were canonized saints to serve as exemplary models of Christian discipleship.

As disciples of Jesus and members of the Catholic Church, we have the opportunity and responsibility to learn about our Faith, love our Faith, and to live according to our Faith. This is the legacy that our ancestors in the Congress Movement have handed on to us.

Congress IX convened in Chicago, Illinois in 2002, declaring eight Core Principles of concern. Since then, parishes, diocesan offices, and national organizations of Black Catholics have used the Congress IX Pastoral Plan of Action as a framework for addressing these eight principles: promoting vibrant expressions of **spirituality** and experiences of **parish life**; affirming the presence and contributions of **youth and young adults** in our Church; sustaining **Catholic education** in our communities; advocating for **social justice**; eradicating **racism**; strengthening bonds with **Africa**; and providing for a compassionate response to those who suffer from **H.I.V. and/or A.I.D.S.**

SACRAMENTALITY AND COMMUNITY

Christ established the sacraments and entrusted them to the Church for our benefit.² The values they uphold promote harmony within the household of faith and in society. The sacraments are tangible encounters with the living God, enriching our lives with divine grace. The very life of God empowers us to live according to His Gospel.

¹ Cyprian Davis, O.S.B. *The History of Black Catholics in the United States*. (New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing, 1990), pp. 7-8.

² *Catechism of the Catholic Church 2nd Edition*, section 1131.

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A sacramental way of life is liberating. We strive to love God above all people and in our relationships. It is liberating to enjoy relationships that are mutually enriching rather than exploitive. We strive to love God above all things and in our use of things and so our possessions do not own us, nor do they define our self-worth. We are not lulled into a sense of complacency about any situation but rather live with the conviction that life is fully experienced when we practice what we proclaim. This is the good news about who we are and to whom we belong.

There is a hunger among Black Catholics to deepen our understanding of this integral part of Catholic spirituality. The sacraments are encounters with our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ is the Proven Foundation for fruitful ministry. We place our hope in what He promises because the sacraments will be fulfilled by His choice and with our cooperation. The fruits of the holistic empowerment of people of African descent are a richer Church and society to the glory of God.

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[Jesus said,] “Remain in me, as I remain in you. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own unless it remains on the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me will be thrown out like a branch and wither; people will gather them and throw them into a fire and they will be burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you. By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.” John 15:4-8

The sacraments are tangible encounters with Christ. Their celebration is an integral part of proclaiming the Gospel. The meaning of these sacramental signs and moments already influences our approach to the Core Principles. The vision of Congress X is to help Black Catholics to deepen our understanding of these vital connections.

Apart from the life and love of Christ, given to us through the ministry of His Church, we can do nothing! We are not ashamed to teach everything that Christ has commanded us to do (cf. Matthew 28:20a). As the dismissal at the end of our Eucharist celebration reminds us, worshipping Christ in our churches must be connected to witnessing to Christ in our communities.

Everything that Christ does is an expression of God’s enduring love for humanity, given totally and without reservation. This good news elicits a desire within us to offer ourselves wholly and unconditionally to Him. Sacramental celebrations are expressions of this covenant that we have with God. Here we outline just a few of the ways in which the sacraments are the foundation for our work on the Core Principles:

The Sacrament of **Baptism** develops a proper sense of **spirituality**.

Fundamental to our identity is that we are beloved children of God. This has been an important truth to receive as Blacks endured the deleterious effects of racism in American history. Created in the divine image, we rejoice in the gifts of our culture and offer these gifts back to God in worship and praise.

The Sacrament of **Confirmation** reminds us that we have been anointed by the Holy Spirit to offer prophetic witness by advocating for **social justice**. The witness of Black Catholics extends within the Church and to the wider society. It is local, national, and global. With a special feeling of solidarity, Black Catholics witness to the dignity and human rights of the millions of people in

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Africa who are oppressed by civil war, poverty, foreign debt, and disease. The issue of whether faith influences our stance on public policies is not vexing for us, because prophetic witness has been integral to our strategy to survive. We witnessed to the Gospel by building religious, educational, medical, and social service institutions.

The Sacrament of the **Eucharist** is at the center of **parish life**. Our parishes are the main places where the People of God gather to remember and celebrate the saving actions of our God. We are not just remembering past events. We are celebrating how they are made present to us now, influencing our perspective on life. The gift of the Body and Blood of Christ is a tangible demonstration of God's unconditional love for us. Our participation in the one eternal sacrifice of Christ reminds us that sin and death do not have the last word in our lives and in our world. The love of God is the reason we: (1) have been created in the divine image; (2) can be healed of the wounds of sin; and (3) can make life-giving choices that can transform society, so that our fervent prayer can be answered in concrete ways: "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven" (cf. Matthew 6:10). We are proactive in defending the dignity of each human being and we fight against anything that devalues any human life.

The Sacrament of **Reconciliation** contributes to the process of **eradicating racism**. Obligatory when we have broken the bonds of fellowship through grave sin, it is also a healing remedy when our actions have frayed those bonds. Experiencing divine mercy helps us to extend forgiveness toward others. Otherwise the petition, "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us," becomes a very dangerous prayer indeed (cf. Matthew 6:12,14-15). Harboring a reluctance to forgive will internalize bitterness and cause us to make wrong choices.

Reconciliation means the process of establishing right relationships. It begins when the offender owns up to his actions and corrects his behavior. It continues when the person who was offended gives the offender the chance to be reconciled. Offering mercy is not giving permission for someone to continue to engage in destructive behavior. Rather, it gives a person the opportunity to act in ways consonant with her dignity and that of her neighbor.

The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick teaches us how to provide a compassionate response to people suffering from **H.I.V. and/or A.I.D.S.** and to their families, friends, and caregivers. Those who suffer from this disease do not need to experience isolation from the People of God. Social stigma contradicts Gospel teaching. The presence of members of the Church demonstrates that God and His people have not abandoned those who are sick. Together we pray to God for healing, which can be experienced in many ways.

The Sacraments of **Holy Matrimony** and **Holy Orders** speak in particular to our **youth and young adults**, as they consider the distinctive vocation that God calls them to fulfill. Our youth and young adults are members of the Church today. How we minister to them--and invite them to join in the work of the ministry--will have an impact upon the Church in the future. Whether through **Catholic Schools**, parish religious education programs, youth ministries, neighborhood outreaches, mentoring programs, rites of passage programming, etc., Black Catholics are anxious to minister to our younger generations.

As our young people move from adolescence to young adulthood, they seek to forge their personal identities. This includes issues of faith and membership in the Church. Many young adults are singles. It has been a challenge in the Church as a whole to develop effective ministries that support young adults and singles.

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BEARING NEW FRUIT: THE CONGRESS X PLAN OF ACTION

*[Jesus said,] “Remain in me, as I remain in you. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own unless it remains on the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in me. **I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing.** Anyone who does not remain in me will be thrown out like a branch and wither; people will gather them and throw them into a fire and they will be burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you. By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.” John 15:4-8*

LEADERSHIP COMMISSIONS

The Congress X Plan of Action, presented in this document, reflects our perseverance in bringing the Core Principles to fruition. In 2004, National Black Catholic Congress (NBCC) staff surveyed diocesan representatives across the country about their progress on the first steps of the Congress IX Plan of Action. The results revealed that overburdened diocesan and parish offices sought resources and models for how to implement the Plan and advance the Principles. Responding to the survey, the NBCC's Board of Trustees created eight Leadership Commissions, one for each of the Core Principles. To constitute the commissions, NBCC staff solicited and reviewed nominations from across the country. Nationally recognized leaders on each principle were designated as commission facilitators. The Leadership Commissions met in extended workshops in Baltimore, Maryland in 2005 and 2006, guided by the methods of Appreciative Inquiry,³ and continued their work through periodic conference calls and emails.

For each of the Core Principles, the designated Leadership Commission created a national agenda of “ideal states,” each of which included strategies for progress and specific approaches and resource materials for implementing each strategy. These were compiled into a National Leadership Commission Agenda, which was published in its entirety in the program book that registrants received in Buffalo.

In preparation for Congress X, each Leadership Commission examined its Core Principle in relationship to the Sacraments and then created unique workshops, evening events, and exhibit booths for Congress X, to highlight critical current issues, useful models and resources, and opportunities for action. The Youth and Young Adult Leadership Commission assisted NBCC in creating the Youth and Young Adult track for the program, while the other leadership commissions organized seventeen workshops and events for the adult track at Congress X. ***These opportunities to learn about and reflect upon our core Principles, in light of our sacramental core as Catholics, were truly the heart of the Congress X experience.***

Learning and reflection are meaningless unless they inspire action. At the final assembly of Congress X, on July 15, 2007, chaired by Bishop Joseph Perry, the commissions reported their vision of the Principles with specific steps to implement over the next five years. Those reports, the fruit of the work of eighty-five gifted and dedicated women and men on the leadership commissions, are summarized here.

³ Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a collaborative process for organizational change and development that is used by corporate and nonprofit institutions worldwide. It was introduced to the NBCC community at Congress IX. Rather than focusing on deficits to be eliminated, AI emphasizes strengths to be used and past successes to be replicated. Rather than problem-solving, an AI approach involves envisioning “ideal states” and defining strategies for progressing toward the ideal.

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This is our plan of action—our framework for remaining in Christ, the Vine, and branching out to our parishes and our world so as to bear much fruit. Clergy, religious, and laity; NBCC staff and trustees, diocesan and parish staff members, families, and individuals—each of us, in our work and in our daily lives, will find in this plan steps that we can help to implement, where we live and work.



The National Black Catholic Congress Movement has always seen the importance of having strong bonds with Mother Africa. Africans have been a part of the Catholic Church since her beginning, shaping the Church's message and her advancement. Africans have been "raised to the altars of the Church" as exemplary models of discipleship for Christians around the world.

Deepening our understanding of our African heritage has led us to a deepening of our understanding of Christianity. It has also contributed to the incorporation of cultural values in liturgy, catechesis, and rites of passages programming, among other areas.

ACTIONS SINCE CONGRESS IX

- § Identified the following priority areas of concern in regard to Africa: Sudan, HIV, poverty and economic issues.
- § Suggested activities to build stronger relationships with our brothers and sisters from Africa.

CONTINUING OUR SOLIDARITY IN ACTION (2007–2012)

Goal #1:

Every parish, apostolic organization and/or Office of Black Catholic Ministry will join or establish a legislative network to advocate for ethical policies by our federal government towards the continent of Africa.

Step to Achieve Goal#1:

Work with Catholic organizations to learn more about existing Catholic legislative networks (e.g., state Catholic conferences) and to educate parish or diocesan organizations about these efforts.

Goal #2:

Every parish, apostolic organization and/or Office of Black Catholic Ministry will establish a relationship/partnership with a parish, diocese, or apostolic organization in Africa.

Step to Achieve Goal #2:

Work with Catholic organizations to learn more about Global Solidarity Partnerships and twinning relationships.

Goal #3:

Every parish, apostolic organization and/or Office of Black Catholic Ministry will support, create or participate in community events to celebrate contributions from our brothers and sisters in Africa.

Step to Achieve Goal#3 :

Work with local African Diaspora communities to learn about community events.

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Goal #4:

Every parish, apostolic organization and/or Office of Black Catholic Ministry will support the Solidarity Fund for the Church in Africa, which has been instituted by the USCCB.

Step to Achieve Goal#4:

Contact the USCCB to learn more about the Solidarity Fund for the Church in Africa.⁴

SACRAMENTAL FOUNDATIONS THAT HELP OUR EFFORTS TO BEAR FRUIT

Sacrament of Baptism ~ We are incorporated into the Catholic Church. As beloved children of God and disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ, we continue to build bonds with one another as members of the household of faith (cf. Galatians 6:10). There are no foreigners in the Catholic Church. Living in solidarity with our sisters and brothers is in keeping with this reality that God has given us a great dignity and glorious destiny.

Sacrament of Reconciliation ~ As we have experienced reconciliation with God, we are ambassadors of reconciliation with others. This informs our desire to promote conflict-resolution in Africa and at home, which can build right relationships and just societies.

Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick ~ Concern for those who are suffering from illness has been the impetus for creating medical institutions. It is one of the critical concerns of our global relief agencies. By working to support treatment of diseases across the continent of Africa, such as HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis, we invoke the power of the Holy Spirit to protect those who are suffering and to provide fortitude and peace.



CATHOLIC EDUCATION

ACTIONS SINCE CONGRESS IX

- § The Commission focused on five ideal states that would support our vision: Black Catholic Education at the heart of the Church to evangelize a socially just Church.
- § Our first priority for Black Catholics is that of sustaining Catholic Education in and for the Black Community. We researched best practices in sustaining Catholic Education and examined the literature extensively, reviewing strategies implemented throughout the United States over the past several years. Our Commission wrote a book, *Sustaining Catholic Education in and for the Black Community* (Los Angeles: Perfect Press, 2007), to serve as a resource for dioceses, individuals and educational organizations in their development of successful strategies.
- § The Committee participated in The Interregional African American Evangelization Conference and provided a workshop on issues surrounding Catholic Education in the Black Community.
- § Members wrote articles on Catholic Education in the National Black Catholic Congress newsletter.
- § We issued "A Call for Solidarity" in an effort to educate and offer support for sustaining Catholic Schools in urban communities.

⁴ More information at: <http://www.usccb.org/churchinafrica/background.shtml>

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- § Commission members participated in various diocesan conferences and events across the US, providing workshops and lectures on Catholic education in and for the Black Community.

CONTINUING OUR SOLIDARITY IN ACTION (2007 – 2012)

Goal #1:

To develop a National Support Initiative to provide financial assistance to efforts that will produce favorable results in sustaining Catholic Education in and for the Black Community.

Steps to Achieve Goal #1:

- #1: Planning (2007-2009) The Catholic Education Leadership Commissioners will serve as the Planning Board for this initiative: (1) defining goals and objectives; (2) forming regulations to govern the initiative; (3) initiating fundraising efforts; and (4) establishing policies regarding the distribution of funding.
- #2: Funding for the Planning Stage (2007-2009) Accumulate start up funds for the planning stage of the initiative through donations managed by the NBCC office. Requests for donations were initiated during Congress X. All donors will receive regular updates from the planning board.
- #3: Hiring of the National Support Initiative Director (2008) The Planning Board will create the job description and assist in the hiring process. The director/manager will be responsible for fund development as written by the Planning Board.
- #4: Funds made available to the community, as proposed (2009 or 2010) Financial assistance for sustaining Catholic Education in and for the Black Community to be made available to the public, as outlined in the plan developed by the Planning Board.

SACRAMENTAL FOUNDATIONS THAT HELP OUR EFFORTS TO BEAR FRUIT

Sacrament of Baptism ~ As Saint Paul writes in his first letter to the Church in Corinth, as members of the Body of Christ we share in the successes and struggles of each member (1 Corinthians 12:26). This is why sustaining Catholic Education in and for the Black Community benefits the entire Church and contributes to its mission to evangelize. Historically, Catholic Schools have introduced many in the Black Community to the Catholic faith.

Sacrament of Confirmation ~ The gifts of the Holy Spirit are given for the building up of the Church and enabling the believer to give witness to faith, in word and action. The gift of fortitude enables us to persevere in keeping our educational institutions viable.



HIV/AIDS

Christ cares for those who suffer from illness and compels us to reach out to those who are suffering from H.I.V. and A.I.D.S., along with their caregivers, families, and friends. Doing so is in keeping with our understanding of being a sacramental people who extend the ministry of Christ. The Church's ministry continues to address issues of adequate medical care in addition to appropriate pastoral care.

We must continue to educate our communities about the scope of the epidemic. This includes promoting effective methods of prevention in keeping with Catholic moral teaching, which upholds the dignity of every human being and a responsible use of our freedom.

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As Catholics we are called to respond to all suffering as Jesus did - with love and care. We are called to respect the dignity of every human person and to bring strength and courage to those who live with this disease.

CONTINUING OUR SOLIDARITY IN ACTION (2007–2012)

Goal #1:

The Church is to be an active sign of compassion, offering healing and breaking down the social stigma and prejudice that have been attached to people with HIV/AIDS.

Steps to Achieve Goal #1:

- #1: At a minimum it is recommended that every parish develop an AIDS ministry.
- #2: Ministry begins with a faith community praying daily for those infected with the disease and for their families and love ones who care for them. Only then will persons living with HIV/AIDS feel safe to come forward to seek the Church's pastoral care.
- #3: Our pastoral focus can include, in a very personal way, providing home visits, transportation, respite care or childcare. It is important at such times to listen to people with HIV/AIDS and their families and allow them to articulate their own needs rather than assume we know what these needs are.

Goal #2:

We will respond to the call of the USCCB to form bonds of global solidarity with Africa.

Step to Achieve Goal #2 :

Invite Catholic Relief Services to make a parish presentation on opportunities for involvement.⁵

SACRAMENTAL FOUNDATIONS THAT HELP OUR EFFORTS TO BEAR FRUIT

Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick ~ The Church continues to show concrete concern for those who are suffering from illness, their families, friends, and caregivers. By reaching out to people suffering from HIV and AIDS and their caregivers, we invoke the power of the Holy Spirit to protect those who are suffering from anxiety, discouragement, and temptation and to provide peace and fortitude.



CONTINUING OUR SOLIDARITY IN ACTION (2007–2012)

Goal #1:

To encourage every parish to evaluate their efforts of evangelization for the purpose of creating an aggressive evangelization plan that includes all aspects/ ministries of parish life and a timeline to implement the plan.

Steps to Achieve Goal #1:

- #1: Provide educational forums to assist parishes in their understanding of evangelization, which includes leadership training and guidance on creating an evangelization plan.

⁵ CRS offers a variety of ways for Catholics in the United States to get involved. They have programs and resources for education, direct action, advocacy, partnership and service, enabling development of a program tailored to a particular parish.

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#2: Organize a diocesan Black Catholic "Evangelization Camp Meeting" that provides tools to assist local parish efforts.

#3: Place this goal on Parish Council or Pastoral Council agendas so that parish leadership can discern how the parish should be structured to promote evangelization.

Goal #2:

To encourage each national Black Catholic organization to design, promote and implement an evangelization initiative within their organization.

Steps to Achieve Goal #2:

#1: Seek ways to engage the leadership and membership of national Black Catholic organizations in conversation about implementing an evangelization initiative.

#2: Encourage organizations to designate a committee to examine how the organization contributes to the evangelization mission of the Church and how its contribution can be strengthened.

#3: Place this goal on the agenda of national gatherings of these organizations.

SACRAMENTAL FOUNDATIONS THAT HELP OUR EFFORTS TO BEAR FRUIT

Sacrament of Baptism ~ Preparing adult catechumens and candidates for full communion with the Catholic Church helps them to appreciate how sacramental grace promotes union with Christ. Preparing families for the baptism of infants is a moment for evangelization. We proclaim the good news that God has not abandoned the crown of His creation to the power of sin and death. In a world created good by God's choice, but which is wounded by the sinful choices of human beings, we claim our children for Christ! The parish serves as partner with parents and godparents in raising the children in the practice of the Faith.

Sacrament of Confirmation ~ The gifts of the Holy Spirit are given for the building up of the Church. They enable believers to give witness to their Faith in word and action. Leadership training is important to guide the disciples in using their gifts and talents to build the Church and further her mission. The anointing of the Holy Spirit can help parishioners to understand the teaching of the Church, since the Holy Spirit leads us to all truth, as communicated through Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition.

Sacrament of the Eucharist ~ The central act of worship within a parish is the celebration of Holy Mass. The importance of well-planned liturgies whose primary aim is to glorify God will edify believers and evangelize those who are apathetic about their Faith or alienated from the practice of the Faith.

Sacrament of Matrimony ~ Preparing engaged couples for marriage is another moment for evangelization. Sometimes this may be a time in which couples will become active disciples within the parish, if they are not already. The witness of the marriage covenant should proclaim to the community that this relationship strives to model how God loves humanity.

Sacrament of Holy Orders ~ Parishes are crucial in helping young people to understand what God is calling them to do in their lives. In what ways are parishioners encouraging men who may be called to the priesthood or permanent diaconate through the Sacrament of Holy Orders? Do we provide the support parishioners need to respond to a call to consecrated religious life or lay ecclesial ministry?

Continued on page 17

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ACTIONS SINCE CONGRESS IX

- § The Commission met regularly through monthly conference calls to identify, assess, plan, and formulate implementation of the Pastoral Plan of Action of 2002 and the National Leadership Commission Agenda of 2005.
- § The Commission obtained information from Offices of Black Ministry or Multicultural Ministries across the country, mainly from the Eastern, Southern, and Midwestern regions.
- § The Commission developed a Vision Statement: "We as descendants of the African Diaspora believe that all who embrace the precepts of the Catholic Church are called to eliminate the sin of racism." We titled the project: "Moving Beyond Bitterness and Anger: U.S. Black Catholics Address Racism in Our Church and Society."
- § The Leadership Commission identified four "Ideal States" or goals, with strategies for implementation.

CONTINUING OUR SOLIDARITY IN ACTION (2007–2012)

Goal #1:

Continuing to promote and affirm the efforts of members of the hierarchy in combating the existence of racism.⁶

Steps to Achieve Goal #1:

- #1: Members of the clergy should speak out on racism with passion and zeal as an issue that is consistent with our defense of human life and human dignity. A responsible organization within the Congress Movement can develop "homily helps" in this regard.
- #2: Provide information that shows the connections between racism and various societal problems such as: violence and inequities in education, housing, and economic benefits.
- #3: Promote workshops for Church leaders, including clergy and consecrated religious, on diversity.
- #4: Promote diversity in hiring by diocesan curia.
- #5: Promote diocesan involvement in the Black Community (e.g., conducting business with Black-owned businesses; advertising job openings in Black newspapers).

Goal #2:

Black Catholics need to inform themselves and others about the impact that racism has had within the Church and society. This should also lead to promoting reconciliation.

⁶ *Brothers and Sisters to Us* (1979), a pastoral letter by the precursor of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and *What We Have Seen and Heard* (1984), a pastoral letter by the Black bishops in the United States, are two examples of ways in which members of the hierarchy have spoken about racism and its deleterious effects upon Church and society. Members of the hierarchy have issued pastoral letters in their own dioceses as well.

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Steps to Achieve Goal #2:

- #1: Disseminate information from the teaching of the Holy See and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) in ways that can be easily received by Catholics in this country.
- #2: Promote education about the presence of peoples of African descent in the Bible and in the history of the Catholic Church.
- #3: Promote programs that successfully have facilitated discussion about racism and the need to promote reconciliation.

Goal #3:

Black Catholics, who are adequately trained in various academic disciplines, including theology, should make themselves available as resource persons to address any racial incidents that may occur and to provide viable solutions to overcome them.

Goal #4:

The Catholic Church in the United States will embark upon concentrated, simultaneous, continuous plans of action to address racism.

Steps to Achieve Goals #3 and #4:

- #1: Steps listed for the first two goals also contribute to this one.
- #2: An example of concentrated, sustained, and continuous action to address racism would be if a month or week were designated during which national Catholic organizations (not just Black organizations) would address the issue in our parochial, diocesan, educational, medical, and social service institutions, and in various media.

SACRAMENTAL FOUNDATIONS THAT HELP OUR EFFORTS TO BEAR FRUIT

Sacrament of Baptism ~ As members of the Body of Christ, we recognize the diversity of members with a variety of spiritual gifts given by God to contribute to building up the Church. Saint Paul tells us that we cannot deem anyone in the Church as insignificant.

Sacrament of Reconciliation ~ We take responsibility for our actions by examining our consciences, rejoicing in the blessings that we have received and repenting of any sins we have committed. We confess our sins with a firm desire to turn away from what leads us to sin so that we may live in fidelity to the Gospel. We trust in the forgiveness of sins as we hear the bishop or priest offer the Prayer of Absolution. Then we are encouraged to be an ambassador of reconciliation toward others. Our lives can serve as a testimony that people can change for good.



SOCIAL JUSTICE

African-Americans have experienced the Gospel as a liberating path. Faith has always had a role in promoting our freedom and advancing the struggle for social justice.

ACTIONS SINCE CONGRESS IX

§ Identified certain priority areas of concern (listed on the following page)

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- § Developed several suggested strategies for the effective formation of Black Catholics in social ministry
- § Identified practical actions that Black Catholics can take to understand, embrace and implement the principles of Catholic social teaching, whether personally or at parish, diocesan, organizational or national levels

CONTINUING OUR SOLIDARITY IN ACTION (2007 – 2012)

Goal:

As Eucharistic people and ministers of Reconciliation, we recognize Christ's real presence in the least of our brothers and sisters. As Black Catholics, we will view Catholic social teaching and the capacity to act on it through the lens of the Black experience, creating and utilizing resources and approaches that reflect and build upon our reality.

Steps to Achieve Goal:

- #1: Black Catholics will become more knowledgeable of and engage more actively in addressing the following priorities:
 - § Sacredness of human life
 - § Economic poverty
 - § Criminal justice system
 - § Peace
 - § Health care, including mental health.
- #2: Effective formation strategies include modifying existing formation programs, as needed, to utilize the wisdom, insights and experiences of Black Catholics seeking justice.
- #3: Practical actions that Black Catholics can take today include:
 - § Engaging in advocacy and civic participation
 - § Incorporating social justice in liturgical celebrations and all facets of parish life
 - § Creating communication and education tools for social justice ministry that are helpful to Black Catholics, and
 - § Intentionally building strong relationships with other Catholics of African descent to advance social justice.

SACRAMENTAL FOUNDATIONS THAT HELP OUR EFFORTS TO BEAR FRUIT

Sacrament of Baptism ~ Through Baptism, we are called to nourish right relationships with God and with others. We reject evil, in all its forms, individual or social. Living out our Baptismal promises means setting aside indifference and taking action to “let justice surge like water, and goodness like an unfailing stream.” (Amos 5:24)

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Sacrament of Eucharist ~ The celebration of Holy Mass includes the table of the Word of God and table of the Eucharist.⁷ Before the proclamation of the Gospel, we pray that the Word of Christ will influence what we think, say, and do. At the table of the Eucharist, the blood and wine become Christ's Body and Blood so that we who receive Him can become Christ to one another. We make a place at the table for the poor and vulnerable.

Sacrament of Reconciliation ~ We receive the grace and peace of this sacrament on the basis of making a good examination of conscience, acknowledging our sins, doing penance, and seeking to sin no more. Our sacramental experience teaches us that reconciliation in society also requires an honest examination, to acknowledge the laws and institutions that oppress the dignity and life of some, for the advantage of others. Reconciliation requires prayer to repent of our ways and it requires a commitment to action, so as to "sin no more."



SPIRITUALITY

The National Black Catholic Congress is an evangelistic movement. Practicing Catholics need to be evangelized in order to evangelize others. Our vision sees Black Catholics spiritually alive, combining the richness of Black spirituality and the Catholic faith to revitalize our Church, and restoring our community to provide a place of life for our children and us.

The process of forming viable and vibrant faith communities continues by responding to the divine call to evangelize. This deepens our conversion to Jesus Christ and engages us in the mission of the Church. Inculturation is an important part of evangelization so that the Gospel engages people in their lived reality. Black spirituality is a worldview that calls to who we are in Christ, our culture, history and cultural expressions, which help us to live our Catholic faith wholeheartedly in daily life.

ACTIONS SINCE CONGRESS IX

- § Collaboration with the Institute of Black Catholic Studies of Xavier University of Louisiana (hereinafter, IBCS) to develop a program to engage participants in the vocation of discipleship and evangelization. This three-week process invites participants to: (1) acknowledge their purpose for living as revealed by the teaching of Christ and the Church; (2) awareness of the deeper implications of being a follower of Jesus Christ within the fellowship of the Catholic Church; and (3) practical ways of actively engaging in the mission of the Church. The first part of this program was initiated on June 30, 2007.
- § Raising a conversation about Black Catholics at their best, to affirm using the principles of Black spirituality to live the Catholic faith in concrete ways. The commission contacted Offices of Black Catholics to share information about their programming that promotes Black Catholic spirituality in the areas of catechesis, Bible study, family life programs, liturgy, stewardship programs, sacramental preparation, and other ministries.

CONTINUING OUR SOLIDARITY IN ACTION (2007 – 2012)

Goal #1:

National Goal: Calling all Black Catholics to live their Catholic faith wholeheartedly, we propose an Institute for Black Catholic Spirituality in collaboration with IBCS to revitalize our call to discipleship and evangelization.

⁷ Vatican Council II, *Dogmatic Constitution On Divine Revelation* (1965), section 21.

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Steps to Achieve Goal #1:

- § Design and implement an intense three-week program that incorporates the principles of Black Spirituality, African rites of passage, and the Appreciative Inquiry process, beginning with the IBCS 2007 program year.
- § Evaluate and plan the program with all involved for IBCS 2008 program year.

Goal #2:

Diocesan Goal: To create a “resource bank” of programs and material that have been successfully used in Black Catholic communities.

Steps to Achieve Goal #2:

Work with diocesan Offices of Black Catholics to create an Internet resource bank of materials and programs that would be linked with the National Black Catholic Congress website.

Goal #3:

Local Goal: In order to retain, reclaim, and recruit disciples, we commit our parishes to help Black Catholics to deepen their understanding of their call to discipleship in the Catholic Church.

Steps to Achieve Goal #3:

- § Work with IBCS to develop a small group faith sharing process that can be used in our parishes, including an appreciation of the sacramental life as an integral part of growing as disciples of Christ.
- § Supply models of developing small faith communities on the National Black Catholic Congress website.

SACRAMENTAL FOUNDATIONS THAT HELP OUR EFFORTS TO BEAR FRUIT

The celebration and reception of the sacraments is a hallmark of Catholic Christian spirituality. They were instituted by Christ and entrusted to His Church for the salvation and sanctification of His people. These are tangible encounters with the living God, which accomplish what they signify because the grace of God is always effective. The impact of these celebrations is dependent upon our cooperation with God. We accept how God chooses to be present and what God chooses to do in these encounters.

Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist ~ The Sacraments of Initiation serve as the foundations of living as Catholics (Catechism of the Catholic Church #1212). Immersed into the very life of God, we are His beloved children. The principles of the Gospel of Jesus Christ influence our thinking, speaking, and acting as members of His Body, which is the Church. We each have different responsibilities, encouraging each one within the Church to mature as disciples, and contributing to the advancement of the mission of the Church. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are given for the building up of the Church and enabling the believer to give witness to the faith in word and action. Created in the divine image, we rejoice in the gifts of our culture and offer these gifts back to God in worship and praise.



YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS

The Leadership Commission on Youth and Young Adults envisions a Holistic approach to call forth the formation of Black Catholic youth ministers in expanded leadership, ministry and evangelization roles in the Church and to call forth the preparation of Black Catholic young adults for ministerial leadership roles in the Church.

ACTIONS SINCE CONGRESS IX

In partnership with the NBCC, the Youth and Young Adults Leadership Commission planned the Inter-regional African American Catholic Evangelization Conference (in collaboration with IRAACEC) held in Atlanta in August 2006.

In partnership with the NBCC, the Commission organized a separate track for Youth and Young Adults at Congress X in Buffalo, including plenary sessions, workshops, worship, and activities.

CONTINUING OUR SOLIDARITY IN ACTION (2007–2012)

Goal #1:

Black Catholic youth leaders will participate at the national level of the Catholic Church.

Steps to Achieve Goal#1:

- #1: Design a Website, linked from the NBCC Website, to provide information and communicate the activities of parishes and regional teams.
- #2: Develop collaborative partnerships with representatives from the Youth and Young Adult Commission and the National African American Youth Ministry Network (NAACYMN) to create and maintain an interactive Website of resources, speakers and events for Black youth and young adults.
- #3: Develop an online continuing education/certificate program in partnership with the Xavier University Institute for Black Catholic Studies' program of Catechetical Certification.

Goal #2:

Local parishes and dioceses will discern, model, and empower Black Catholic youth leadership.

Steps to Achieve Goal #2:

- #1: Develop small reflection groups to establish retreats, workshops and programs in areas such as chastity and sports ministry.
- #2: Develop measures of accountability to review parish and diocesan Youth and Young Adult leadership training programs for Black Catholics.

Goal #3:

Degree and certificate programs will be available at the national and regional levels for Black Catholic young adults.

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Steps to Achieve this Goal:

- #1: Develop distance-learning programs for adult continuing education in Church leadership.
- #2: Partner with the Xavier University Institute for Black Catholic Studies, the National Black Catholic Congress, and the Thea Bowman certificate program for curricula and field/internship experiences.
- #3: Create regional educational and training centers that are accessible in design and program delivery.

Goal #4:

Parishes will use young adults in ministry and leadership roles.

Steps to Achieve Goal #4:

- #1: Develop parish ministries that will utilize the gifts, skills, talents and resources of young adults.
- #2: Develop liaisons and partnerships with NBCC regional coordinators in order to involve young adults in regional planning that will influence the parish planning.
- #3: Design stewardship-training workshops at the diocesan level to assist parishes in the development of Black young adult leaders.

SACRAMENTAL FOUNDATIONS THAT HELP OUR EFFORTS TO BEAR FRUIT

The Congress X sessions for the Youth and Young Adult track explored extensively the ways that our Sacraments can nourish and guide the lives of youth and young adults:

Sacrament of Confirmation ~ More than just a one-time ceremony for Black Catholic Youth. Confirmation is a lifestyle. We are to rely on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit in the daily endeavor to live as true Disciples of Jesus Christ.

Sacrament of Reconciliation ~ This sacrament calls youth and young adults to understand the evil nature of sin and its disruptive effects on humanity. In spite of it all, we experience God's endless mercy.

Sacraments of Holy Orders and Marriage ~ These sacraments call youth and young adults to examine the meaning of vocation and to listen to their true calling. Vocation is the life God intends an individual to lead, whether in ordained ministry, consecrated religious life, a secular career, marriage, or single life.

Sacrament of Marriage ~ The decisions Black Catholic teenagers make today about relationships have a direct effect on their family lives later on in adulthood. Youth need to understand the attitudes and conditions that build healthy relationships and to recognize the true love that leads to solid friendships and prosperous marriages.

A PROVEN FOUNDATION FOR FRUITFUL MINISTRY LEADS TO A PROMISING FUTURE

[Jesus said,] "Remain in me, as I remain in you. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own unless it remains on the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me will be thrown out like a branch and wither; people will gather them and throw them into a fire and they will be burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you. By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.'" John 15:4-8

The Gift of Christ and His Church is the proven foundation for a fruitful ministry. Formed by the convictions of the Gospel, filled with the Holy Spirit, and inspired by the witness of our ancestors, we are deeply grateful for the gifts of our Catholic and African heritage. Our contributions to our Church and society enrich the lives of people of every ethnicity.

God is glorified as our ministry bears fruit. Nourished by the grace of Christ in the Sacraments, we are sustained by divine life and love. This is the reason for our hope for the Catholic Church in the Black Community. First, our hope is placed in God, who is always faithful in fulfilling His promises. Second, growth takes time and God is good all the time! We reaffirm our ongoing work on the Core Principles, affirmed by Congresses IX and X as our framework for action. Renewing our understanding of the sacramental life of the Church reminds us that the grace of Christ will help us to stand on a solid foundation (cf. Matthew 7:24-28).

Relying upon the grace of God who wants us to have a fruitful life, we face our challenges and embrace opportunities. God will lead us to experience a promising future--within time and for eternity.

"Let us not grow tired in doing good, for in due time we shall reap our harvest, if we do not give up. So then, while we have the opportunity, let us do good to all, but especially to those who belong to the family of the faith." Galatians 6:9-10

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National Black Catholic Congress 2007

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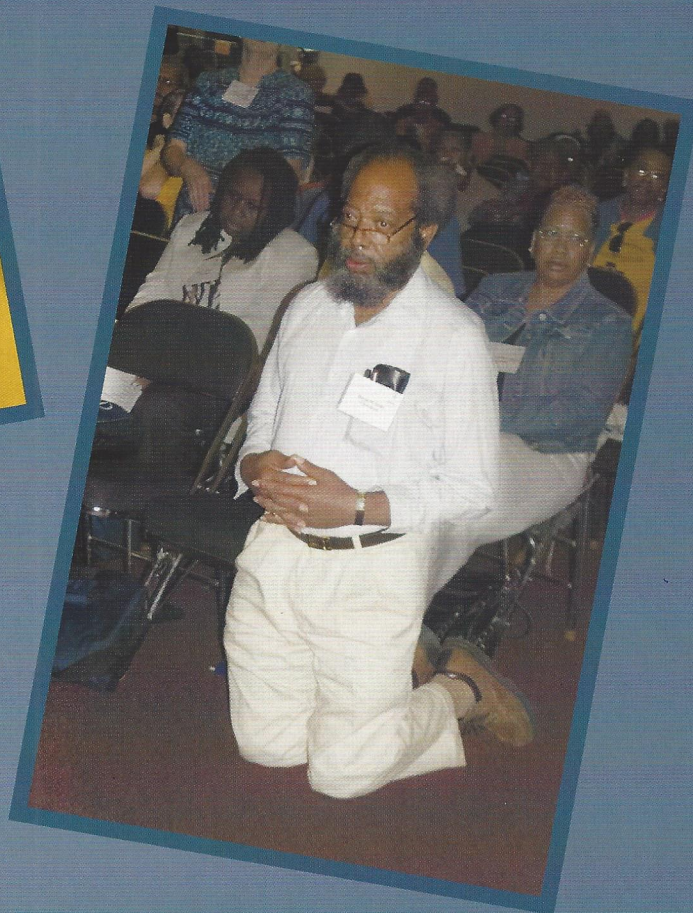
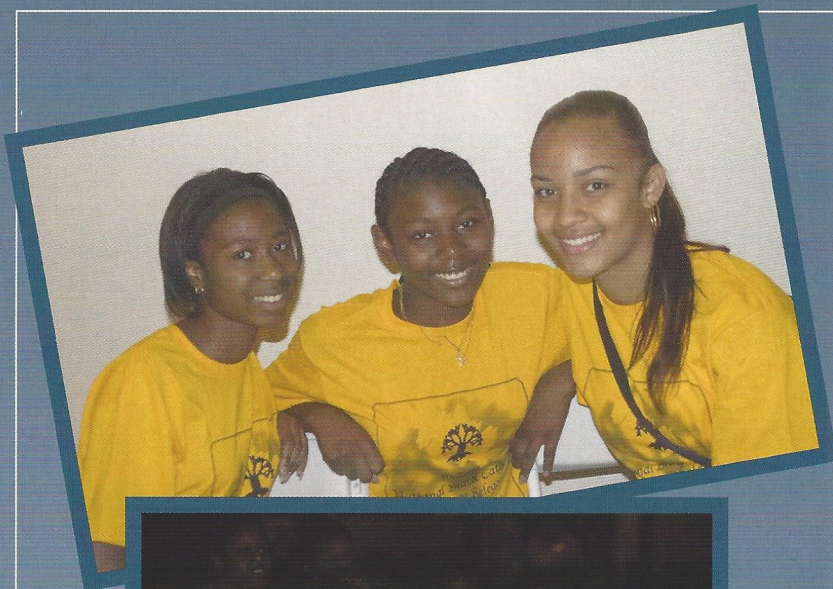
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*"Remain in me, as I remain in you.
Just as a branch cannot bear fruit
on its own unless it remains on the vine,
so neither can you unless you remain
in me.*

*I am the vine and you are the branches.
Whoever remains in me and I in him
will bear much fruit, because without me
you can do nothing."*



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