

Synodality Listening Session 4 Comments

March 26, 2022

Carmelite Sisters of Baltimore

1. What are your dreams for a Church that welcomes and includes Black Catholics in all areas of Church life (worshipping congregations, leadership positions, ordained ministry/religious life, teachers and experts in theology)?

My dream is that (White) People in positions of power take into account that people from different socioeconomic backgrounds can't participate in ministries or different church opportunities because of their work schedules. In other words, my dream is that we become more aware of people's needs and desires and that we meet them where they are at.

My dream is that the church becomes a loving, inspirational, interdenominational, interracial community that is bound by contemplative prayer and worship. We need more dialogue and less monologues. We need a more relational church so that Black Catholics feel welcomed.

My dream is that Church should celebrate multiculturalism; incorporate Black culture in worship-- embrace it-- don't outright reject what we don't know about. Parishes that have separate ministries for Hispanics and Anglos, where never the twain shall meet-- how does this create unity in worship? In the Body of Christ? This is something we can work toward now-- embracing other cultures (native American also mentioned) fully in community and in worship. What can we learn about others? How might this make our community more alive?

I dream of a Church:

Where all are welcomed – recognized for both uniqueness and the richness of their cultures, their stories.

Willing to be educated and converted – transformed – by the experience of other persons and cultures. Where people are seen for themselves and not through stereotypes.

Where the culture of synodality (such as we are experiencing now) does not end with the synod, but becomes the way in which the Church enters a new era of communion and conversion.

Dreams of an inclusive church.

A Church that values the gift of all, is diverse, where we can praise God together.

2. How can the People of God ensure that this is a reality? What needs to change/be transformed within you, within society, within the Church?

Sharing project between parishes in Chicago-- all nationalities and ethnicities represented in liturgical celebration-- joyful, free, alive, not bound by time constraints. Current liturgical structure and schedules in parishes don't normally accommodate these sorts of celebrations. Maybe we need to be more flexible, less constrained.

The church needs to encourage people to share and participate in different interest groups in order to attract different people.

We need to become aware that people go to church in their neighborhoods and that neighborhoods are segregated. What can we do to eliminate segregation in our neighborhoods and in our churches?

How do we make this a reality? *Just start.*

The church needs to create a welcoming space for African Americans.

The church needs sustained listening.

Change must begin within each of us first.

Invite more young people into the church

Educating ourselves about the different cultures and the history of racism in our church and country.

We need to make Catholic Schools more accessible to Black students so that there is more representation of Blacks in our churches.

We need to have homilies be said by Black Catholics.

We need Black Catholics to serve as representatives and leaders and encourage others to join the leadership groups.

Need to hear from more Black priests at my parish, have them preside regularly. Hear from more Black voices.

We must include African Americans in every aspect of the hierarchy of our church.

Expand personal horizons: read Black theologians, read Black history, open minds and hearts to different ways of thinking, relating, being.

Be aware of our privilege and behavior that may be discriminatory or may be keeping someone else down.

Pray for conversion and transformation of racist attitudes within ourselves and within our church. That our church helps us achieve this and that we help the church.

We need to share stories and be given opportunities to share our truths.

We need to wake up to our own biases.

We need to wake up to our own participation and contribution to systemic racism.

We need to be open enough to our own racism and to recognize that we are beloved sinners who can ask for redemption and forgiveness.

We need to become aware of our own and the churches' unconscious racism.

White people need to be aware of our own privilege and biases. Go to predominantly Black churches rather than expecting them to come to us.

Major themes: Listening and learning from "the other"— "Who is the other in your life?" Relationships are key (take "the other" to lunch—TED talk); Re-education—relearning history from what we were taught as children; taking time to reflect and discern; coming to terms with the reality of the past.

It is difficult to admit to my racism and privilege. Purposefully have chosen to go to a black parish; unsure about how to become involved. Been advised by some not to volunteer for leadership; by others, to be myself if I am called to leadership.

Reflection is crucial; without it, things will never change.

What is "lost" by our not listening, or only listening to the loudest voices (or only to people who think like us)?

African-American Catholics are often not invited to the table of church leadership.

Education, reading are key—do your homework; learn about “the other” (Book recommendation: *The Miseducation of the Negro*)

“I need to come to terms with myself as a sinner who has benefited from racism.”

“We need to re-learn history.” “It’s not so much what you ‘eat,’ as what your grandmother ‘ate.’”

“We have to be willing to do the hard work that is confronting our own racism and participating in systemic racism.”

“We need to come to grips with that with which we wrestle—as individuals, as church, as a nation.”

Be humble, be of service, listen to others of different races rather than having them come to us and assimilate to our way.

We need to be comfortable with black Catholic Leaders. Are we, really?

Hold up and remember African American Catholics:

Value of portrait of Mother Lange

Musician Clarence Rivers (and others) in 1990s made liturgies so much more exciting. African Americans pour out their hearts in liturgy.

Don’t be afraid to cross boundaries. Exciting time.

Make it local: listen, hear, see, start it.

Hard for whites to imagine a time when they will not be in charge. Need to examine this fear and work to eliminate it.

Having grown up in an atmosphere of white supremacy, we probably all need to become more aware of biases—many of which are unconscious. One of the best ways to do this is to choose opportunities where we can meet people we consider different from ourselves.

Our experience is that parishes don’t deal with the issues such as the murder of George Floyd and racism. This choice prevents the church from healing racism in the church. Homilies need to speak to our experiences and provide help with such difficult questions. They must be relevant to the lives of Black people.

An insight from a psychological perspective: We are wired to categorize. This accounts for our implicit bias. One way to overcome this bias is to have more and more experiences with those we consider other (race, color, religion, gender, political orientation, etc.). This will give our unconscious minds a larger library of images and make it easier for us to react favorably to the other more of the time.

The Church community should take concrete steps to provide such experiences for parishioners with events such as: choir exchange, inviting a parish from another part of the city to share a meal, being aware of the art and music that adorns our church walls, etc. Always being careful that the strengths of each group are honored.

The liturgies during the Triduum provide a perfect time for the church to reflect the cultural diversity within a parish. This could be healing

Food is important in every culture and sharing a meal across cultures could help to break down barriers. And the connection with Eucharist could be made clear.

The bottom line is that all should feel at home, be seen, and listened to, appreciated for personal gifts and contributions.

Slowing down to listen carefully and with full attention to the other, especially when we don't find a natural connection to the person or his/her views.

Of course, this is not only the responsibility of the pastor. The entire community, but particularly those who exercise leadership positions in the parish (liturgical committees, social committees, PTAs, etc.) can all provide opportunities for growth. But leaders need to have the vision and must be open to suggestions from others.

Listen to one another.

Importance of relationships/personal encounter: Take someone else to lunch.

Lutheran Church (DC?) is offering a 12 week diversity training: Being historically educated; *do the hard work*.

As an African American it has been our history not to be at the table. Importance of being named and we want to tell our own story. Provide space for this at Church.

Welcome exchange (listening) with different cultures within our church.

Look at why is the church so White?

Observation: White people don't really know about Black culture - this needs to be rectified.

We should accept people for who they are.

Emphasis- the church needs to create a welcoming, safe place for African Americans. One member of the group who spoke about going to a Black church and feeling very welcomed by the congregation wondered if the same would be true if a Black person came to an all White church.

Question: how do we unknowingly contribute to distance and lack of welcome between Black's and Whites? One member of the group said she was curious about her unknowing - curiosity needs to be cultivated - helps us to enter in to another culture. Example: one member of the group shared about encountering "Hip Hop For Change Inc." on a street corner in California. She was initially skeptical about it because of the type of music they represented but she found herself changed by the encounter. Another member of the group spoke about being curious about Black churches in the U.S. and discovered that the African Methodist Episcopal Church was formed in Philadelphia in 1787 because of racism in the Methodist church.

One member of the group shared that a local Black church asked a local all White Presbyterian Church for permission to use its sanctuary for a special worship service because they needed a larger space. A member of the Presbyterian Church noted upon hearing the music performed by the Black congregation- "Our church hasn't rocked like that in a long time!"

One member of the group spoke about business models that employ people from across spectrums of color, cultures and genders which allow all to assist each other to aid in the success of the whole - to raise each other up and in so doing, raise the entire effort.

Our discussion about needed changes in the church reminded a member of the group of the function of the trim tab. A trim tab is a small attachment on the rudder of a large ship. The big rudder guides the ship and changes its direction, but moving that rudder is a big task that requires a lot of energy. Moving the trim tab requires much less energy and it creates a force that moves the main rudder, which in turn, moves the large ship. While we may not be able to do big things all at once, if we do small things we can influence big changes. We are all called to be trim tabs.

Being open, Listening, Relationship, Curiosity, Gifts are meant to be shared, Welcoming the stranger, Open minds

Review the history of sins of commission and omission regarding not inviting young black people into Catholic religious congregations.

Change takes time. Time for building relationships when white and black Catholics don't know each other. Not sure if the past immigrant model of separate Masses for different groups is a helpful way to do it, e.g. Hispanic Spanish language Masses will help people get to know each other.

Begin with personal change. "It begins with me."

It is important to listen to each other's stories, personal and collective.

Learn from each other's cultures, e.g. appreciation of reading scripture aloud within a black culture that has a tradition of orality.

Being willing to challenge our comfort zone by participating in different religious cultures present within Catholicism.

Educate ourselves, be open to new experiences, mention Racism in the Prayer of the Faithful, branch out with music ministry, talk to the Parish Council.

How deal with the integration in worship? No real good answers from this group...

Visibility! Noticing! Why do we not see "them?" Who is not here? If you don't see...

We only make space for some people. Need to consciously make space for Black people.

We all have a capacity for bias. Need to examine it. Be honest about it.

The conversation focused on the power of personal stories, developing relationships, incorporating culturally meaningful art, music, symbols as a way of shaping a welcoming Church for all cultures, especially for Black persons as well as for other cultures.

To have for one year all churches use only the hymnal *Lead Me Guide Me* used in black culture and black Christian Communities. Learn to move with the music.

To have each of us accept as brothers and sisters people of all races as equals. In how we worship God. Go deeper into ourselves and show love.

For the Church to persevere. To urge everyone to learn, educate yourselves, take action like Georgetown University and the various religious orders. Acknowledge the past and the sins of the past.

To give up power in the hierarchical order and the privileges of the clerical system

To give up power and "Live as if this life IS the Kingdom.

We need to ask what black culture has to teach us, what it can provoke in us. Recognize the gifts that can benefit all.

We don't know how to welcome, listen learn. We need to accept and understand the power of white privilege, acknowledge it. We need to work at knowing and understanding more. Led by our clerics and leaders

Some books were mentioned: Resurrection Hope, Kelly Brown Douglas,; History of Black Catholics in America; Unusual Faithfulness; Birth of a Movement; Caste. Be more diverse in our reading. Have a book group.

Need to stop being arrogant so as to ignore or not even know this history.

To change our hearts, give up notion of economic power and superiority and thinking that, based on that “, others not as good as us”.

We need to redone that we are addicted to white supremacy, see it in ourselves. Start the change by acknowledging it. We need to be taught and informed.

3. Other Related discussions.

Need more education on race, learn about one another, open hearts and minds.

How is it that we have not come further?

Woman lives on an island off RI, USA: lots of diversity of people, worship.

Gender and ethnic equality carry the same weight as to importance

Conversation went to current refugee situation in Europe; Poles welcoming Ukrainians to their country... Ukrainians look like relatives and are made welcome. People of mixed races refused (editorial comment: is this true? Not sure.) Contrasting welcomes based on skin color. We tend to be more welcoming to those who look like us.

Example of Cory Booker and Ketanji Brown Jackson in the Senate hearing the other day—“That was church!—Can you imagine that we learned about church from the Senate!”

As nation, we discriminate and reject please for asylum from people of color (e.g., Dominican Republic). Manifestation of our unconscious white privilege. We must be more aware of what’s hidden deep inside us. We identify with cultures that are more like us-- tribal issues in Eritrea and Ethiopia don’t make sense to us. War between Russia and Ukraine does. Is this because the political situations are different or is it because because skin colors are different?

White Americans criticize other countries, but are uncomfortable with our own sin. We are blind to the log in our own eye while ready to point out the splinter in others.

Black Catholics in non-black parishes see themselves losing their cultural identities as parishes become more multi-cultural.

“It is still seen that African American Catholics are not capable of growing the community or taking ownership.”

Some of what we see is based on geography and economics—”my suburban parish is made up of wealthy people of all races and cultures, but most blacks are African—not African American.” Redlining in Baltimore and “white flight” caused parishes to be segregated by race and economic level.

One member compared the ethnic shame of the Holocaust due to her country of origin; different, but similar in some ways. “Lots of emotional work to be done for sins of the past.”

“Kingdom of God” versus “Kingdom of Israel” We are more concerned with ethnic “purity” in nations than with the Kingdom of God open to everyone. “How can some of those in the Senate who claim to be Christian believe in the same Jesus I do?”

How to be a white person in a black parish.

“What does it mean to be church?”

“Grew up in Connecticut; not many blacks; my mother and grandmother would say racist things, but I don’t think I ever had racist feelings—I didn’t understand it.”

Why do we accept European migrants more easily than Central American migrants?

Billions to Ukraine but not billions to border, to our cities where African Americans are?

Supreme Court Hearings: racist questioning by Christians, Catholics.

Two kinds of blacks: African Americans and e.g. Nigerians. Makes a difference in Church community.

What kind of system have we created?

Slaves were not taught to read because reading is power, knowledge.

Black Catholics and liturgy: How deal with all the diversity and cultures in our country? Some have experience of Spanish liturgy or the preponderance of Spanish-speakers. How integrate more black Catholics and/or their culture in worship?

One woman had the experience of the diocese bringing African priests into the diocese because they needed priests. Women become more overlooked. The Africans are not as open to women in the church (for functions) so women become more repressed.

Life of the church moves slowly. How can things begin to happen more quickly?

It is lots easier to be worried about the people “out there” in the third world. Doesn’t threaten personal world order.

Pope Francis is trying to pry open our feelings but many cardinals and priest openly despise him for doing so. Non European he is “not one of us”.

One person in the group was from New Zealand. That person shared about how there is work being done in that country to reconcile with the Maori People regarding the return of land that was taken from them by White people.

It was noted that we all belong to the Heart of the Father - we are all children of God regardless if color or gender - we all come from the womb of God.

St. Matthew’s, Baltimore, as a model inclusive, intercultural parish for welcoming people from different cultures, countries, languages. Focus on trying to listen to each other.

Will people be able to trust the church when there is a high level of mistrust of church administrators regarding the cover up of past sexual abuse of children and adults by clergy out of concern about church fundraising?

For one person, racism changed from being an abstract social issue to becoming a personal one after the death of George Floyd.

The two Black participants noted that it is OK to acknowledge the contributions of western European culture without equating that with the Church. They also mentioned the importance of the Latinx and Asian cultures being recognized and appreciated.

Power and status are hard to surrender, especially if those holding it feel they are defined by it, are fearful of losing their identity.

4. Synodality in General or Today's experience

Thank you for inviting us to dream and learn more about what can be done so that Black Catholics are welcomed and represented at all levels.

The synodality process needs to become a methodology for the way we do church. We need to be a listening church. Black Catholics will feel welcome if we are a listening church and they feel heard.

“Appreciate the comment that the church moves slowly! Good reminder.”(although shouldn't we be leaders if we are followers of Christ?)

Picked up from the presentation: “Beware of hierarchies that exploit.” It will be a huge turnaround for many in the Church hierarchy to see themselves as part of the Church, but not as “the” Church – for our Church to look like the logo being led by children, youth, disabled people, ordinary people with the bishops and clergy in the middle.

Parables in context of the synod: What is lost? Whose voices are we willing to hear? Voices get drowned out by those who speak the loudest.

It was noted that there were no African Americans in our breakout group.

Comment - delightful to see two younger people involved in the discussion with M. Shawn Copeland.

We need to/should revisit the topics brought up in the discussion between Copeland, Robinson and Wratee.

An idea was floated that M. Shawn Copeland could be invited to speak at various churches to talk about the issue of African Americans in the church.

Referring to the Gospel passage of the prodigal son/father, it was noted that relationships are an important part of how we as Christians see each other, treat each other.

It was noted that in their sharing, Copeland, Robinson and Wratee said the church is called to be a counter-cultural institution/community. What part of the present culture are we called to counter? If there is something wrong going on in our culture we need to work to change it.