

**(3 min.) Presentation by Cecilia Braveboy at
Diocese of Arlington's Listening Session, May 2019**

Singing in my heart: I wanna do what the Spirit say do. I wanna do what the Spirit say do. What the Spirit say do, I wanna do, O Lord. I wanna do what the Spirit say do.



My name is Cecilia Braveboy from Our Lady Queen of Peace Church in South Arlington. Thank you, Bishop Burbidge and Bishop Fabre for this Listening Session and the sessions all across the country.

I agree that listening sessions are very important instruments of peace and healing. From my own experience, one summer one of my former pastors, Fr. David Ray, invited my husband and I to attend a week long Black Catholic conference. When we returned from the conference, we were so fired up with the Spirit and being with hundreds of other Black Catholics. We met with our pastor in an evening meeting at our house; put records on the stereo of Masses with gospel music (that tells a little age); and worked out a strategy to include what we had learned in the parish. At the invitation of the pastor, we held a listening session with 20 African American Catholics in parish. With the blessing of Fr. Ray, we took the recommendations of our meeting, and: we held our first African American Catholic History program with the then Fr. Carl Fisher (a pastor from Baltimore); we formed the first Gospel Choir for the 9:30 Sunday morning liturgy; and we recruited Black CCD teachers for the religious ed program.

It's historical for me as an African American Catholic to be standing in front of this listening session this evening. I'm recalling that in the segregated Catholic community of 1954, some 65 years ago on May 17th, my community activist mother, Marguerite Thomas, heard in the news that the Supreme Court decision of Brown vs. the Board of education gave the judicial ruling to desegregate the public schools. Soon she informally met with the pastor of St. Thomas More [STM] Church and School, Msgr. Arthur Taylor, and asked, "Why couldn't three of her children be enrolled in the STM elementary school?" In that conversation (getting to know each other), Msgr. Taylor responded "yes" and in September 1954 the first three African American

children, including my two brothers and I, entered St. Thomas More school without any community disturbance. (These Christ-like actions occurred 5 years before the Virginia public schools were forced to open their chained up, locked doors to Black people in the public schools.) In that model of parish leaders breaking down racist barriers, a parish leader worked along with pastor of St. Thomas More, the pastor of OLQP, and the people of goodwill to make that social change come into fruition. We need more of that in our communities.

In the United States, the Catholic Church is the reflection of society and the hopes of the people of God. While racism is the root cause of most of the evils in our society today, the Church can and should continue to take the lead in moving people of goodwill towards developing ways of loving one another in all walks of their lives.

For African American Catholics in this Diocese, I still believe education and setting up interracial relationships is the key to social change. 76% of African Americans Catholics are located in predominantly white parishes.

Thank you.

There were 14 other presentations that evening in the Listening Session. If I had more time, I would have said the rest of my presentation.

Let me suggest some practical actions.

-- For African American Catholics in this Diocese, I still believe education and setting up interracial relationships is the key to social change. 76% of African Americans Catholics are located in predominantly white parishes. There is a dire need for pastors to have regular conversations with their African American parishioners, who in most cases are the hidden gifts and talents in their parish ministry. I recommend that there would be two simultaneous tracks or pathways combatting racism that include:

- 1) An enculturated faith development of African American individuals and groups like programs of the Institute for Black Catholic Studies at Xavier University in

Louisiana. There could be a series of webinars like IBCS's Walking with the Saints. Also, the Archdiocese of Washington this year received a grant to develop trainers in Fr. Clarence Williams' Racial Sobriety process. The Arlington Diocese could join the Washington Archdiocese in this venture as we did for the Black Catholic Convocation with parish leaders in 2014 held at the Josephite Pastoral Center. African American Catholic women are already networking and attending the retreat days of Sisters in the Spirit in the Archdiocese of Washington and of Sisters in the Spirit in the Arlington Diocese. For several years the Black Catholic Ministry of the Multicultural Office has also benefited from the annual Day of Reflection and Unity Mass.

2) An enculturated faith development of all the parishes and religious organizations. There could be a concerted parish-wide enculturation focus similar to what occurs among the priests at the altars as they promote the Bishop's Lenten Appeal at the weekend Masses. For specific dates throughout the year, all the pastors could be given a template of the topics and points to embellish in the weekend liturgies, and well as suggested prayers and other resources for the liturgy. The African American Catholic Youth Bible, with its essays and prayers, is an excellent resource for homilies and for individual and group study.

--Over 40% of Catholics in our nation are African Americans and persons of color whose cultures that should be reflected in the diocesan staff, the parish staff and the volunteer ministry leadership. Also, to combat hundreds of years of racism, discrimination and exclusion of African Americans and persons of color in ministry leadership, the church must take specific steps to cultivate vocations from African Americans and persons of color for the priesthood, diaconate, religious orders of men and women (including secular orders and associates), and for lay ministry.

-- In the process of recognizing, defining, lifting up various cultures to proclaim that the Catholic Church is a multicultural Body of Christ, Church leaders should not displace and omit the African American culture and spirituality. Currently it seems that when the Church is speaking and forming policies for its multicultural composition, it is not including the African American culture, but it is including the

persons of color who speak a foreign language. Example: in our diocesan website under the “Multicultural Ministries” page , African Catholics are included but not African American Catholics. On another page “African/African American Communities”, Black Catholics are featured, but the predominantly African American Masses at St. Joseph’s (Alexandria) are not included (but should be) in the listings for the multicultural Mass information.

--Do not lump African American spirituality and development with African spirituality and development. While, because of the color of their skin, they experience a similar form of discrimination and oppression in the U.S., these races are two separate Black cultures. The term Black Catholic means Catholics who are African American, African and Caribbean. For my comments, you may have noticed that I have been speaking about African American Catholics, who require a different faith development than African and Caribbean Catholics.

-- There should be Black and other persons of color depicted in religious icons and art media/communications all over the diocese. Look around this room, and in your churches and its buildings. Are there paintings and icons with Black/persons of color icons on your walls, in your statues, in your media art/ illustrations, and in your visual displays? I think the majority of Catholics of goodwill have accepted and hold true that Jesus was a middle-Eastern Jew of color with curly dark hair. African American Catholics have been saying for many years, “Jesus is Black”. Let the church say, “Amen”.

-- African American Catholic youth/ young adults/adults 40 and under are the primary targeted group for faith development. It was the 40 year old and under leaders who developed and worked in the Black Catholic movement in the 1960s through the 1980s. This led to prominent African American leaders (like Servant of God Sr. Thea Bowman, Historian monk Fr. Cyprian Davis, Liturgist Archbishop James Lyke) , as well as the Lead Me, Guide Me hymnal and the Black Bishops pastoral “What We Have Seen and Heard”. Most of the African American bishops in the Bishops Conference for the 2018 pastoral letter, “Open Wide Our Hearts”, are from the 1960-1990 generations. It is the 40 year old and under (or the millenniums born 1980 through the early 2000s) that must step up to the home-

batting plate and help reshape the African American Catholic ministries. These ministries can lead the Church in combatting its challenges of racism in a new direction. Like the spiritual sings: “Who will be a witness for my Lord? Who will be a witness for my Lord?”

Taken from the Pastoral Letter, “Open Wide Our Hearts, the Enduring Call to Love”: What is needed, and what we are calling for, is a genuine conversion of heart, a conversion that will compel change, and the reform of our institutions and society. Conversion is a long road to travel for the individual. Moving our nation to a full realization of the promise of liberty, equality, and justice for all is even more challenging. However, in Christ we can find the strength and the grace necessary to make that journey.