



THE NATIONAL BLACK CATHOLIC CLERGY CAUCUS

(NBCCC)

Holy Angeles Church

740 W. 28th

Indianapolis, IN 46208

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

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Priest Groups Lead as Catholic Church Addresses Racism

The Association for US Catholic Priests (AUSCP), the largest free association of priests in the United States, and the National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus (NBCCC), one of the oldest Vatican II priests' organizations, gathered last week in Atlanta, Georgia, for a summit on race. Over 170 priests, deacons and bishops convened at the Airport Marriott Hotel from June 19-22 to model the pastoral bridge building that will come from leadership in society and especially the church and to discuss healing the racial wounds of the nation and the church under the theme "Peacemaking in Our Fractured Society." The four days were filled with prayer, keynotes, dialogue, worship, pilgrimages, and colloquia. Fr. Kenneth Taylor NBCCC said, "It is a new day for priests who are committed to racial healing and want to have church leaders find their voice for supporting justice. We are truly better together."

The AUSCP already has 1200 members after only six years of existence. It partnered with the 150-member Black Catholic Clergy organization, which will celebrate its 50th anniversary in 2018. The two groups have a history of collaborating for racial healing. They have published two statements on race relations and the Catholic Church. In 2014 they wrote an open letter on the Ferguson shooting and protest. In the following year they wrote a letter on the occasion of the papal visit requesting that Pope Francis speak out on racism in the cities that he visited. Fr. Bob Bonnot, Chair of the AUSCP Leadership Team stated, "Part of the peacemaking theme of the assembly is to deepen and extend the working relationship between our priest groups as partners in ministry advocating for healing racial wounds in our church and society."

Fr. Bryan Massingale, former president of the Catholic Theological Society of America and author of *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church*, addressed the assembly on Monday night, June 19. His talk, titled "To Redeem the Soul of America: Martin Luther King's Vision and its Challenge to American Catholics," opened the assembly, which was focused on peacemaking. The presentation featured slides of the major American cities, with their black and beige centers surrounded by vanilla suburbs. The slides were effective in telling the story of racism and segregation in a graphical way.

On Tuesday, June 20, the first morning prayer celebration focused on the Book of Lamentations and expressions of regret for the role priests and bishops played in the construction and support of the white supremacy culture in the western hemisphere. This morning prayer consisted of song, scripture, and graphical PowerPoint slides that told the story of priests and bishops in the institutionalization of racism. This story originated in the Spanish conquest of the Caribbean and Latin America and extended to the construction of Anglo white supremacy culture in the American colonial Catholic experience, beginning with the primal diocese of Baltimore, Maryland. The lamentations chronicled the role of baptismal registrations of racial castes and the exclusion of nonwhite Catholics from seminaries and convents over the last 500 years.

A day of reflection and celebration took the group into the city of Atlanta, Georgia, to walk in the steps of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Next April in 2018 will mark the 50th anniversary of the assassination of this great American minister and prophet. The Black Catholic Clergy will celebrate its 50th anniversary next year as it took Dr. King's death as its mandate to fight racism and ushered in the nation's Black Catholic movement.

The attendees visited the King Center, where the body of Dr. King is buried next to Ebenezer Baptist Church and his birthplace. A mass was celebrated at the historic Black Catholic Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, which was built by St. Katharine Drexel over one hundred years ago. The church is across the street from the King Center. Archbishop Wilton Gregory, the head of the Catholic Church of Atlanta, presided, and the homily was preached by the president of the National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus, Fr. Kenneth Taylor of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis, Indiana. The church's dynamic liturgical expression of gospel music and liturgical dance and the Afrocentric environment inspired the enthusiastic worship of the clergy who filled the church.

The day culminated in an award banquet at which Fr. Bryan Massingale received the coveted Pope John XXIII Award. Fr. Massingale has become the celebrated leading expert on racism in the Catholic Church throughout the world. Here at home he is the consultant to the US Bishop's Conference, the American theological community, and many national Catholic non-profits of every type.

On the last day, different colloquia of interest to the priests were held. The colloquium on racism was presented by the National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus (NBCCC) and was the most attended. It was led by Fr. Clarence Williams, CPPS, the author of *Racial Sobriety: Becoming the Change You Want to See*. It is the official program on racism of the National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus (NBCCC). The racial sobriety approach is also endorsed by the National Catholic Social Work Association. Williams presented the goal of the approach as "helping people to free themselves from living and behaving 'under the influence' of racial dysfunction." He continued, saying, "There are seminaries and formation programs today that require the completion in training in Racial Sobriety to become ordained." The program is being used in the corporate and government worlds as well as in faith communities. There are also publications in Spanish and Portuguese. Fr. Williams has been honored as far away as Brazil and Spain for his ministry in healing the wounds of racism.

The AUSCP and NBCCC have plans for deeper collaboration in the future. These proposals will be taken up at the Black Catholic Clergy conference in Orlando, Florida, from July 9-12.

The photos are being transmitted in separate emails under the subjects: Priests Groups Lead Photo Package 1; and ...Photo Package 2.

For further information contact:

Fr. Clarence Williams, CPPS, Ph.D.	frclarenc@live.com	614-313-9300 (cell)
Paul Leingang, Photographer	prleingang@gmail.com	
Fr. Bernard "Bob" Bonnot, AUSCP	auscpbonnot@gmail.com	330-397-1257
Fr. Kenneth Taylor, NBCCC	fatherkt@mailhaven.com	317-432-2128
Fr. Bryan Massingale	bmassingale@fordham.edu	