

RECONCILED

On Reconciliation and Greater

Collaboration Between

THROUGH

Hispanic American Catholics

and African American Catholics

CHRIST



Committee on Cultural Diversity in the Church

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

ES ENGLISH EDITION ES

RECONCILED THROUGH CHRIST

On Reconciliation and Greater Collaboration Between Hispanic American Catholics and African American Catholics

He is the head of the body, the church.
He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead,
that in all things he himself might be preeminent.
For in him all the fullness was pleased to dwell,
and through him to reconcile all things for him,
making peace by the blood of his cross
[through him], whether those on earth or those in heaven.
(Col 1:18-20)

The NCCB Committee on African American Catholics and the NCCB Committee on Hispanic Affairs have been in dialogue for several years about the positive relationship—and the tensions—that often exist between both communities. In their dialogue, the committees have discussed their common cultural roots; their common histories; their leaders, heroes, and heroines; their challenges and dreams; and the need to work for the common good in the Church and in society. The committees worked on developing *Reconciled Through Christ* with the intent of making the Church more aware of and sensitive to the need for collaboration and reconciliation. The document, prepared by both committees, is particularly directed at the pastoral leadership that works with the African American Catholic and the Hispanic Catholic who together share many similar challenges. In September 1996, the Administrative Committee of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops approved the bilingual publication of *Reconciled Through Christ*, which is authorized for publication by the undersigned.

Monsignor Dennis M. Schnurr
General Secretary
NCCB/USCC

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Foreward to the 2013 Edition

When we published this joint statement in 1997, the African American and Hispanic bishops of the United States acknowledged our common ground. We pondered distinct gifts, challenges and opportunities that Hispanic and African American Catholics offer the Church and broader society on our own initiative through the grace of God, and more importantly, as collaborators animating the mission of Jesus Christ.

In the years since its publication, the heart and substance of our message remain valid. While some progress toward the goal of cooperation has been realized, sadly we continue to observe unacceptable instances of separation and isolation in our ministry as exercised in Catholic parishes, dioceses and organizations. As pastors, we are cognizant of current circumstances dictating that we reiterate our message and amplify its urgency. We must daily remember that Our Lord gave us a ministry of reconciliation for which the Holy Spirit will guide and sustain our efforts.

“So whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come. And all this is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and given us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.” (2 Cor 5:17-18)

This online re-issuance of our statement, *Reconciled Through Christ* omits previous demographic data and photographs – elements that otherwise might outdate our observations and conclusions on this matter of collaboration. Furthermore, we recognize that this call for greater collaboration is not limited to African American and Hispanic Catholics, yet may serve as a valuable resource to other diverse communities and the larger community, as well.

Recently, Hispanic and African American bishops have utilized national meetings to enter into public discourse on this subject. We are committed to promoting continued reflection, discussion and partnerships in our communities. Therefore, we urge you to create opportunities for productive dialog, team building, joint projects and mutually beneficial resources in order to promote Catholic education and adult faith formation, leadership development, increase in vocations and all dimensions of Church life in both communities.

This reflection will look to our communities' pasts, presents, and futures. It will be conscious of our long histories from the rooting of our Hispanic and African American Catholic communities more than five hundred years ago. For Hispanics this reflection focuses on the missionary work in the border states where the first language of ministry in the Church was Spanish. For African Americans this reflection focuses on the arrival of Black peoples from the island of Hispaniola (present day Haiti and Dominican Republic) at the end of the eighteenth century. (Appendix A provides a history of both Catholic communities.) Our people recognize our common challenges, reflect upon our need for mutual reconciliation, celebrate our past achievements, and commit ourselves to working together for our future in the Church and in the world. We do this with confidence because we share one faith.

Preface

The changing composition of neighborhoods and, by extension, parishes is creating new challenges for ministry and worship. Significant shifts in demographics and changing values are converging to create new communities—communities whose people are not from the same culture, do not know the histories and stories of each other, and oftentimes do not speak the same language. Balancing the needs and expectations of such diverse groups can be a difficult undertaking.

As members of the African American and Hispanic Affairs Committees, we write this statement to help pastoral leaders and church professionals gain a deeper understanding about two diverse groups who now find themselves in close proximity in their neighborhoods and in their parishes. We have heard from several forums of consultation, as well as firsthand in our role as pastors, that life in these new communities is sometimes difficult and increasingly competitive. Many people seek concrete examples of how to bring the African American and Hispanic Catholics into a closer relationship. Not all parishes experience these difficulties but enough do to be of concern.

Our committees believe this statement presents a modest attempt to respond to those concerns and to promote a sense of togetherness, a source of joy and inspiration, and a sense of responsibility for each other. It is our hope that we will build models of collaboration in faith and love as we look at the emerging cultural diversity throughout the world and as we prepare for the great Jubilee. It is also our hope that this effort will encourage a spirit of greater openness to and collaboration with the diversity of other ethnic and racial groups in our midst.

The NCCB Committees on Hispanic Affairs and African American Catholics were joined by our respective bishop consultants at several meetings concerning cooperation and communication between our communities of Catholics.

We felt it important to our mutual goals of evangelization to develop a document that would serve as a context to foster togetherness and encourage an atmosphere of cooperation and collaboration.

Most Rev. Roberto González, OFM, Chairman
U.S. Bishops' Committee on Hispanic Affairs

Most Rev. Curtis Guillory, SVD, Chairman
U.S. Bishops' Committee on African American Catholics

Introduction

We are like two ships sailing on a stormy sea. We are on parallel courses but our infrequent communication makes it difficult to help each other find our way. Our ships are of different sizes and different designs. The lightning blinds us to each other's radiant faces, and the thunder deafens us to each other's cries for help. When we do hear each other, the roar of the wind makes it impossible to understand what we are saying. But from each of our vessels we can see a bright light that seems both near at hand and far away.

Some would say that this is a fair description of Hispanic American and African American Catholics. The stormy sea is the evil of discrimination and racism that makes it so difficult for us to chart our similar but different courses. Our unique ships are our distinctive histories and cultures. The lightning is caused by the social, economic, cultural, and political forces that put us in competition with one another for education, employment, housing, and political influence. The thunder is caused by the frustration, mutual misunderstanding, tensions, and conflicts in our neighborhoods, made worse by cuts in federal and local assistance programs. The roaring wind is the media, which, eager to report human conflict, overstates our disputes. The bright light is Jesus Christ, leading us and guiding us.

We, the members of the NCCB Committees on Hispanic Affairs and African American Catholics, address these reflections to the pastoral leaders who serve the approximately twenty million Hispanic Catholics and the approximately three million African American Catholics in our country in the hope that our voices, joined with those of many others, will be clear above the roaring winds, urging us to become collaborators rather than competitors in order to enrich the human family and to strengthen the Christian community. The committees are anxious to make a genuine pastoral effort to bridge some of the gaps that exist between us and to encourage our people in joint efforts that give full expression to unity amid the diversity of the Church. The pastoral and sociological realities of our dioceses and the mandate of Jesus Christ, "Go, teach all nations," compel us to make this new form of pastoral collaboration an integral part of our mission of bringing the word of God to all. In this way, our communities will give witness to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council's Constitution on the Church.

In the building of Christ's body there is a flourishing variety of members and functions. There is only one Spirit who, according to His own richness and the needs of the ministries, distributes His different gifts for the welfare of the Church. . . . This same Spirit produces and urges love among the believers.¹

The Body of Christ will be strengthened whenever we come together as brothers and sisters. Let us pray for reconciliation as Jesus prayed on the night before he died,

*“Father! May they be in us, just as you are in me and I am in you.
May they be one, so that the world will believe that you sent me.”*

Jn 17:21-21

It is our hope that this newly released version will serve as a model and a source of encouragement toward greater collaboration and reconciliation within the Body of Christ. May your efforts and ours exceed human imagination – to the glory of God.

Most Rev. Shelton J. Fabre, Chairman,
Subcommittee on African American Affairs

Most Rev. Gerald Barnes, Chairman,
Subcommittee on Hispanic Affairs

I. Recognizing Our Common Challenges

There are approximately twenty-six million Hispanic Americans; 75 percent of them are Catholic.² There are thirty-three million African Americans³; approximately 10 percent of them are Catholic. Sociological studies of our communities often present us as unrelated populations in American society and in the Church. Much of this literature has focused on intergroup conflict rather than on cooperation, and these studies may reinforce our inadequate perceptions of each other. Only in recent years have efforts been made to explore the interaction between Hispanics and people of African descent.

One need not be a scholar to recognize the issues and experiences that have led to mistrust and division. These same realities underscore the urgency of cooperation. Many members of both communities are poor. As a result, African Americans and Hispanics compete for the same scarce resources, such as quality education, stable employment, secure neighborhood housing, and much-needed funding and grants. Both of our communities are sometimes perceived as politically indifferent and insufficiently aware of the force for change that we can be by participating in the political process. As a growing number of African Americans are elected and appointed to political positions, some Hispanics may perceive them as self-serving, seeking to help only “their own” and ignoring the needs of others. Some African American politicians may argue that Hispanics, because of their numbers, could have a more significant impact in their communities and beyond if they would develop a greater interest in politics and mobilize their people to vote. In addition, the different political histories and cultural experiences of our people lead to different positions when our communities discuss affirmative action or bilingual education. The multiple pressures in both communities have often resulted in open hostilities, violence, and riots, which have been a cause of concern for all.

1. Historical Roots

The Hispanic and African American communities share some historical roots. While we may not often think about it, Americans of Spanish and African origins have rich and revered histories that go back to the beginning of the sixteenth century on the continents of North and South America and back to antiquity in Spain and Africa. Spanish explorers and colonizers arrived here in the early 1500s. During those same

years, African men, women, and children were brutally enslaved in North, Central, and South America, as well as on the islands of the Caribbean. The Spaniards brought their long tradition of Catholic faith, which encountered the deep religious life of the native people. The Africans brought their traditional rich and indigenous religions.

2. Common Racial Backgrounds and Experience

Many of our people share the same racial backgrounds. One reason is because many people from Central and South America are of partial African descent because of the tragedy of the slave trade. The 1990 census indicates that a substantial number of Hispanic people identify themselves racially as Black. This ranges a great deal from diocese to diocese. For example, in Jackson, Miss., 27 percent of Hispanics identify themselves as Black, in New York, 15 percent, and in Lafayette, La., 12 percent. In other dioceses this is much lower: 2 percent in Houston and Los Angeles. Across the United States, 800,000 persons identify themselves as Hispanic and racially also as Black.

With the immigration of the last fifteen years, both the African American and the Hispanic communities have become culturally more diverse. Among Black people, there is an increasing number from Haiti, Panama, parts of Cape Verde, and Nigeria. In the Hispanic community, the number of people from the Dominican Republic and South American countries has increased as well. This diversity from within brings new complexities and challenges to our relationships, especially in the area of group acceptance and rejection.

While some of us share racial backgrounds, all of us share in varying degrees the evil of discrimination, racial prejudice, and oppression that endangers the very fabric of American society. In *Brothers and Sisters to Us*, the entire conference of bishops has spoken out strongly and repeatedly against the sin of racism.

Racism is an evil which endures in our society and in our Church. Despite apparent advances and even significant changes in the last two decades, the reality of racism remains. In large part it is only the external appearances which have changed.⁴

In the same letter the bishops continue,

How great is that sin of racism which weakens the Church's witness as the universal sign of unity among all peoples. How great the scandal given by racist Catholics who would make the Body of Christ, the Church, a sign of racial oppression! Yet all too often the Church in our country has been for many a "White Church," a racist institution.⁵

3. Sharing Neighborhoods

In spite of our differences, we have much in common. First of all, as bishops, we know from our pastoral experience that African Americans and Hispanics often live in overlapping neighborhoods in our dioceses and parishes. African American and Hispanic people live in all of our diocesan communities, and two-thirds of our dioceses have at least ten thousand residents of each group. Six of the largest metropolitan dioceses have large Hispanic and African American communities of more than half a million. In addition, the nineteen dioceses with more than half a million Hispanic or African American residents have substantial though smaller communities of the other group (see Appendix B).

The growth in the number of newcomers and the changing composition of immigration patterns from 1980 to the present has caused dramatic demographic changes in the United States. As a result, in many of our dioceses our two communities combined form a substantial part of our diocesan neighborhoods. In some urban centers they constitute the majority of the population.

4. Extended Families

Some of our households are blended or extended families, where two or three generations may be found in one home. The rapidly changing sexual, family, and cultural mores of American society have had their impact on Hispanic and African American families. In 1992, 52.9 percent of African American families and 31.8 percent of Hispanic families were headed by a single parent. Until the early 1970s, a majority (68 percent) of African American families were two-parent families, but by 1992, less than one half (47.1 percent) were married-couple families.⁶ Nevertheless, the sense of family as a nurturing center endures for many. Black Protestant churches have traditionally been a stabilizing and strengthening force for families, especially those with children. In some communities, Islam is making a similar contribution. For Hispanics, the extended family, often including grandparents and godparents, has traditionally been at the center of important activities, especially religious celebrations.

5. Limited Socioeconomic Resources

Many of us are poor. Since racial discrimination is systemic in our country, socioeconomic limitations are intrinsically connected to it. Large numbers of our African American and Hispanic households are caught up in the cruel cycle of inadequate education, unemployment, low incomes, and high poverty rates. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the 1992 median income of Black families was 57.6 percent and for Hispanic families 65 percent of the income of White families. In 1991, among White men who

worked full-time, median earnings were \$30,266. For Black men the comparable figure was \$22,075 and for Hispanic men, \$19,771. These statistics remind us that poverty rates are high in our communities. Among the non-Hispanic White population, one out of ten persons (9.6 percent) was poor in 1992. In contrast, African Americans were three times more likely to be poor (33.3 percent), and almost as many Hispanics (29.3 percent) were poor.⁷

Children constitute the largest age group of people living and dying in poverty. Of the children under eight living in poverty, 14.7 percent were African American, and 12 percent were Hispanic. Both groups of children experience a much higher poverty rate than White children, whether they live with one or both of their parents.

Poverty and poor education are often joined hand in hand. In spite of some improvements, the educational achievements of African American and Hispanic children are consistently lower than those of the general population. This may be due in part to faulty teaching and testing methods. In 1980, 66.5 percent of the national population completed high school. However, only 51.2 percent of African Americans and 44 percent of Hispanics did so. In 1990, high school graduation rates for African American students increased to 63.1 percent and Hispanic rates increased to 49.8 percent, but both figures remain well below that of the overall population. A more recent report for 1995 presents advances in education for the African American population. However, Hispanic educational levels remain the same. This still leaves half the Hispanic population and more than one-quarter of the African American population without a high school diploma, thus limiting economic advancement and perpetuating the cycle of poverty.

In 1980, 16.2 percent of the national population had completed college. By 1990, it was 20.3 percent. In the same time period, African American college graduation rates increased from only 8.4 percent to 11.4 percent. Hispanics progressed from 7.6 percent to 9.2 percent. The percentage of doctorates declined in both communities, and the number of African American or Hispanic doctors, lawyers, and scientists remains alarmingly low.

Though poverty, unemployment, and limited education can lead to anger and frustration, the majority of both communities have a strong commitment to sharing whatever they have with those who have even less. In African American and Hispanic communities there is a growing determination to foster self-help groups and to address inequities from within each community with or without government assistance. In spite of elements of controversy, the Million Man March added impetus to grassroots self-help groups in Black neighborhoods.

6. Common Spiritual Leaders

As Catholics, we are linked by the spirituality of Martin de Porres and Estevanico, two Christian men of African descent renowned for their charity and spiritual counsel.

Martin de Porres, canonized by Pope John XXIII, was a lay brother of the Dominican Order from Lima, Peru. Estevanico, an African from Spain, served with the first Spanish missionary expedition of Fray Marcos de Niza into territory now known as Arizona and New Mexico.⁸

Another inspirational figure is St. Rose of Lima, a seventeenth-century Peruvian, who was known for her physical beauty and humility. She practiced great mortification and penance and tried to imitate Jesus, living in solitude as a hermit. With her life of prayer, she embarked on the evangelization of the native Indians.

The long history of systematic oppression of African Americans from the time of slavery to the middle of this century is well known and well documented. While Hispanic Americans have not endured slavery, they too have been a conquered people and systematically excluded from mainstream American society because of prejudice, racism, and segregation. In our struggle to overcome the many injustices we have endured, we have been graced by men and women of deep faith and personal courage whose example of perseverance in the face of opposition compels us to meet the challenges of the present. In nineteenth-century New York, Pierre Toussaint, a Haitian-born former slave, was known for his piety and charity, and he is currently being proposed for canonization. This century also saw great contributions of the Blessed Sacrament Sisters and the Oblate Sisters of Providence to the education of African Americans. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Juanita Fernández Solar, known as Teresa de los Andes, continued the long tradition of the mystics of the Church. She died at the age of nineteen after only eleven months of religious life. What most distinguished her was her contemporary life filled in every way with Jesus; her faith inspired her to follow him in his prayer and agony, and in his passion.

7. Contemporary Moral Leaders

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and César Chávez are renowned among contemporary moral leaders. Like Mahatma Gandhi, they would not be intimidated as they became the voices of the voiceless, demanding just and equal treatment for all. Dr. King's biblical faith and Baptist spirituality sustained him as he became the leader of a nonviolent grassroots movement to end segregation, correct unjust working conditions, and defend the rights of those he eloquently and collectively called "the Negro." By boycotting stores, participating in sit-ins, marching in protest, walking rather than riding segregated buses, conducting voter registration drives, and preaching powerful conscience-stirring messages, Dr. King and the hundreds of thousands of people he and many others organized brought down the legal scaffolding that supported segregation and institutionalized racism. Dr. King's example continues to be a powerful inspiration for Black Americans working for justice in this country. Many African American Catholic communities display his picture prominently in their churches as a sign of his unique place in their history.

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César Chávez was a devout Catholic who did not simply believe the teachings of Jesus Christ; he was transformed by them. They guided his efforts to secure just treatment for migrant workers. He taught the social teachings of Pope Leo XIII to farmworkers at strike rallies. But he did not simply form unions. He established tight-knit community organizations. He gathered the Mexican Americans in Delano, Calif., formed the United Farm Workers, and led a strike against local table grape growers. The struggle for just contracts was long and drawn out. Rejecting violence at all times, he turned to a water-only diet, fasting and doing penance to draw national attention to the blatantly unjust wages and working and living conditions of the Hispanic migrant laborers in California. He was not only one of the great labor leaders of this century, he was also a heroic example of Catholic moral leadership.

One of our contemporaries, Sr. Thea Bowman, was an evangelist and educator who spread the good news to all people and tirelessly promoted pride in Black culture. Sr. Thea was a religious of the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration who eloquently and with great dignity spoke about, lived, and sang a life of deep commitment to the Church. This was seen clearly in her voiced concern about our Hispanic and African American neighborhoods and her many speaking engagements in various Hispanic parishes.

II. Seeking Reconciliation

The pastoral reflections of our priests, deacons, sisters, brothers, and lay leaders and our own regular contact with our people remind us that we need to work toward mutual reconciliation in many areas. African American and Hispanic people bring different interpretative points of view to the experience of race and language. Generally, Hispanics experience race as a continuum from those who are very fair-skinned to those who are very dark and all of the shades in between. Class distinctions are often based on complexion. Ethnicity and the particular Spanish-speaking country of origin also influence the perception of race. Because of their more European features, some of those who are most fair-skinned may not even be perceived as Hispanics by African American or White people. Though it may be less pronounced, African Americans also experience race as a continuum, from fair to dark. Class distinctions may be based on complexion and the greater or lesser degree of obviously African features. Many have argued that those with fairer skin are much more readily accepted by White society. Both groups are aware that prejudice exists not only against them and between them, but also within their own communities.

Each group has its deeply felt sensibilities about interracial marriage. They also have important sensitivities about what they are called or how they are named. While the majority of Americans of Spanish-speaking origins seem to accept the designation Hispanic, all do not welcome it, preferring instead to be called Mexican Americans, Cuban Americans, Puerto Ricans, and the like. Through a complex evolution from slavery to the present, Black people have experienced the emergence of African American consciousness, resulting in many names including Negroes, Colored people, People of Color, Black people, Afro-Americans, African Americans, Africans in America, Americans of African descent, and simply Americans.

In this context our communities should acknowledge that a growing number of Black and Hispanic leaders question the use of the terms “minorities” and “minority groups” as they are applied to our people. They are aware that much of the civil rights and social justice legislation of the past thirty years uses that terminology to speak about those for whom special efforts should be made to correct the injustices of the past. However, they are now asking whether these words are becoming subtly shaded in American consciousness. When the evening news speaks about the “problem of minorities” in the United States, of whom do most Americans think? “Minorities” has become a code word for poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, drugs, violence, and unwed parents. The impression can be given that those who are “the majority” do not have these problems, even though they do. These terms ignore the fact that people of European origins do not constitute

the majority of the world's population. There is a growing awareness that, just as we no longer refer to Lutherans, Anglicans, and Baptists as what they are not (non-Catholics) but as what they are (Christians of other traditions), we should refer to ethnic and racial groups as who they are (African Americans, Hispanic Americans) and not who they are not (minority groups, i.e., not the majority, not White).

Language is important for both the Hispanic and African American communities. There is a great need to support every opportunity for our Spanish-speaking people to become fluent in English. This is vital for their economic and political security. At the same time, the great patrimony of the Spanish language and the cultures associated with it must not be undermined. Thus, bilingual education is of great value. Hence, as bishops, we cannot support "English-only" regulations. Many educators feel that the standardized English used in most school tests may make it difficult to accurately monitor the educational progress of African American young people who may communicate in an adaptation of English; some consider this adaptation bad grammar, and others consider it a legitimate urban dialect or "Black English." Whatever side one takes in this debate, it is clear that a knowledge of standard English is vital for the economic and political security of future generations of African American people. Full and complete participation in our American educational system is important for both groups as they strive for the excellence in education that has long eluded them. It is not surprising that our Catholic schools play an important role in both communities.

Dr. King and César Chávez were prophetic pathfinders on the road to justice, freedom, and full citizenship. Both were inspired by a spiritual vision and were committed to a collaborative method in their work for change. African American and Hispanic Catholics must also be guided by a spiritual vision and a commitment to working together as our communities continue the work of renewing our society and our Church. Working together to address the pressing issues of our own time will increase our strength and improve our chances for success.

That Christians must continue to strive to remove the blight of prejudice and discrimination from our national character is unquestionable. Each day's news headlines confirm that those who would turn back the clock of social progress are making significant strides. As federal and local governments continue to cut back programs that provide educational, economic, housing, and health care resources for the poor, especially households with dependent children, neighborhoods with large African American and Hispanic populations will be among the first to suffer. If our communities raise their voices together on behalf of those most in need, we may have a better chance of being heard.

Many states are now seeking not only to limit immigration but also to impose restrictions on services for immigrants. Our communities must remind American citizens that this is a nation of immigrants. While respecting the need for reasonable immigration laws, as bishops, we must join our people in demanding that the laws be implemented fairly, so that, as a nation and as a Church, we may continue to offer a genuine welcome to strangers who come to our shores, especially those fleeing political and economic suffering.

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It is evident to all Americans that while laws that support overt racism and segregation have been overturned, the underlying attitudes that led to their establishment have not. Our people still face many forms of discrimination in everyday life. In recent years, small but aggressive militant and organized groups committed to “White supremacy,” such as “skinheads,” have become more public and outspoken in their proclamation of hatred for those different from themselves. This is particularly disturbing because many of them are young people. Meanwhile, our own young people may grow impatient, finding it difficult to work nonviolently for change. Hence, the education and formation of Hispanic and African American youth in understanding each other is crucial.

In *On the Coming of the Third Millennium (Tertio Millennio Adveniente)*, Pope John Paul II stresses the unique responsibility of the young for the future of the Church. His words could well be addressed to our Hispanic American and African American young people.

The future of the world and the church belongs to the *younger generation*, to those who, born in this century, will reach maturity in the next, the first century of the new millennium. *Christ expects great things from young people*, as he did from the young man who asked him: “What good deed must I do, to have eternal life?” (Mt 19:16). . . Young people, in every situation, in every region of the world, do not cease to put questions to Christ: *they meet him and they keep searching for him in order to question him further*. If they succeed in following the road which he points out to them, they will have the joy of making their own contribution to his presence in the next century and in the centuries to come, until the end of time: “Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever.” (no. 58)⁹

When people feel vulnerable or threatened, it is difficult for them to think of the needs of others. This helps us to understand why members of our communities might not seek each other out or strive to comfort one another in times of strife, such as neighborhood gang conflict. Parents and religious leaders may find themselves so caught up in concern about the well-being of those for whom they are immediately responsible that they may appear indifferent to, or even antagonistic towards, others involved. It is not easy to move from anger and suspicion to respect and tolerance, and from respect and tolerance to understanding and cooperation. This may be especially true when our communities are forced to compete with one another for limited educational, economic, and recreational resources in nearby communities. If one group appears to have the ear of “City Hall” and the other does not, competition and conflict will only increase. This can also be the case when Hispanic and African American Catholics become the equivalent of two distinct parishes in one parish facility. It is difficult for people in these circumstances to see beyond their own struggles for recognition and identity and to open their hearts and minds to appreciate the gifts and contributions that others are making to the community and to the Church.

III. Celebrating Our Progress

As bishops, we are grateful for a half a century of national efforts of ministry in our African American and Hispanic communities. There is much that gives us cause for rejoicing. Across the country, parishes resound with the exuberance of liturgies in Spanish and in English, which reflect the enrichment of Catholic worship with expressions from Hispanic and African American cultures and are distinguished by great warmth and family hospitality. These liturgies engage the heart, the mind, and the soul, celebrating with spirit-filled music, hand-clapping liveliness, and neighbor-embracing spontaneity.

At the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, the voice of our communities is present with twenty-three Hispanic bishops and thirteen African American bishops. Fifty years ago there were no bishops from either of our communities. Hopefully, these numbers will increase. National offices serving Hispanic and African American Catholics are promoting efforts to produce multicultural catechetical publications, including resources for the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. National efforts through three *encuentros* have focused efforts to highlight the Hispanic presence and provide direction to Hispanic ministry in the Church in the United States. The two contemporary national congresses of Black Catholics have renewed the African American Catholic community and made it more visible to the larger group of Black Christian Churches. These national efforts have the greatest impact when they are reinforced by grassroots efforts that require the support of all involved in pastoral ministry.

In many dioceses, especially those with large African American and Hispanic populations, offices for Hispanic and African American ministry have been established. More and more in diocesan-wide efforts such as synods, the consciousness of the presence of diverse groups is reflected in both preparation and results. Increasingly, diocesan offices with varied responsibilities direct the parishes and their people to be sensitive to and to incorporate cultural and racial diversity in their programs.

A significant contribution of African American and Hispanic communities to the larger Church has been in making the universality and the catholicity of the Church a reality in the United States. In his First Letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul reminds us that all of the Spirit's gifts to the diverse peoples of the Church are for the common good. "There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service but the same Lord; there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone" (1 Cor 12:4-6). In *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Pope Paul VI taught us that the reign of God, which the Gospel proclaims, takes concrete form in the lives of people who are profoundly shaped by their particular culture.¹⁰

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As bishops, we thank God for the many ways in which Hispanic and African American Catholics have contributed their gifts to the Church. Nevertheless, the needs of the Church and the signs of the times compel us to do even more. With our communities we can reach out to the Asian American and Native American Catholics who have experienced similar tensions. Our efforts will have greater impact if our communities collaborate.

IV. Working Together

We African American and Hispanic American Catholics have enriched the Catholic Church in the United States with our experience of the faith. Many of our people are blessed with a natural sense of wonder in the presence of the power, mystery, and love of God. The faith lives of our people have been enriched by popular devotions and family prayers, which have found their expression in many aspects of their daily lives.

These similarities in our spirituality should help us appreciate the efforts being made by our pastoral leaders—including us who are bishops, our liturgists, our theologians, our musicians, our artists, our poets, our architects, and our spiritual visionaries—to continue to develop and adapt the liturgy to the fullest extent possible for the authentic expression of our religious experiences. This must be done in communion with the larger Church and in fidelity to the teachings of the Second Vatican Council.

Our spirituality and our very diverse liturgical expression can be particularly challenging when our people worship in the same parish and compete for liturgical resources. Sometimes it seems that the more dominant group will push out the smaller group. Efforts to have joint celebrations on special occasions prove difficult because of great differences in language, music, and liturgical style. We must resist the temptation to show negative forms of religious and ethnic pride. There can be no suggestion that the particular liturgical expressions and practices of faith of one group are somehow more Catholic than those of the other. This is one of the many areas in which we need the gift of patience as we work together. We may grow weary, but we must not give up. All of us want to offer “plenty good room” and to announce from our hearts that “mi casa es tu casa.” As bishops, we should explore ways to improve our own communication and strengthen our bonds of cooperation.

In all of our efforts, the words of St. Paul can sustain us as we labor “with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love, striving to preserve the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace” (Eph 4:2-3). If we as bishops, Hispanics and African Americans, work together in this way, the Lord Jesus Christ will surely be our light, even on the stormy sea. And by his grace, each of us can bring his light to our world.

As the year 2000 and the third millennium of Christianity draw near, the voice of Christ is a clarion call summoning us to reconciliation and greater collaboration. Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ, the mother of the supreme reconciler, is our model and guide. We can build bridges but we can cross those bridges only with Christ’s call to love as he calls us to be truly Hispanic Catholics and truly African American Catholics:

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Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do. And over all these put on love, that is, the bond of perfection. And let the peace of Christ control your hearts, the peace into which you were also called in one body. And be thankful. (Col 3:12-15)

What Can Our Communities Do Together? A joint review of the Black and Hispanic pastoral plans is a good starting point.

The Pastoral Plans

Key Features of the National Black Catholic Pastoral Plan

This plan was a culmination of the National Black Catholic Congress held in Washington, D.C. on May 21-24, 1987. During the two years of planning for the congress, an extensive consultation process took place in U.S. dioceses. Each diocese held a day of reflection to discern issues relating to evangelization of African Americans on the local level. Diocesan goals and objectives were collected from the participants and forwarded to a central planning committee, where common elements were transformed into a cohesive national evangelization plan.

The National Black Catholic Pastoral Plan was adopted by the full body of bishops in 1989 as a commitment to the African American community and as a pledge of support to the zeal of Black Catholics.

The plan embraces three broad areas: (1) the Catholic identity of African American Catholics, (2) ministry and leadership within the African American Catholic community, and (3) the responsibility of this community to reach out to the broader society. These areas include such issues as culture, family, youth, spirituality, liturgy, ministry, lay leadership, parishes, education, social action, and community development. The pastoral plan serves as a blueprint for evangelization, whereby the African American community becomes an active participant in the Church's work of evangelization.

Key Features of the National Pastoral Plan for Hispanic Ministry

The Hispanic plan evolved as a strategic plan from three national *encuentros*. The National Pastoral Plan for Hispanic Ministry emphasizes the Church as missionary, communitarian, and participatory. It has four pastoral priorities: *pastoral de conjunto*, a collaborative and integrating process that demonstrates a shared ministry that is open and co-responsible for the common good of its members; evangelization that recognizes, develops, accompanies, and supports small church communities and church groups that promote experiences of faith and conversion; a missionary option that promotes faith

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and effective participation in the life and structures of the Church; and formation, which is done in the cultural context of the community being served and promotes the development of skills to build the kingdom of God.

Developed with the strong participation of lay leaders working with clergy, women religious, and bishops at the diocesan, regional, and national levels of the Church, the plan evolved over a two-year process. The plan

- Serves to train, evangelize, catechize, and empower lay leaders in the Church, giving ownership of the Church to its participants and promoting a co-responsibility for building the kingdom of God.
- Promotes solidarity among various communities by implementing a common vision to build God's kingdom and a common process to follow—see, judge, act, celebrate, and evaluate.
- Provides guidelines for pastoral leaders and church professionals seeking to respond to the pastoral needs of Hispanic Catholics.
- Respects inculturation—the relationship between faith and culture—in making the word of God known to the faithful.
- Encourages lay leaders to take responsibility for ministering to their own.
- Is adaptable to any Catholic community.
- Serves as a catalyst for the formation of new Hispanic Catholic organizations—e.g., Hispanic theologians, catechists, musicians, the National Catholic Council for Hispanic Ministry, and the National Catholic Association of Diocesan Directors for Hispanic Ministry.

Specific Recommendations

The following are some specific recommendations of ways in which our Catholic communities can move forward together. Many of these suggestions come from local diocesan and parish experiences.

Nationally

- Continue meetings of a representative group of Hispanic and African American bishops during the fall and spring NCCB meetings.
- Ensure the attendance of a bishop from the other group at any national meeting of one group.
- Consult with each other on any national event that will have a significant impact on one or both of our communities.
- Model joint efforts with Native American bishops and Asian American pastoral leaders.

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National and Diocesan Level

- Encourage Hispanic and Black bishops to jointly meet at least once a year.
- Jointly address issues of discrimination, especially when these issues exist in church ministries and structures.
- Foster dialogue between African American and Hispanic leaders and support cross-cultural training for everyone in ministry, e.g., at the Mexican American Cultural Center in San Antonio or the Institute for Black Catholics in New Orleans.
- Increase opportunities for African American and Hispanic Catholic leaders, resource persons, and staff members to come together to examine common concerns, e.g., sponsoring a joint voter registration campaign or examining conditions of incarcerated young persons.
- Sponsor days of dialogue to discuss race relations or other topics of mutual interest.
- Be visibly present together at times of community tension and racial conflict.
- Work together for support of vocations to the priesthood, the diaconate, and religious life, using *Future Full of Hope: A National Strategy for Vocations to the Priesthood and Religious Life in the Dioceses and Archdioceses of the United States* as a guide.
- Jointly examine staff patterns and representation in diocesan offices and consultative structures of the Church.
- Conduct joint seminars and workshops on mutual concerns for seminarians, e.g., on inner-city ministries.
- Sponsor joint workshops for youth leadership of both communities.

Parish Level

- Encourage informal gatherings of Hispanic and African American parish leaders to hear each other's stories and histories of joys as well as sorrows.
- Support the coming together of priests, deacons, religious, and lay leaders to talk about their faith in a noncompetitive, nonthreatening environment.
- Jointly examine religious and cultural ways in which marriage, raising children, and care for the elderly are appreciated by our people.
- Worship together at major liturgical events.
- Celebrate and appreciate each other's music and art.
- Come together to study the Gospel.
 - a) Choose a specific gospel sentence.
 - b) Discuss how it is lived in the challenge of everyday life.

Two programs developed to assist our collaboration are

- Building Bridges in Black and Brown, based in Detroit, Mich.
- Racism and Renewal of the Mind, Mexican American Cultural Center, San Antonio, Tex.

NOTES

1. "Constitution on the Church" in *Documents of Vatican II*, Walter M. Abbott, ed. (1989), p. 7.
2. Various figures have been given for the number and percentage of Hispanic Americans who are Catholic.

The General Social Survey	72%
Andrew Greeley	70%
Hispanics in New York	85%
3. U.S. Census Bureau, Department of Commerce, *The Hispanic Population in the United States: March 1994*, Current Population Reports, PPL-26 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1995); *The Black Population in the United States: March 1994*, Current Population Reports, P20-480 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1995).
4. National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Brothers and Sisters to Us* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1979), p. 1.
5. *Ibid*, p. 8.
6. U.S. Census Bureau, Department of Commerce, *Household and Family Characteristics: March 1992*, Current Population Reports, P20-467 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993); *Educational Attainment in the United States: March 1995*, Current Population Reports, P20-489 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1996).
7. U.S. Census Bureau, Department of Commerce, *Poverty in the United States: March 1992*, Current Population Reports, P60-186 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993).
8. Cyprian Davis, "Black Spirituality: A Catholic Perspective" in *One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism* (New York: Archdiocese of New York, 1988), pp. 46-47.
9. Pope John Paul II, *On the Coming of the Third Millennium (Tertio Millennio Adveniente)* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1994), no. 58.
10. Pope Paul VI, *Evangelization in the Modern World (Evangelii Nuntiandi)* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1976), no. 20.

APPENDIX

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Hispanic Ministry in the United States

The Gospel was introduced to this continent and to this hemisphere more than 500 years ago. As such, ministry to the Spanish-speaking and to native peoples has been an ongoing process and an integral part of our Church's history in the Americas. In more recent times, ministry to the Spanish-speaking was established by dioceses to respond to the pastoral and social concerns of their particular Spanish-speaking communities. In some dioceses, ministry offices were established at the turn of the century. In many western and southwestern dioceses, Spanish-speaking councils were established in the 1940s and 1950s.

The first Bishops' Committee for the Spanish-Speaking was established in 1945 under the leadership of Archbishop Robert E. Lucey of San Antonio by the National Catholic Welfare Conference. The primary focus of the committee was the plight of migrant workers in the southwest. Its office was located in San Antonio.

At the time the bishops' committee was established, the Spanish-speaking community was largely settled in the states bordering Mexico. Other parts of the country also seeing a significant Hispanic presence were the Midwest, the Northeast, and Florida.

In general, the population was relatively small and largely poor. Most workers received low wages, lived in substandard housing, lacked medical care, had little education or educational opportunity, and received little support or assistance. Many workers had come to the United States as *braceros* in the federally sponsored Bracero Program, which was established as a contracted labor force to support the agricultural industry during and after World War II. Needless to say, the plight of the farm workers intensified during this period.

Many social and pastoral needs in different parts of the country moved Hispanics to form new secular and ecclesial associations. These important associations were used by the Spanish-speaking community as vehicles for a more proactive participation in public

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policy issues and in meeting the many social service needs facing their families and communities. The Church responded by continuing to provide social services and later by establishing and funding pastoral institutes and diocesan and regional offices to better coordinate Hispanic pastoral ministry efforts.

Within this affirming and supportive climate, the Church established an office for ministry to the Spanish-speaking community that went beyond regional concerns. In 1968, with the reorganization of the National Catholic Welfare Conference, the national office of the Bishops' Committee for the Spanish-Speaking became the Division for the Spanish-Speaking, which was under the Department of Social Development of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB).

In 1971 the office was moved to Washington, D.C. The task of the national director was to move beyond social and material concerns to the pastoral, to increase the size of the staff to carry out the challenging work ahead, to collaborate with national organizations, and to invite them to become partners in the task at hand. The challenge of the national office was to assist the Church in its response to the pastoral and social needs of a growing number of Hispanic Catholics. Its mission was to serve as an advocate for pastoral needs and for public policy issues impacting the life of the Spanish-speaking community. In June 1972, these concepts became the priorities and the basis for the *Primer Encuentro Nacional Hispano de Pastoral*. According to Pope Paul VI, the first *encuentro* "aroused so much enthusiasm and so many expectations."

The *Conclusions of the First Encuentro* called for "greater participation of the Spanish-speaking in leadership and decision-making roles at all levels within the American Church." Further, it called for regional and pastoral centers to be established and coordinated nationally for the purpose of research and reflection and for programs of Christian leadership formation at all levels of the Church. The participants of the *encuentro* stated that "being convinced of the unity of the American Church" and of the values of the heritage, they were "impelled by the Spirit to share responsibility for the growth of the kingdom" among the Spanish-speaking and the peoples of the United States.

The period following the *Primer Encuentro* saw an increase in the number of Hispanic bishops, collaboration with non-Hispanic bishops, renewal of Hispanic and pro-Hispanic priests and religious, revitalization of the apostolic movements, and the hopeful increase of small Christian communities.

On January 1, 1975, the Division for the Spanish-Speaking became the Secretariat for Hispanic Affairs. Within its first year of existence, the bishops' committee called for a *Segundo Encuentro Nacional* to respond to a need for a "more concrete pastoral orientation to the NCCB." The following year, the national secretariat took advantage of the International Eucharistic Congress in Philadelphia to convene a meeting of national ministry leaders to consult and determine priorities, particularly those of the grassroots Hispanic community. "Three priorities surfaced: unity in pluralism, integral education, and social change (especially in establishing greater respect for Hispanos). Each priority

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gave special attention to leaders and youth” (*Proceedings of the II Encuentro Nacional Hispano de Pastoral*, p. 64).

The participants at the national gathering set the summer of 1977 as the date for the *Segundo Encuentro*. A national coordinating committee was established, consisting of the secretariat staff and the regional directors. Also included were the heads of the national Catholic Hispanic organizations. In January 1977, the Ad Hoc Committee of Bishops for the Spanish-Speaking supported and endorsed the *encuentro*.

In various planning meetings leading up to the *encuentro*, the national coordinating committee quickly discovered that the “principal strength of the process was found in the diocesan Church.” The number of diocesan offices for the Spanish-speaking had grown from thirty in 1972 to more than one hundred in 1977. The diocesan directors were included in the planning process and invited to the National Meeting of Diocesan Directors of the Hispanic Apostolate. Eighty-two diocesan directors participated. The motto chosen was *Pueblo de Dios en Marcha* and the official hymn chosen was *Somos un Pueblo que Camina*. The theme was evangelization, as well as five additional topics related to activities describing the concept of Church: ministries, human rights, integral education, political responsibility, and unity in pluralism. More than one hundred thousand people from all parts of the country participated in the process (*Proceedings of the II Encuentro Nacional Hispano de Pastoral*, pp. 65-66).

In 1967 the Midwest Regional Office and in 1972 the Mexican American Cultural Center were established to assist in the formation, training, and development of diocesan staffs and pastoral leaders. In 1974 the Northeast Catholic Pastoral Center for Hispanics was established in New York (*Hispanic Ministry: Three Major Documents*, p. 29). But the period following the *Segundo Encuentro* of 1977 saw the opening of five new regional offices for Hispanic ministry. The new offices were established in the Southeast in 1978, the far West in 1979, the Northwest in 1981, the North Central states in 1982, and the Mountain states in 1984. These offices and regional structures were a great support to the Hispanic apostolate and continue to be an integral part of Hispanic ministry today.

In addition, during the *Segundo Encuentro*, a national youth task force was created that became the *Comité Nacional Hispano de Pastoral Juvenil*. This organization no longer exists, though there have been attempts to re-establish it. In 1987 the NCCB reorganized and placed youth under the Secretariat for Laity and Family Life. In place of the *Comité*, regional and diocesan offices have taken on the responsibility of coordinating Hispanic youth ministry.

The successful collaboration with national Hispanic Catholic organizations during the *Segundo Encuentro* proved to be a valuable exercise for pastoral ministry. The national leaders proved to be an asset to the ad hoc committee and to the Secretariat for Hispanic Affairs. All the participants benefited from the national coordination. They saw a need to keep in contact and to continue to collaborate for the purpose of implementing national Hispanic pastoral priorities.

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As a result of the need to continue meeting, the National Advisory Committee (NAC) was created by the NCCB in 1978 to assist the Secretariat for Hispanic Affairs. Its members included the directors and coordinators of the regional offices and organizations, presidents of the pastoral institutes, presidents of the apostolic movements, and heads of Hispanic Catholic organizations, such as PADRES, HERMANAS, Comité Juvenil, Instituto de Liturgia Hispana, and the National Farmworker Ministry. With the change of the ad hoc committee of bishops to a standing committee in 1987, the NAC was dissolved in 1990 to adapt to the structure of NCCB/USCC permanent committees.

The Bishops Speak with the Virgin: A Pastoral Letter of the Hispanic Bishops of the U.S. was published in 1982 as a message of our pilgrimage throughout history, our reality, our role as artisans of a new humanity, and our pilgrimage with joy, courage, and hope. In 1983, the body of bishops issued a pastoral letter on Hispanic ministry titled *The Hispanic Presence: Challenge and Commitment*. In this document, the bishops of the United States made a call to Hispanic ministry, affirmed its achievements, listed urgent pastoral implications, and made a statement of commitment. Most importantly, in their letter, the bishops called for a *III Encuentro* and for the conclusions to be reviewed as a basis for a *National Pastoral Plan for Hispanic Ministry*.

The bishops asked “our Hispanic peoples to raise their prophetic voices once again, as they did in 1972 and 1977, in a *III Encuentro Nacional Hispano de Pastoral*, so that together we can face our responsibilities well. We call for the launching of an *Encuentro* process, from *comunidades eclesiales* and parishes, to dioceses and regions, and to the national level, culminating in a gathering of representatives in Washington, D.C. in August 1985.” Further, they stated that they recognized “that integral pastoral planning must avoid merely superficial adaptations of existing ministries” (*Hispanic Ministry: Three Major Documents*, p. 18).

Four objectives for the *III Encuentro* were proposed by the Ad Hoc Committee of Bishops on Hispanic Affairs: (a) evangelizing, (b) forming leaders through the process itself, (c) developing by necessity from the grassroots, and (d) giving emphasis to the diocesan and regional dimensions of the process. A fifth objective came from A *National Pastoral Plan*. The regional offices, the pastoral institutes, the National Advisory Committee, and representatives from the diocesan promotional teams helped design the process, which aimed to preserve the model of communion and participation.

The theme selected was *Pueblo Hispano: Vox Profética*, which came from the bishops’ pastoral letter *The Hispanic Presence: Challenge and Commitment*. Practical “Prophetic Pastoral Guidelines” were approved and became the “basic guidelines, the fundamental direction” for Hispanic pastoral ministry (*Hispanic Ministry: Three Major Documents*, p. 33).

Prophetic Voices was published in 1986 as the document on the historical context, process, commitments, follow-up, pastoral reflection, and conclusions of the *III Encuentro Nacional Hispano de Pastoral*.

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The “Prophetic Pastoral Guidelines” included family as the core of pastoral ministry, a preferential option for and in solidarity with the poor, a preferential option for Hispanic youth, and a resolution to follow *pastoral de conjunto* and the pastoral approach of an evangelizing and missionary Church. The “guidelines” were designed to promote Hispanic leadership and a “line of integral education that is sensitive to cultural identity, promotes and exemplifies justice, and values and promotes women in equality, dignity and in their role in the Church, the family, and society” (*Hispanic Ministry: Three Major Documents*, p. 33).

The National Pastoral Plan for Hispanic Ministry (NPPHM), approved by the NCCB in 1987, promotes a model of Church that is communitarian and participatory. The “General Objective” prophetically and poetically states the vision of Church that Hispanic and non-Hispanic Catholic leaders and pastoral agents have developed and participated in for many decades. Though there are many new leaders and church professionals who have not been involved in the Hispanic pastoral process during the last twenty-five years, the vision is still very relevant for it comes from the Hispanic community. To a large degree, Hispanic ministry has been affirmed and supported by the Church during this process, though not always to the degree expected. The purpose of the process has always been to develop responsible pastoral leaders to share the Good News and to participate in the process of building the kingdom of God, regardless of age, culture, economic status, or gender.

“To live and promote . . . by means of a *Pastoral de Conjunto* a model of Church that is: communitarian, evangelizing, and missionary, incarnate in the reality of the Hispanic people and open to the diversity of cultures, a promoter of justice . . . that develops leadership through integral education . . . that is leaven for the kingdom of God in society” is the challenge all Christians must face. Through the four “Specific Dimensions” of the Pastoral Plan, *pastoral de conjunto*, evangelization, missionary option, and formation, and with the programs and projects delineated, the Hispanic ministry implementation strategy is in the hands of the Church. Since 1987, when the Pastoral Plan was approved by the NCCB, Hispanic ministry has had a mandate to implement the model of Church that so many participated in and experienced.

Today, the implementation of the National Pastoral Plan is integral to the work of the NCCB Secretariat for Hispanic Affairs, the four regional offices and four regional associations, and the more than 140 diocesan directors and coordinators for Hispanic ministry in the United States. Other NCCB/USCC departments and secretariats, as well as most national and regional ecclesial associations and organizations working in Hispanic ministry, utilize the pastoral plan as their guideline and measure in developing their particular ministry. The Bishops’ Committee on Hispanic Affairs and the Secretariat for Hispanic Affairs collaborate closely with this pastoral network.

RESOURCES

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Black Catholics in the United States

Through many dangers, toils and snares,
I have already come;
Tis grace has brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home.

Amazing Grace, Verse 4

On July 10, 1793, six ships arrived from what is now known as Haiti and the Dominican Republic bringing Blacks who would form the nucleus of the Black worshiping community. This community, which was established at St. Mary's Seminary on Paca Street in Baltimore, would later become the first Black Catholic parish in the United States. St. Francis Xavier Parish was established by the Jesuits in 1864. Several years prior to the landing of these ships, there were 3,000 Catholic slaves in Maryland, and by 1800 there were sizeable communities of Black Catholics in southern Maryland, southern Louisiana, southern Missouri, and western Kentucky.

Although the Catholic community was not exempt from the evil of slavery, even during those trying times Black Catholics seemed to persevere. In 1829 the Haitian community, which met in the lower chapel of St. Mary's Seminary in Baltimore, produced the first Black American religious community. Elizabeth Lange, a Haitian, enlisted the help of three other Black women to teach the children. In 1831 the Oblate Sisters of Providence were approved by Pope Gregory XVI. Despite the constant racism and sexism of the day, the Oblate Sisters of Providence established schools for Black children and a home for Black orphans. In 1842 the Sisters of the Holy Family were founded by Henriette Delille in New Orleans, despite unsurmountable odds. The Sisters of the Holy Family ministered to and educated slaves and the poor Blacks of the city. They established a hospice for the sick poor, nursed the sick in their homes, established an orphanage, and eventually founded a school for girls from free Black families. Today, there are no Black orders for men, but there are orders that minister in the Black community.

The nineteenth century offered early opportunities for Blacks to establish themselves in the Roman Catholic Church. In the late 1800s three Healy brothers, sons of a slave

holder and his slave, became priests. James A. Healy, ordained in Paris in 1854, was a priest of the diocese of Boston and would later be named Bishop of Portland, Maine in 1875; Alexander Sherwood Healy became a priest in 1858 and was also assigned to the diocese of Boston; and Patrick F. Healy, who joined the Jesuits, was educated at Louvain and ordained a priest in 1865. Fr. Patrick Healy later became president of Georgetown University, although he kept his Black identity a secret. Healy never identified with the Black Catholic community in his actions or his relations. The first recognized Black priest and one who identified completely with the Black Catholic community was Augustus Tolton, a former slave. Despite opposition, Fr. Tolton was ordained in Rome in 1886 and assigned to Alton, Ill. Fr. Tolton spent much of his time preaching, teaching, speaking, writing, and lending his presence to his people. When he died in 1897 at the age of 43, his loss was keenly felt by the Black Catholic community of the United States.

In the late nineteenth century, Black Americans began meeting in conventions and congresses. Daniel Rudd, publisher of the *American Catholic Tribune*, a weekly newspaper instituted to make the Catholic Church better known in the Black community, was responsible for organizing the first Black Catholic Congress. Five congresses, which took place between 1889 and 1894, addressed the establishment of Catholic schools, including industrial schools especially for Black children, the admittance of Blacks to labor unions, the end to poor housing, professions of faith by Black Catholics, social justice, evangelization, and African American Catholic history. What was interesting about these congresses was that they were a lay movement—probably the first national lay organization in the Church in the United States.

There were many occurrences between the last Black Catholic Congress in 1894 and the next phase of congresses, which began in 1967. The 1960s were a turbulent time in Church and in society. Race relations and the igniting of the “Black Power and Pride Movement” sparked a flame to address these issues within the Black Catholic community. During this time came the emergence of the National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus, the National Black Sisters’ Conference, the National Black Seminarians Association, and in 1970, through self-determination and self-reliance, the National Office for Black Catholics (NOBC). NOBC established departments of education, culture, and worship, and the Black Catholic Lay Caucus; offered programs and workshops directed to evident needs; published a monthly and quarterly newsletter; produced a base of support; and secured financial backing. One of the major supporters of NOBC was the Knights and Ladies of St. Peter Claver, the largest organization of African American laity. For the first time, Black Catholics could speak as a body and with some authority in the forums shaping the hopes, aspirations, and activities of the larger Black community.

During this time, the question was raised—**Could one be authentically Catholic and authentically Black?** The answer is yes. Black clergy, religious, and laity created national organizations and sponsored regional and diocesan conferences that addressed social justice issues. Another avenue to address the needs of the laity was the founding of the Offices of Black Ministry in the 1970s, and in 1978, as a response to the growth of

these offices, the National Association of Black Catholic Administrators was incorporated. The development of these national Black Catholic organizations, the evolution of the Black Power and Pride Movement, and the need to incorporate Black culture and heritage within the Church spurred the establishment of Black Catholic revivals, gospel Masses and choirs, the ordination of priests and bishops, the profession of vows of nuns, and the development of many organizations to address their racial and social needs. During this period there was tremendous growth. The increase in African American Catholic bishops in the 1980s led to the creation of *What We Have Seen and Heard*, a pastoral on evangelization, and the *Lead Me Guide Me Hymnal*. In spite of that growth, there was still a need to continue to address issues of social justice within society and the Church.

The twentieth century lent itself to repeating history and developing a new set of historical events. In continuing the tradition established by Daniel Rudd, the sixth and seventh National Black Catholic Congresses took place in Washington, D.C. in 1987 and in New Orleans in 1992. The focus of these congresses included some of the same issues that were addressed one hundred years earlier. The issues included African American history and culture, lay leadership development, community development, and the African American family. The 1987 congress produced the National Black Catholic Pastoral Plan, an implementation strategy for those working in the Black community. The document also addressed inculturation, the appointment of more Black leaders, and the calling of African Americans to take a more active role in articulating the concerns of Black Catholics. Also, in 1987, the idea of a Secretariat for African American Catholics was endorsed.

In January 1988, the Secretariat for African American Catholics of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops was opened. The purpose of the office is to “fill a void in the Church’s recognition of Black Catholics and ensure a Black voice at the highest level of the Church.” The focus of the Secretariat has been to mainstream African American Catholics by showcasing the culture, scholarship, and resources developed by African American Catholics within the life of the Church. In 1989 the U.S. bishops endorsed the National Black Catholic Pastoral Plan with its own document, *Here I Am, Send Me: A Conference Response to the Evangelization of African Americans and the National Black Catholic Pastoral Plan*. This document affirmed diversity throughout the institutional Church and called attention to instances of racism in society as well as in the Church.

As we approach the third millennium, we must acknowledge that Black Catholics have made numerous contributions to the Roman Catholic Church. They have suffered many indignities; however, their faith has never wavered. As a tribute to that faith, a campaign has been established for the construction of a chapel, “Our Mother of Africa Chapel,” dedicated by African Americans at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception. The Our Mother of Africa Chapel campaign also includes the establishment of an endowment fund and programs in vocations; parish evangelization;

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lay, youth, and family life ministry; religious education; and chapel pilgrimages to enrich the life of the Church and the African American community. In 1997 Baltimore will be the host site for Congress VIII. There are now seventy-one offices of Black Ministry. The 2.3 million African American Catholics have a rich history, legacy, and culture within the Roman Catholic Church.

RESOURCES

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