

MINISTRY IN  
AFRICAN AMERICAN  
CATHOLIC  
COMMUNITIES

## A TALE OF TWO PARISHES

Sister Mary Jerome Buchert, O.S.U. Provincial

My reflection is really a tale of two parishes where I grew to appreciate and love African-American culture, heritage and spirituality. I served for 14 years at St. Francis de Sales in Walnut Hills and nine years at St. Agnes in Bond Hill.

My very first teaching assignment as a young religious was to the 7th and 8th grades at St. Francis de Sales School in 1966. At that time the school had already been in existence 91 years. The parish itself was founded in 1848, and for the next 100 years was one of the wealthiest parishes in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati. Many of its parishioners lived in the big mansions in East Walnut Hills and were among the Who's Who of Catholic Cincinnati. The de Sales School that their children attended was well staffed, equipped, and maintained. It provided a superior education for the times.

Between 1948 and 1960 Walnut Hill experienced a tremendous socio-economic and cultural shift in population. Thousands of West End families — mostly African-American — were displaced largely due to the building of expressways. (Black population census for Walnut Hills: 1945- 16%, 1960- 57%, 1965- 88%) Many of those families moved to Walnut Hills where landlords seeking real estate investment opportunities purchased large mansions and turned them into multi-family apartments. As is too often the case for the African-American community, property owners collected the rent but put very little back into these properties for upkeep and maintenance. By the mid-1960s some of these places were often little more than tenements.

When the race riots erupted after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968 the white middle-class began to move out of the neighborhood. I could see the burned out storefronts along Woodburn Avenue from my classroom window. St. Francis de Sales Church and School were not damaged in the riots because word went out in the community that “this is a place that is educating our children.” I learned early on how very important the education of their children was to black parents. Although we had some middle-class black families that could afford the tuition, we also had many poor families. I saw the sacrifices those mothers and fathers made to scrape together the (\$100+) tuition. They did without, so their children could go to school. They “worked off” tuition by doing some kitchen and janitorial jobs in the school.

During the 60s, de Sales was a white church with an increasingly black school. As the number of white children in the school declined, so too did the resources being put into the school. We had to make do with hardly any money, older textbooks, ancient desks, and an antiquated library with few if any resources on black history or heritage.

Since I taught the junior high history classes, I spent many Saturdays and summers in the public library trying to create lesson plans that made up for the total lack of Black History in the regular history textbooks. I was thrilled when I had the opportunity to attend a summer workshop at Xavier University taught by Lerone Bennett. The first edition of his ground-breaking African-American history was titled, *Before the Mayflower; a History of the Negro in America*. 1619-1964.

I not only started the new school year with an entire book on “Afro-American” history (the term in-vogue then), but I could share with my students that I met and was taught by a famous black historian! They were so proud.

As a result of the civil rights movement many educators began to overcompensate for the horrible racism of the Jim Crow years. This trend hit the Catholic school too. Some teachers would make excuses for the “poor” little black kids who teachers thought lived in chaotic homes where there was no food to eat, little interest in education on the part of parents etc. To my knowledge most of these teachers had never set foot in an African-American home. They did not expect the same quality of work from black students as they did of the white students and often would discipline the White kids but not the black kids. One teacher at de Sales would give candy to the black students when they misbehaved so they wouldn’t do it again. Of course, that didn’t work. It only caused more discipline problems.

Fortunately for St. Francis de Sales School, we hired a young African-American teacher in January of 1970. Janet Turner knew the difficulties of growing up black and poor in Cincinnati, but she worked all kinds of jobs to pay the tuition to put herself through Catholic elementary school and high school, then to college. One fateful day in the spring of 1970, Janet and I shared playground duty. She told me that something had to be done to change the attitudes of teachers and raise the academic standard of the school. She spoke passionately from her own experience and said that “low expectations for black kids was just another more pernicious form of racism.” Thus began what those of us involved called, the de Sales Revolution! Those teachers who didn’t agree to change did not return that next year. We mobilized an army of both black and white parents who were eager to participate in the education of their children. Msgr. John Staunton, pastor, gave us the thumbs up, and Father Jim Trick actively supported the faculty and parents.

Over the next several years teachers and parents worked together on several fund raisers: we reinstated a parish festival, had book fairs to get new books for our library, sponsored PTA dances for the adults, and opened the Little Dough Bakery, the brainchild of Jinny Berten, where we sold bake goods and Byebe pottery after Sunday Masses and three days a week. We also received several foundation grants. With money for paint and materials volunteers transformed the dingy interior of the school with colorful classrooms and hall murals. Fifteen trained tutors staffed a program to help some of the students with diagnosed learning disabilities so they could be mainstreamed into the regular classroom. This program was so successful that white children from Western Hills and Hyde Park enrolled in the school. We had guest speakers like Marguerite de Angeli, Pulitzer Prize winner for children’s literature, visited with the children. Jeffrey Hewitt, son of Don Hewitt producer of “60 Minutes,” lived in Walnut Hills at that time, and he volunteered to help students start a school newspaper and taught videography to the junior high. School enrollment grew from a low of 104 in 1970 to 188 by 1977. Test scores went up, and by 1977 we had a student body of 75% Black, 25 % white and 41 % Catholic to 59% non-Catholic. All non-Catholic students were expected to take religion classes and attend school Masses just like the Catholic children.

As so many African-Americans know only too well, hard work and achievement do not necessarily lead to rewards. Racism is always there to rear its ugly head. By 1975, I had been principal of de Sales for several years. Principals of urban Catholic Schools were constantly being challenged by the archdiocese to increase enrollment for cost efficiency. At de Sales we took this challenge very seriously and implemented a PR program to increase enrollment. In 1975, I heard that Holy Cross School in Mt. Adams would be closing at the end of the 1976 school year. Holy Cross enrollment was under 100 students — mostly white with two black families. I wrote a let-

ter to the principal, with the encouragement of our PTA, inviting them to consider de Sales school for their children.

We invited students to spend time in our school and to have families come for informational tours. A consolidation with Holy Cross would have helped our growing enrollment, and would have made de Sales the most racially integrated Catholic school not only in the archdiocese but probably in the country at that time. We knew we had a good school with a wonderful welcoming family spirit. Such a merger, we thought, was a win-win situation for all.

Many months passed and we never received a response to our invitation. I just thought that Holy Cross must have found a way to remain open. Then in February of 1976, we got a call from the superintendent, Father Jerome Schaffer, saying that Holy Cross was in talks with St. Mary's in Hyde Park regarding consolidation. I told him that we had invited Holy Cross to enter into a dialogue over a year ago and never heard anything more. Furthermore, to bus White kids past de Sales in neighboring Walnut Hills to Hyde Park could be perceived as a segregative act. It was during this very time that public schools were being denied federal funds for purposeful segregation of schools.

Letters began to fly between the pastors of the three parishes, and in March of 1976 de Sales was invited to make a presentation in three days at Holy Cross as the decision was going to be made that night. Parents and staff from de Sales did make a comprehensive presentation on all that our school had to offer, but when we came home and talked about the experience everyone present felt that the decision had already been made. Bringing de Sales in to talk was only a formality. The next morning we got the call saying Holy Cross chose St. Mary's. Although we were disappointed, the entire lay and religious leadership felt that it was Holy Cross' loss. We had no intention or desire to force ourselves on people who didn't want us.

However, there were forces outside of the de Sales family — the NAACP and the Cincinnati Public Schools who saw the merger as segregation for racial purposes. The Social Action Commission of the archdiocese also wrote a letter of concern to Archbishop Bernardin. State funds for auxiliary services were withheld from St. Mary's until Federal District Court Judge Timothy S. Hogan ruled in favor of St. Mary's in a trial held in 1979.

The core argument of three years of legal hassling was that the decision of Holy Cross parents to enroll their children at St. Mary's was a decision based on religious conviction not on the racial composition of the schools. They argued that the parents were exercising their First Amendment rights of free exercise of religion.

Of course, in order to this, they had to provide testify at the trial indicating that St. Francis de Sales religion program was significantly different, not as traditionally Catholic, from the programs at St. Mary's and Holy Cross. Then in the news media, both newspapers and TV, innuendos were put out that de Sales was really a public school and only Catholic with a small "c" because we had so many non-Catholics. Even trial testimony from some Archdiocesan school officials supported this notion. They made a big deal out of the fact that the Memorare was said every day at Holy Cross and not by the student body at de Sales.

A narrow legal victory may have been won, but there was no moral victory for the archdiocese. In the process St. Francis de Sales reputation was unjustly smeared. The facts were that we followed to the letter the religion curriculum of the Archdiocese and the time allotted for religion classes. We used an approved religion textbook series although not the same one used at Holy Cross. We also celebrated class Masses and school liturgies more frequently than did St. Mary's.

Furthermore, it never came out in open testimony, only in the judges' chambers, that religion classes were not a big concern or topic during the one and only two-hour meeting de Sales leadership had with Holy Cross. What also never came out at trial was the fact that we approached Holy Cross one year before the consolidation was made, and that they never responded to us until the archdiocesan superintendent got involved. Nor was it made public that there were efforts by parents involved to get the de Sales school building condemned or that a key person at the school office early on used the word racism to a Dayton principal in describing what was going on in Cincinnati over the merger.

In the aftermath of all of this, what I learned from my African-American brothers and sisters was "that God does make a way"! Archbishop Bernardin came to de Sales after all of this was over and had a Mass of reconciliation and apologized for the hurt we had endured. There was no bitterness toward him, as we knew that some of those under him were the ones that made the short-sighted decisions. Of course, he acknowledged that the ultimate responsibility was his. He heard our concerns that the church needed to witness to quality education in the African-American community. It was after this that CISE really got going and an Office of African American Catholics gained importance.

The enrollment at de Sales school went up over two hundred! In addition the bond between de Sales parents, staff and students only grew stronger. For posterity, I want to just call out the key families that led during those difficult times: Girton, Hinton, Pharris, Berten, Trice, Mitchell, Basket, Davis, Lang, Walker, Barkley, Howard. *(I also need to add that since 1985 when the Marianists took over the pastoral leadership of St. Francis de Sales Parish much has been done to reach out to the African American community and bridge what was once a divide between a Black school and a White parish. My time at de Sales predates their ministry.)*

Many religious sisters and priests walked away from their vocations during the 1960's and 70's. One of the greatest blessings in my life and a major reason I stayed in religious life was that I learned from the people I have been privileged to serve that you, "keep on keeping on" even when the road is rough and long.

St. Agnes Parish in Bond Hill was another great love of my life. How lucky can one be to have more than one great love? I have been blessed!

In 1992, after spending the decade of the 80s in various administrative positions for my community, the Ursulines of Cincinnati, I was hired as pastoral associate of St. Agnes. I thought I died and went to heaven. Here was a parish that was racially mixed and celebrated the gift that African-American culture is to the Catholic Church. This did not just happen by accident or wishful thinking. It was the result of both pastoral and lay committed leadership.

When I arrived on the scene Father Giles Pater was well into his second six-year term as pastor. Giles was a genuine pastor who respected and fostered the gifts of all his parishioners both black and white. He was also a gifted liturgist who saw to it that St. Agnes had good music directors sensitive to cultural needs and differences. Quality in liturgical music was always the bottom line. Father Pater was also a good friend and patron of Father Clarence Rivers, so you know the bar for the celebration of the Liturgy was held very high. Every year Clarence was invited to celebrate with us on the "high holydays" of Christmas and Easter. However, at St. Agnes every Sunday was a little Easter, and the incorporation of gospel music and deeply inspiring spirituals from the African-American tradition brought new parishioners both black and white to our doors. Being a member of the choir was viewed as a very important ministry. Unlike many

parishes I have attended where there is a good choir and the congregation passively listens, the St. Agnes choir led a full-throated singing and praising congregation.

I arrived at St. Agnes just in time to help with the series of celebrations that ended a year of special events marking the parish's 100th anniversary. The parish had also just completed a capital fund campaign that resulted in over \$200,000 in renovations and refurbishments to church and school buildings.

All during my time at St. Agnes, I always felt a sense of pride that the well-maintained parish grounds and facilities witnessed something important to a declining neighborhood. *To me it said, "We who worship here want God to be praised in a beautiful place, we value each other and we value our neighbors. We are willing to make the sacrifices to do that."* St. Agnes did not have a missionary church mentality — *we don't deserve anything nice unless it is a hand-me-down or "Father" gives it to us.*

In the nine years I served there, never once were we unable to do the things deemed necessary for improving parish life - a new state of the art piano for church, a much needed second bathroom in the back of church, a renovated parish center for numerous church ministries, expansion of the St. Vincent DePaul pantry, African-American art for the church, special outreach to needy families at Christmas, new and expanding parish ministries. If the people knew what was needed and why it was needed they paid for it, and often provided the sweat equity to get it accomplished.

I know that many parishioners were sad when Father Giles was transferred and St. Agnes was not assigned a resident pastor. I became the resident pastoral administrator. There was for awhile this sense of feeling like a second class parish.

We had an interim canonical pastor, Father George Jacquemin for a short time, and then Father Tom DiFolco was appointed pastor. Tom was also director of the Priestly Formation Office for the archdiocese and pastor of St. Martin de Porres Parish. The day-to-day administration of St. Agnes was my responsibility. Tom was supportive and performed all his duties as pastor including celebrating Sunday Masses on a regular basis. We also had an excellent supply of priests who celebrated parish liturgies on Sundays and other occasions when Father DiFolco could not be present. Those priests included Steve Angi, George Wilson SJ, Martin Smith, and Rob Jack. During that time we also rejoiced in the ordination of Royce Winters, one of our own, as a permanent deacon. Little did we know that St. Agnes was in the forefront of a parish model that would become more common a decade later.

It didn't take long for most in the parish to appreciate some of the benefits of our parish model. The rotation of celebrants provided some variety in homilies and presentation styles. An even larger number of parishioners began to get involved in expanding ministry opportunities. There were parishioners trained in the Ministers of Service program and the Lay Pastoral Ministry program. There was a genuine sense of ownership for the life of the parish on the part of the "pew people." We had very competent candidates for parish council elections, and to serve on important committees like finance, worship, religious education, buildings and grounds and fund raising. I always said that my job was more one of facilitation — providing resources, support and advice and allowing the folks to do their thing. New parish groups sprang up as a result of this sense of personal initiative: Seniors Citizens, The Men's Group, and a Women's organization that inaugurated the annual Fashion and Art Show Luncheon. We struggled to provide meaningful youth activities despite the competition from outside school and sports program.

Because our parish population came from different parts of the city so too did our youth attend diverse schools.

When I first came to St. Agnes, I often heard very heartfelt stories about the importance that Christ Renews His Parish and Ebony & Ivory played in easing the transition from a primarily White parish to a predominately African-American parish. It was a delight to hear shared stories from African Americans who “got to break the color barrier” at St. Agnes and those white parishioners who reached out to welcome them. These were the trailblazers who made St. Agnes a model integrated parish, a truly Catholic parish.

Perhaps that is the reason why every year prior to Black History Month, we would get calls from various white parishes inviting our choir or speakers to come out to a parish so they could have a “black experience.” In earlier days, Ebony & Ivory provided this ministry, and later we did participate in some exchanges. However, eventually we realized the futility of these efforts. There was no commitment on the part of these parishes from Sunday to Sunday to make the effort to be more welcoming to African Americans. By this, I mean, there was a take it like it is or don’t come attitude. One pastor said his parish didn’t have to learn music appealing to blacks because there were none of “them” in his parish even though there was a growing black population in the neighborhood. There was no sense that African-American spirituals and gospel are part of our common Catholic heritage. African-American Catholics sing and appreciate music from Gregorian Chant to other contemporary Catholic music in addition to gospel and Spanish hymns! Who is more Catholic? It is not a matter of letting them come to our parish, but doing those things that say we value your membership.

St. Agnes parishioners participated faithfully in every archdiocesan planning program that came out of the central offices, especially For The Harvest and Ministry 2000. Even though we were a ministerially complete parish, with a physical plant in good repair, and the ability to pay our own way, the specter of closing always threatened. My sense was that the lay leadership and the people of St. Agnes were more than open to change, but they were not going to give up what was very good for something lesser. Because to lose the quality of parish life like a St. Agnes attained would be to eventually lose the gifts of African Americans to the Catholic Church. There is no going back to the struggling whatever you say, Father, mission churches of the 19th and 20th centuries.

That gift of blackness to the universal church is as old as the church herself and it is a heritage that enriches all of us. That is why I feel so blessed!

## **COMMISSION RAPS MERGER BERNARDIN SCHOOL STAND HIT**

*Cincinnati Enquirer* 1976

Cincinnati Archbishop Joseph L. Bernardin is accused by his Social Action Commission of saying he favors school integration and allowing something quite different. He risks being cloaked with the “robes of racism,” the commission warned him in a harsh two-page letter. His “decision compromises each of us who is a Catholic,” it added. Archbishop Bernardin is charged with promoting “further racial isolation” by allowing two predominantly white parishes to merge their schools while leap-frogging a predominantly black parish school between them. “The robes of racism have no place on the church leadership of our archdiocese,” the commission wrote him.

Current plans consider Holy Cross School, Mt. Adams, and St. Mary School, Hyde Park, merged when school opens this fall. Between them is St. Francis de Sales School, Walnut Hills. The Mount Adams students, most of them White, would have to be bused through St. Francis de Sales Parish, which is mostly black, to Hyde Park and St. Mary School, the commission charges. Holy Cross was closed for lack of students in June.

This is “immoral” Commission Chairman Thomas F. Waldron charged in the letter. Waldron warned the churchman his national reputation is threatened by the school situation. Moreover, such blatant racial division could cost parochial schools federal funds for busing students, Waldron added.

Archbishop Bernardin has said repeatedly his parochial schools would not be “havens” for White students fleeing Cincinnati school desegregation. Archbishop Bernardin, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, could not be reached for comment Sunday. He was attending the ordination of Auxiliary Bishop George Fulcher in the Columbus [Ohio] Diocese.

The commission letter scorned the idea that the Holy Cross-St. Mary merger is “less immoral” because future union with St. Francis is being studied. The existing merger still “promotes further racial isolation in the schools...” Waldron said most of the 30 member commission all appointed by Archbishop Bernardin, supported writing the letter last Thursday. No one voted against it. Friday, the archbishop met with Waldron and four other commission members. “The archbishop expressed concern about the letter, and said the consolidation was still under review,” Waldron, a lawyer, said Sunday.

The transfer of 54 Holy Cross students to St. Mary School 2845 Erie Avenue was announced May 25 by the Rev. Jerome Schaeper, superintendent of schools for the Archdiocese of Cincinnati. Last year, St. Mary reported 391 students. Holy Cross students’ records have been transferred to St. Mary and, as of July 1, the State of Ohio has recognized and accepted the consolidation, St. Mary Principal Ronald Aylward, a layman, told the *Enquirer* Sunday. With the merger, St. Mary would have 424 students in grades one through eight this fall, Aylward said. He refused to say what would happen if the consolidation fell through. St. Francis de Sales had about 155 pupils last year, said an associate pastor, Monsignor Lawrence C. Walter. He referred all questions to the pastor, the Rev. Bernard H. Bruening, who he said was out of town. “We were very happy the archbishop took the time to meet with us right away,” Waldron said. “Our position is pretty clearly understood by the archbishop.”



## SAINT FRANCIS LEADER SOUGHT SCHOOL MERGER

*Cincinnati Post* – July 19, 1979

The principal of St. Francis de Sales Catholic Elementary School testified in federal court today that she attempted to bring about a consolidation between her largely black Walnut Hills School and nearly all-White Holy Cross Elementary in Mount Adams. The consolidation never came about, however, and 52 Holy Cross students, all but two of the white, ended up at nearly all-white St. Mary School in Hyde Park, even though St. Francis was closer to their homes. Sister Mary Jerome Buchert, principal of St. Francis in 1976, said she wrote a letter suggesting consolidation with Holy Cross, almost as soon as she heard the Mt. Adams School would be closed due to declining enrollment and financial problems.

While differences between religious programs at the two schools have been offered as the main reason Holy Cross children transferred to St. Mary, Sister Buchert said this morning, religion “wasn’t a larger portion at all” of the discussion she had at a March meeting on consolidation with Holy Cross parents. But her outline of the St. Francis religion program did show differences from that at Holy Cross, she testified.

Catholic school officials had discussed with her earlier the possibility that St. Francis would have to consolidate with another, with predominantly Black St. Mark suggested as a good possibility, she said. But she resisted that suggestion because she didn’t want to merge two predominantly black schools, Sister Buchert testified. Noting that desegregation plans were going into effect all over the country in the early 70s, she said, “We felt it was going to hit parochial schools, too, and if we created an all-Black school, down the line we would be made to undo that.”

Despite her efforts, and the efforts of St. Francis de Sales parish priest Father Bernard Bruening, the merger of Holy Cross with St. Mary was approved by Catholic school officials in 1976. Part of that plan included the proposal that St. Francis eventually would be merged with the new St. Mary at a later date. That approval was later withdrawn in favor of allowing Holy Cross parents the freedom to choose any school they wanted for their children.

A witness Wednesday said that decision was a carefully orchestrated effort to disengage the Catholic diocese of Cincinnati from the consolidation issue, with its strong racial overtones. But the officials knew all the time “those students would wind up at St. Mary’s anyway,” said Waldron, who was leader of the Archdiocesan Social Action Commission in 1976. It was the commission which accused Catholic school officials of racism to consolidate Holy Cross with St. Mary’s rather than with the closer and predominantly Black, St. Francis de Sales in Walnut Hills. Both St. Mary’s and Holy Cross were nearly all-white.

Publicity following that charge forced the officials to rescind their approval of the consolidation, allowing Holy Cross parents to choose their own school. Of 55 students at the Mt. Adams school, which was closed because of financial problems, all but three went to St. Mary School. At issue in the trial, which began Monday, is whether or not the Cincinnati School Board acted legally when, as a result of the transfer, it stopped passing on state money to St. Mary. Board attorneys feared that continuing to pass along the state money would be considered supportive of segregation by the NAACP, which is suing the school board over racial imbalances in the local schools.

## **SCHOOL ACTION VIOLATED CHURCH ETHICS, LAWYER SAYS**

*Cincinnati Enquirer* – July 19, 1979

In allowing Holy Cross school children to transfer to all-white St. Mary's, the Catholic school system violated the church's position on racial justice, an attorney argued in Cincinnati federal court Wednesday. Al Gerhardstein, a lawyer assisting Robert Laufman as "friend of the court," suggested that the decision to let Holy Cross parents send their children wherever they wished had the same effect as a merger of the two schools.

All but three of the 55 pupils who transferred from Holy Cross when the Mt. Adams school closed in 1976 wound up at St. Mary's in Hyde Park. They bypassed St. Francis de Sales, a closer school in Walnut Hills with a 70% black enrollment. Gerhardstein sought to make those points during the third day of a trial before U.S. District Judge Timothy S. Hogan. The judge has been asked to determine whether the Cincinnati Board of Education acted illegally in cutting off all state funds to St. Mary's.

The school board took the action rather than give the plaintiffs in the metropolitan Cincinnati School desegregation any possible chance of claiming the Cincinnati School District had aided a segregative act. Attorneys for St. Mary's pupils are seeking a ruling by Hogan that would release to the school about \$200,000 in state funds being held in escrow pending resolution of the case.

Auxiliary Bishop Daniel Pilarczyk, head of the Cincinnati Archdiocesan School System, testified that Holy Cross parents were encouraged by the archdiocese to send their children to the Catholic school nearest their homes. But he said Catholic school authorities made no attempt to keep them from transferring to St. Mary's after the archdiocesan school board scrapped a proposed consolidation of Holy Cross and St. Mary's on July 23, 1976. The bishop also emphasized that the proposed consolidation, branded as having racist overtones by the archdiocese's Social Action Commission, would have gone into effect only if it included the future prospect of merging with St. Francis de Sales.

Bishop Pilarczyk said the two-page consolidation plan was rescinded after he was informed that the St. Francis de Sales Parish "refused to go forward" with it. On July 23, 1976, the Archdiocesan School Board issued a statement saying: "To allow the partial consolidation [of Holy Cross and St. Mary's] to stand would be contrary to the church's position on racial justice and could raise serious legal problems."

Several Holy Cross parents testified Tuesday that they transferred their children to St. Mary's because it offered the same conservative, traditional approach to education as Holy Cross. They said the less doctrinally oriented Catholic education program at St. Francis de Sales did not appeal to them and denied any racial motivation in their decisions.

The Rev. Bernard Bruening, pastor of St. Francis de Sales, testified that he and other St. Francis representatives tried to induce Holy Cross to merge with their school. He said he hoped to improve the St. Francis de Sales racial balance, its disproportionate enrollment of more than 50% non-Catholics, and its financial circumstances by adding the students from Holy Cross.

While insisting that the Catholic education program was not "watered down" at St. Francis de Sales, he conceded under questioning by attorney David Young that it had a different emphasis

than Holy Cross. Unlike Holy Cross and St. Mary's which provided Mass at least once a week for every class, St. Francis de Sales did not schedule Masses on a regular basis for its students Father Bruening said. Since then, it has instituted a policy of at least one Mass every two weeks for its students, he added.

Attorneys indicated that the trial might be completed today.

**SAINT URSULA CONVENT**

**1339 East McMillan Street**

**Cincinnati, Ohio 45206**

July 27, 1979

Most Rev. Joseph Bernardin  
29 E. Eighth Street  
Cincinnati, Ohio 45202

Dear Archbishop Bernardin

Recent newspaper and television accounts of the trial involving auxiliary services aid for St. Mary's students have raised doubts in some minds about the authentic Catholicity of the religious education program at St. Francis de Sales School. We, the Executive Council of the Sisters of St. Ursula, have been and continue to be confident that the religion program there, as in our other schools, complies with church directives and is consistent with authentic church teaching, beliefs, and renewed liturgical and devotional practices.

We want to assure you of the loyalty of our Sisters and of the teachers at St. Francis de Sales and all our other schools to you and to the authority of the church. We will continue to follow the directives and guidelines of the Archdiocesan Office of Religious Education in establishing religious curricula and in choosing textbooks.

We value your continued support of our apostolic endeavors.

Sincerely yours,

Signed: Sr. Ruth Ann Hartmann, Superior  
Sr. Elizabeth Lang, Councilor  
St. Mary Jerome Buchert, Councilor  
Sr. Mary Helen Sanker, Councilor  
Sr. Judith Winberg, Councilor

cc: Most Rev. Daniel E. Pilarczyk  
Rev. Jerome A. Schaeper  
Rev. Bernard H. Bruening

**Archdiocese of Cincinnati**  
**Office of Archbishop**

July 30, 1979

Sister Ruth Ann Hartmann, Superior  
And Council Members  
1339 East McMillan Street  
Cincinnati, Ohio 45206

Dear Sisters:

Thank you for your letter of July 27 concerning the doubts raised in some minds about the Catholicity of St. Francis de Sales School.

You may be confident that no such doubts ever existed in my mind, or in the minds of Bishop Pilarczyk or Father Schaeper. The fact that a school has a program which is different from the program of other schools is not *ipso facto* and indication of a lack of Catholicity, and anyone who thinks it is simply does not know what he is talking about.

Please be assured of my continued support to all of you in the fine work you are doing for the archdiocese; and, in particular, of my continued trust in the excellent job being carried on at St. Francis de Sales.

With cordial best wishes, I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Signed: Joseph L. Bernardin  
Most Rev. Joseph L. Bernardin  
Archbishop of Cincinnati

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cc: Most Rev. Daniel E. Pilarczyk  
Rev. Jerome A. Schaeper  
Rev. Bernard H. Bruening

## **AN EDUCATOR'S PERSPECTIVE: A BLACK CATHOLIC IN CINCINNATI** ***Pride In My Heritage***

By Mr. Cliff E. Pope, M.Ed.

As a 38-year old black Catholic professional, I have long been intrigued, if not consumed, with the study of black Catholic history. Maybe that interest stems from my history degree from Wittenberg University; maybe it comes from simply growing up in a black Catholic family; or maybe it's just a result of my life-long quest to always know who I am.

Growing up in the Evanston-Walnut Hills area of Cincinnati as a Catholic was unique because most black families from that neighborhood were not Catholic; and therefore, entrenched within a minority population of Cincinnati, I was part of a minority "within" a minority.

It was roughly 15 years ago, when I came across an article in a 1993 issue of *U.S. Catholic* magazine entitled "In the Beginning There Were Black Catholics." The article was written by Father Cyprian Davis, and it was the first piece of literature I had ever come across that focused solely on the history of black Catholics. The article fascinated me, and propelled me to research and network with as many other professionals, scholars, organizations, and institutions connected to black Catholicism as I could find.

That research and networking led me to Xavier University of Louisiana, a Catholic University that also happened to be a historically black college. At Xavier, I contacted Sister Jamie Phelps, the director of the Institute for Black Catholic Studies. She was instrumental in directing me to resources that led to a wealth of historical facts and statistics surrounding black Catholics. I learned that the largest concentrations of black Catholics in the U.S. were found in some of the largest metropolitan cities: Washington, D.C.; Chicago; Atlanta and New Orleans. I also learned that there are more than 200,000,000 Catholics of African descent worldwide. She also directed me to the National Black Catholic Congress website that has been pivotal to my research.

On a more local level, there is a rich history of the Catholic Church and the black community of Cincinnati. One of the true gems of that history was old Martin de Porres High School, which was located in the West End neighborhood of Cincinnati. De Porres was one of the most successful Catholic high schools in Cincinnati during the 1940s and 1950s; and during a time of segregation it had an all-black student population. My oldest uncle attended de Porres before it closed in the spring of 1964.

It is impossible to talk about the local church and not discuss the impact of Father Clarence Rivers and what he meant not only to this city, but to the black Catholic community and to Catholicism as a whole. He attended Cincinnati Catholic schools in the 1930s and ended up becoming the first African-American priest ordained in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati in 1956. His groundbreaking work in the realm of liturgical music still resonates throughout the world to this day.

Each year during the month of November, Black Catholic History Month, I take time to focus on how my faith and culture are intertwined. There is a realm of history available to our already rich heritage that simply, for the most part, has gone untapped and relatively unnoticed by the laity of our church. That history is filled with names like Augustus Tolton, Eugene Marion,

Mother Elizabeth Lange and Josephine Bhakita; all of whom were monumental in the growth of Catholicism among the black community. There is also value in examining some of the official papal documents that are particularly relative to Catholics of African descent; documents that include *In Plurimism* (1888), *Catholicae Ecclesiae* (1890), *Brothers and Sisters to Us* (1979), and *Ecclesia in Africa* (1995).

My Catholic faith fills me with a sense of mission that has ultimately determined how I live my life. It is a sense of mission that involves living my life in a manner that matters in the lives of others; which is partially how I have lived the past 15 years of my life as a Catholic educator in the inner-city of Cincinnati. I have committed myself to the Catholic Church's presence in the inner-city, because that is where most of our schools have closed, where most of our Catholics have evacuated and where, unfortunately, many Catholics have forgotten the vital need for the Gospel to remain in Cincinnati's inner-city streets; probably now, more so, than ever before.

In my adulthood, I have learned to listen *for* God, and then to listen *to* God; and I feel this is what God wants me to do with my life. I will live my life to improve the lives of others, and that is where I will subsequently demonstrate that I am a black Catholic from Cincinnati, and very proud of it.

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## A PIECE OF IVORY IN A FIELD OF EBONY

By Rev. George Wilson, S.J.

Although I have been asked to write about my experience ministering in the black community, my story actually begins with the community ministering to me for some years before I began to minister among them.

You see, although I am a priest, my ministry as a church consultant for years took me away from Cincinnati on many weekends. The result was that even when I was “home” on Sundays it was too irregular for me to take a regular assignment as a presider at liturgy. So when I was in the city, I worshiped from the pew like all the rest of those I call “the merely baptized.”

Being a Jesuit, I naturally tended to attend Mass at Bellarmine Chapel. But then after the Beverly Hills Supper Club fire, I felt the need for another style of worship so, for the first time, I decided to see what my local parish, St. Agnes in Bond Hill, was like. I fell in love. For several years I continued to attend in my accustomed way, seated in the pews. Most, if not all of the people had no idea that I was a priest. Free of that distraction, they accepted me for myself.

A few years passed and the community, under the leadership of Father Giles Pater, initiated a kind of evangelizing event, telling the story of the parish as a story of Good News. It was entitled “Ebony and Ivory,” and one component of each session took the form of two witness talks by parishioners. I was asked to give one, along with Michaelle Jones. In the course of the practices for the event, I interacted with others for the first time as individuals and not just fellow-parishioners: John Burns, Curry Burnam, Royce Winters and Arnold Lewis. For a few years I got to know others as I contributed my whiskey tenor to the rich sounds of our choir.

How did they minister to me? First, by offering me acceptance. As a white man with no significant experience of relating to black folk, I was not really sure of myself. I know enough about racism to know that it resides at a very deep level in all of us, white or black. I was concerned that I might unintentionally offend a black sister or brother by something I said or did (and the odds are that I probably have). And as a result of their long experience of exclusion and oppression at the hands of white people, the natural tendency is for them to be wary of us. (Truth to tell — and their acceptance frees me to be honest — that wariness before someone who has no history of oppressing them is the form that the racism in them takes.) If I have to reach out in spite of an unconscious and frightening image in me of trigger-happy young black studs, they have to put aside the image of slave masters of old and real white bosses and salesclerks who insult them every day. Thanks to God’s grace they and I gradually let our respective uneasiness dissipate as we discovered both the richness of our differences and the deeper wealth of our common humanity.

A second way they ministered to me is by freeing me. In case you hadn’t noticed, even the most open of us white folk are still quite buttoned-down. Especially when it comes to our relationship to the Lord. Worshiping among these African-Americans put me in touch with levels of pain and joy we white people don’t ordinarily let ourselves experience, much less express. And I hasten to note that their spontaneity should not be confused with the over-the-top emotionality — hallelujahs and ‘Amen, Jesus!’ — ignorant whites often use as a stereotypical putdown of black religion. (To be honest again, black people sometimes are just jiving when they whoop it up before the Lord; they know when it’s just good human fun going on. And what’s so wrong about



being joyful children in our Father’s house?). I’m really talking about something deeper: bodily expression that flows from real pain and deep wells of joy that come from a lived sense of God’s love — no-matter. I have been freed to shed tears in the midst of people whose grandparents were slaves yet who know in their bones that the Lord still holds the waters apart so they can reach a promised land. And yes, I do clap my hands. In public, no less. Sometimes it’s as if we are singing “Were you there when they crucified my Lord?” and “Glory, glory, hallelujah” at the same time.

And finally they have ministered to me by letting me “inside the family,” as it were. Last year the parish leadership determined that the St. Agnes mission statement, written many years back, no longer fit our present reality. They challenged our members to formulate a new one. In the sometimes heated discussions I saw black members really take each other on (to use a buttoned-down term!). Some almost threatened to leave the parish if the statement didn’t say flat-out that we are an African-American community. Others said just as pointedly that such a designation is not the way they see themselves. I learned something I should have known, something we all need to learn over and over. There is no single “black position,” even on the continually evolving issues of race and identity. Which makes black individuals just like everyone else who is squeezed into some ill-fitting abstraction. Stereotypes do none of us any good.

And as they minister to me, how do I minister among them? By trying to be a better piece of ivory and not kidding myself that I can ever know fully what it means to be ebony.

## **SISTER TERESITA WEIND, SNDDEN** **PROVINCIAL OF THE SISTERS OF NOTRE DAME DE NAMUR**

Before my father died, he was the first to purchase a home in an Italian neighborhood, in Columbus Ohio, in 1941. Our home faced the playground, Convent and school of St. Dominic. The Church and Rectory faced 20th Street, which was the corner of our block: Devoise and 20th Streets. I began education at age five, in St. Dominic Grammar School.

My formation through Catholic ritual, celebration, education and worship gradually climaxed in my transfer from Shiloh Baptist Church to St. Dominic Catholic Church at age 12. By the time I graduated from St. Dominic's Grammar School, the neighbor had changed from Italian to Negro.

Two years later the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth were replaced by the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament. The SBS hired me to prepare their evening meal. Naturally, this brought me a little closer to "inside-convent-life."

Following graduation from St. Joseph Academy in Columbus, I entered the Sisters of Mary of the Presentation in Spring Valley, Illinois. This Congregation had two Negro women: the Dietician at St. Margaret Hospital, and the Principal at a Catholic School in Canada. These two women and all the Sisters were welcoming and encouraging as I continued formation toward full incorporation into the Congregation.

After first Vows, I was assigned to St. Andrew School of Nursing, Bottineau, North Dakota. There was only one negative experience through all of Nursing School. One family refused to admit me to their home during my Public Health rotation. At the time I was wearing a Black Habit for Public Health calls. The Caucasian family referred to me as a Black Witch. The Sisters and Nursing Staff were quick to affirm me and filed a complaint against the family for the treatment I had received.

While wearing the Habit, I received preferential treatment because of my affiliation with the Religious Congregations. After we changed from religious garb to secular dress, the deferential, preferential acceptance was no longer the norm. I have often had to discover ways to "prove my worth" in the face of suspicion, doubt and mistrust. Even though I am not pleased with the way any of us minority people are treated, I am grateful for every opportunity to experience and share the same reception/rejection colored people endure in society today.

A set of clothes is neither protection, shield, nor set of entry into favoritism. Character, inner conviction, truth and self-esteem are the pillars of authentic relationships. Some-times the rejection prompts the inner searching that strengthens true character.

Living as an authentic and conscious African-American, Catholic, Religious Woman in communion and solidarity with other human beings is both call and mission. I am deeply grateful for every year of Catholic Education: Kindergarten through Masters in Theology.

I treasure the gift of living with committed religious women in the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur. I am challenged every day by these women to be faithful to a way of life that continually witnesses to justice and peace.

## **LOCAL SISTER ELECTED LEADER OF WORLDWIDE SISTERS OF NOTRE DAME**

Catholic Telegraph Article – August 22, 2008

During a recent general chapter gathering of Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur from around the world, Sister Teresita Weind was elected the congregation's 19th leader. She will lead the 204-year-old international religious community, whose mission is carried out today by more than 1,650 Sisters in 34 states and in the United Kingdom, Belgium, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Congo-Kinshasa, South Africa, Nicaragua, Peru and Brazil. "I'm looking forward to getting to know the Sisters in all of our Notre Dame ministries," Sister Teresita said. "This is an opportunity to get to know what we're really doing to proclaim the goodness of God internationally."

The election is preceded by the development of a list of characteristics that the congregation feels is needed by a leader at this point in time, she explained. "When the list came out and my name surfaced, it became clearer and clearer that I was being chosen because of the gifts God has given me to call people in a gentle but firm way, be respectful of other cultures and attentive to personal concerns." Sister Teresita will assume her new responsibilities in December after serving for the past three years on the leadership team of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur Ohio Province, which is headquartered in Cincinnati. For the past year she has served as the congregation's provincial leader.

Sister Teresita is a graduate of St. Joseph Academy in Columbus. She holds a bachelor's degree in nursing from the University of Mary in Bismarck, North Dakota and a master's degree in theology from Mundelein College in Chicago. She entered the Sisters of Mary of the Presentation, worked as a registered nurse, and then transferred to the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur in 1973. Before service on the Ohio Province leadership team, she was director of the spirituality center at Mount Notre Dame in Reading. Her previous ministry includes serving as pastoral associate at Sts. Simon and Jude Parish and director of The Neighborhood House, both in Saginaw, Michigan. Sister Teresita also served as pastoral minister at Saint Catherine of Siena – Saint Lucy Parish in Oak Park, Illinois and director of liturgical formation for African American parishes for the Archdiocese of Chicago.

Four sisters of Notre Dame de Namur were elected during the general chapter meeting to serve on the international congregational leadership team with Sister Teresita. All will serve for the next six years. They are: Sisters Maria Delaney and Jeanne MacDonald, members of the Boston Province of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur; Sister Nancy O'Shea of the California Province; and Sister Liliane Sweko from the Zimbabwe-South Africa unit. During this most recent gathering delegates from five continents met in California. In addition to electing the new congregational leadership team, the delegates pledged to raise \$2 million a year over the next six years to fund the Sisters' ministries in Africa, Latin and South America.

Sister Teresita said every newly elected leadership team is given an agenda with specific items to address and implement. At the top of her team's list, she noted, is unity. "The chapter gave us a strong call to stress and enrich the unity of the congregation."

We're called to be one." While saddened to see her leave Cincinnati, the members of the Ohio Province are "moving forward together with a unified heart, recognizing the call of the congregation," she said. "Our Sisters are very happy and supportive."

She believes her biggest challenge will be learning a new language. "I'm a typical American who speaks one language," Sister Teresita admitted. "I need to learn some conversational Italian and will be going to language school in January. It's wonderful to look at someone and smile but even better to be able to understand each other." Sister Teresita will leave for Rome in November. Prior to her departure the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur will hold an open house, scheduled for November 17th, from 4 – 8 p.m. at Mount Notre Dame.

## FAITHFUL, AFRICAN AMERICAN AND CATHOLIC

Ms. Victoria Parks - Interviewer

I have spent this autumn season sitting in living rooms, at kitchen tables, on church pews, and in the offices of some of the most spirit-filled, long-suffering and determined Christians that I've had the privilege to encounter in my lifetime. These African-American Catholic Christian soldiers allowed me to enter their homes and their hearts. Their faith stories are rich, dripping with the knowledge of Christ the King. And regardless of what society said about their dark skin, they knew then and they know now that their value comes from the One who made them.

Many of the stories brought to mind hurtful and unfair conditions but even so, these black Catholics persevered and continue to run the good race. My hope is that this project will allow readers to see and feel the strength of these women and men of faith; and to be enlightened and inspired as I have.

I am grateful to the Archdiocese of Cincinnati's Office of African-American Ministries and the director, Rev. Mr. Royce Winters, for trusting me to unearth such precious jewels. These men and women are mature Christians and without this project, I suspect that their Catholic faith journey would have gone untold and the jewels would have remained buried.

Each individual has their own faith story but if you look closely they stories intertwine. Most of their paths run through the West End of Cincinnati. I have come to learn about the wonderful service of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament. They served in segregated parishes such as St. Edward and St. Ann and instilled in African-American Catholic children during the Jim Crow era that the social condition was wrong. "You are as good as anybody else." "You are smart," the Sisters would tell the children.

I am in awe of how many of these men and women talked to me about "The Beatitudes" and how the sisters planted the beauty of the promises of God into their hearts.

### **The Beatitudes**

*Matthew 5: 3-12*

*3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 4 Blessed are the meek, for they shall possess the earth. 5 Blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted. 6 Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for justice, for they shall be satisfied. 7 Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. 8 Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God. 9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God. 10 Blessed are they who suffer persecution for justice' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 Blessed are you, when men reproach you, and persecute you, and, speaking falsely, say all manner of evil against you, for my sake. 12 Rejoice and exult, because your reward is great in heaven; for so did they persecute the prophets who were before you.*



It is good news, and it is news that the grandchildren of slaves needed to hear! As children, these black Catholics applied the Beatitudes to their lives, and it made a difference!

Yes! Times were challenging. The Great Depression and World War II challenged every American citizen, but the black folk were victims of the ugliness of racism, segregation, poor education, substandard housing, and non-existing health care.

These are dreadful facts, but it is also a fact that not one of the people that I interviewed harbors hate or remorse. They are more than survivors. They are conquerors who rely on their faith in God.

**Ms. Barbara Reid** who was sent to Girls Town in Cincinnati after her mother's death shocked me when she said, "If I had to come up again, I would do it the same way." **Mrs. Irene Bryant**, who grew up at Bessie Allen Orphanage in Louisville, said the same thing.

**Mrs. Ethel Dillingham**, a parishioner at St. Benedict the Moor in Dayton was sent from home to attend the school founded by Sister Mary Lange and The Oblate Sisters of Providence, Cardinal Gibbons Institute in Baltimore, Md.

**Mrs. Elouise Walker** could not attend a Catholic High School in Key West, Fla., because there was not a Catholic School for "colored" children.

**Mr. Myron Kilgore** went to Martin de Porres High School, the only black Catholic all-boys' school in Cincinnati, and he was the first African American athlete to graduate from Xavier University [Cincinnati, Ohio].

**Mrs. Sallie Pearl Coaston** worked at the Pentagon in the 1940s and **Mrs. Joyce Coleman** was one of four young Black ladies to integrate the Mercy School of Nursing in the 1950's.

These are only a few excerpts of their stories. Each of their stories is as compelling as the next. Does hope spring eternal? You bet it does! As **Rev. Mr. Raphael Simmons'** grandmother put it, "Child, the sun don't shine on one dog's behind all of the time!"

The photographs are the work of Mr. Tony Tribble, an independent contractor who works with the archdiocesan publication, *The Catholic Telegraph*. I am so happy that he was selected to work with me on this project. His probing and sensitive eye has captured the undying spirit of these Christian soldiers. Thank you, Tony!