Pastoral Plan of Action for the Catholic Diocese of Oakland African American Pastoral Center

Title: *Reengaging Black Catholic Youth and Young Adults, Evangelizing Black Catholics, and Creating Vibrant Parishes Rooted in Black Spirituality*

Introduction

The African American community within the Catholic Diocese of Oakland has long been a significant part of the broader church body. However, like many communities, it faces challenges in maintaining active participation among youth and young adults, fostering spiritual growth, and ensuring the vitality of parishes. This Pastoral Plan of Action is developed in response to these challenges, focusing on three main objectives: reengaging Black Catholic youth and young adults in their faith, evangelizing Black Catholics, and creating vibrant parishes that reflect the richness of Black spirituality. This plan aims to build a more robust, inclusive, and spiritually flourishing community by fostering a deeper sense of belonging and commitment to the Church.

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1. Reengaging Black Catholic Youth and Young Adults in Their Faith

Objective: To rekindle the passion for faith among Black Catholic youth and young adults, providing them with a pathway to actively participate in the life of the Church.

Action Steps:

- **Youth Ministry Revitalization:**
  Establish dynamic, culturally relevant youth ministry programs that engage young people where they are, emphasizing both faith formation and leadership development. These programs will incorporate elements of African American history, music, and art, offering a space where youth can see their culture reflected in their faith practice.
- **Peer-Led Retreats and Conferences:**
  Create opportunities for peer-led retreats and conferences, where young people can engage with their faith in a setting that fosters community and deep spiritual reflection. These experiences will provide an environment for youth to connect with their peers, grow in their faith, and learn how to share the Gospel in their communities.
- **Digital Engagement and Social Media Presence:**
  Recognizing that young people are often more engaged online, the Diocese will increase its digital outreach through social media platforms. This will involve creating inspirational and educational content, such as virtual Bible studies, faith podcasts, and engaging social media campaigns that highlight African American saints, historical figures, and spiritual leaders.
- **Mentorship and Community Building:**
  Establish mentorship programs where older Black Catholic adults can guide young people in their spiritual journeys. By fostering intergenerational relationships, young

adults will not only receive wisdom but will also feel a stronger sense of connection to the Church.

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2. Evangelizing Black Catholics and Reinforcing Their Faith

Objective: To renew and deepen the faith of Black Catholics through outreach, education, and a focus on social justice.

Action Steps:

- **Faith Formation Programs with an African American Focus:**
  Develop ongoing adult faith formation programs that integrate African American history, culture, and spirituality into theological education. By highlighting African American saints, such as St. Martin de Porres and Venerable Pierre Toussaint, participants will be able to see the intersection of their culture and faith.
- **Community Evangelization Campaigns:**
  Launch evangelization campaigns within the African American community, focusing on re-engaging lapsed Catholics, welcoming newcomers, and strengthening the faith of those who have been active but may have drifted. These campaigns will be centered on themes of healing, justice, and the power of the Gospel in the lives of African Americans.
- **Social Justice Initiatives:**
  Rooted in the Church's teachings on social justice, the Diocese will create a series of initiatives focused on addressing the systemic issues that impact the Black community, such as poverty, racism, and inequality. These programs will show the practical ways in which faith and social action intersect and will serve as a witness to the broader community of the relevance of the Church in addressing real-world issues.
- **African American Spirituality and Liturgies:**
  Encourage parishes to celebrate Masses and liturgies that incorporate elements of African American spiritual traditions, such as gospel music, drumming, and call-and-response worship. These liturgies will reflect the vibrancy and joy of Black spirituality and provide an opportunity for deeper emotional and spiritual connection.

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3. Creating Vibrant Parishes that Reflect Black Spirituality

Objective: To cultivate parishes that are not only spiritually enriching but also reflect and celebrate the unique cultural and spiritual heritage of the Black community.

Action Steps:

- **Culturally Relevant Worship and Liturgy:**
  Work with parishes to integrate elements of African American culture into the liturgy, including gospel choirs, hymns, and the use of symbols and rituals that speak to the lived

experiences of Black Catholics. Parishes will also explore the possibility of incorporating African American spirituality into prayer services and celebrations of the sacraments, particularly baptism, marriage, and funeral rites.

- **Community and Social Gatherings:**
  Organize regular parish-based social gatherings that bring together parishioners of all ages. These gatherings will not only serve as opportunities for fellowship but will also provide a space for open dialogue about the spiritual needs of the community and how they can be met. Events such as Black History Month celebrations, cultural festivals, and local ministry outreach initiatives will further strengthen parish life.
- **Leadership Development in Parishes:**
  Identify and cultivate leaders from the African American community within each parish to serve as role models, mentors, and voices for the community. Parishes will be encouraged to develop leadership pipelines that involve young adults in parish leadership roles, from youth ministry coordinators to liturgical ministers.
- **Focus on Family and Community Life:**
  Strengthen parish programs that serve Black families, emphasizing the importance of family life, marriage, and parenting within the context of Catholic teaching. This includes offering educational workshops, support groups, and other resources aimed at helping Black families navigate the challenges they face, while also providing opportunities for spiritual growth.
- **Partnerships with Other Ministries and Organizations:**
  Foster collaboration between the African American Pastoral Center and other diocesan ministries, such as Catholic Charities, social justice groups, and parish councils. This collaboration will ensure that Black Catholics have access to a broad network of support and resources and can engage in community-wide efforts to promote unity and growth.

Conclusion

The future of the African American Catholic community in the Diocese of Oakland is bright with opportunity. This Pastoral Plan of Action serves as a roadmap to reengage Black youth and young adults, evangelize the Black Catholic community, and create vibrant, culturally rich parishes that reflect the depth of Black spirituality. By focusing on empowerment, education, and active participation, we will build a stronger, more vibrant Church that stands as a witness to the Gospel and meets the unique needs of the African American community. Through prayer, action, and collaboration, the Diocese of Oakland will be a beacon of hope, justice, and spiritual growth for generations to come.

IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

1. Re-engaging Black Catholic Youth and Young Adults in Their Faith

Implementation Ideas:

- **Culturally Relevant Faith Formation:**
  - Create faith formation programs (e.g., retreats, youth groups, Bible studies) that incorporate Black history, culture, and spirituality, integrating the rich traditions of Black Catholicism with the universal teachings of the Church.
  - Use music, arts, and literature from the Black community in worship and educational materials.
  - Invite guest speakers from the Black Catholic community to share personal faith stories and experiences.
- **Peer-Led Initiatives:**
  - Train and empower young adults within the community to lead small faith-sharing groups, Bible studies, or social justice projects that appeal to younger generations, fostering a sense of ownership and leadership.
  - Encourage mentoring relationships between older and younger generations to foster a faith-based community and leadership development.
- **Social Media and Digital Engagement:**
  - Use platforms popular among Black youth (Instagram, TikTok, YouTube) to share faith-related content that is relatable, such as testimonies, educational videos, and reflections on faith that tie into Black culture.
  - Host live-streamed events like virtual youth nights, online Bible studies, and interactive webinars with speakers focused on topics of interest to Black youth, such as racial justice, community building, and personal identity.

Evaluation:

- **Feedback from Participants:** Conduct surveys or interviews with youth and young adults who participate in programs to gauge their level of engagement, their understanding of faith, and their spiritual growth.
- **Retention Rates:** Track how many youths remain involved after their initial participation in programs.
- **Youth Leadership Development:** Assess how many youths take on leadership roles, such as becoming peer mentors or organizing faith-related events.

2. Evangelizing Black Catholics and Reinforcing Their Faith

Implementation Ideas:

- **Culturally Inclusive Liturgies:**
  - Incorporate elements of Black culture into liturgy (e.g., African American hymns, gospel music, call-and-response elements, and local traditions). This allows Black Catholics to feel seen, heard, and connected in the worship experience.
  - Ensure that homilies and liturgical materials address issues pertinent to the Black community, including racial justice, economic inequality, and the challenges specific to their lived experiences.
- **Outreach Programs:**
  - Create parish outreach initiatives that target Black Catholics who may have drifted from the Church or have never been actively involved. This could include visiting neighborhoods, hosting "welcome back" events, or offering free community services.
  - Partner with local community organizations to meet the material needs of the Black community (e.g., food drives, youth programs, career services) while also offering spiritual enrichment.
- **Evangelizing through African American Catholic Role Models:**
  - Highlight the stories and contributions of African American saints, martyrs, and historical figures, integrating them into religious education, youth programs, and homilies.
  - Establish opportunities for Black Catholics to meet and engage with Black Catholic leaders who can serve as mentors and role models in the faith.

Evaluation:

- **Mass Participation and Engagement:** Track attendance at liturgies, including the frequency of participation from Black Catholics, and ask participants how relevant the service feels to their personal experiences.
- **Conversion and Re-engagement:** Measure the number of individuals returning to the Church or being baptized, as well as the retention of those newly engaged.
- **Personal Faith Surveys:** Use surveys that assess how connected individuals feel to their faith after participating in evangelizing efforts.

3. Creating Vibrant Parishes that Reflect Black Spirituality

Implementation Ideas:

- **Community-Focused Ministry:**
  - Establish ministry teams that reflect the diversity of the Black Catholic community, with a focus on service to the marginalized youth, the elderly, those facing financial or social struggles.
  - Focus on creating spaces for African American culture within parish life, such as Black History Month celebrations, storytelling events, and local art exhibitions.
- **Culturally Relevant Faith Education:**
  - Develop catechesis that reflects both the universal and Black-specific aspects of the faith. This could include the study of Black saints, figures in Black liberation theology, or Black Catholic history.
  - Establish study groups that explore the intersection of African American culture and Catholicism, highlighting how both can enrich one another.
- **Celebrating Black Spirituality in Liturgical Settings:**
  - Integrate traditional Black spirituals, gospel music, and African-inspired liturgical dances into the regular worship experience. This creates an atmosphere where parishioners feel their cultural heritage is respected and celebrated.
  - Foster an environment where the worship experience is vibrant, inclusive, and engaging for people of all ages.

Evaluation:

- **Parishioner Feedback:** Conduct regular surveys or focus groups with Black parishioners to assess the relevance of church activities to their spiritual lives and cultural identity.
- **Ministry Participation:** Track the participation of parishioners in ministry programs, especially those rooted in Black Catholic spirituality. Look for growth in active involvement and leadership roles.
- **Community Impact:** Assess the parish's outreach to the local Black community and its reputation within that community. Success can be seen in the growth of parish membership and active engagement in social justice efforts.

4. Tolton Ambassador Program

History

On February 3, 2015, the Father Augustus Tolton Guild launched the **Tolton Ambassador Program**. The Tolton Ambassador is a layperson, accredited and sent by the Tolton Cause, acting as a regional messenger for the **Postulator of the Cause**. Appointed by the **Diocesan Vice-Postulator of the Tolton Cause**, the Tolton Ambassador plays a critical role in supporting the Guild's mission within a designated region.

Collaboration

The **African American Catholic Pastoral Center (AAPC)** and **Saint Columba Parish** are proud co-conveners of this initiative in the **Diocese of Oakland**, working hand-in-hand to engage the local community and foster a deep understanding of the Tolton Cause.

Role and Mission of Tolton Ambassadors

Tolton Ambassadors are commissioned to carry out a wide range of responsibilities that include, but are not limited to:

- **Educating the Faithful**: Ambassadors teach the faithful about the significance of the **Tolton Cause**, helping to spread awareness and understanding of Father Augustus Tolton's life and legacy.
- **Integrating Tolton's Story into Religious Education**: In collaboration with local pastors and religious education leaders, Tolton Ambassadors ensure that Father Tolton's story is incorporated into the instruction of **adults, children, and youth**, making his journey a relevant and inspiring part of ongoing religious formation.
- **Promoting Prayer**: Tolton Ambassadors emphasize the vital importance of prayer for the success of the Tolton Cause, encouraging parishioners to unite in intercession for Father Tolton's canonization.
- **Building Support for the Cause**: With the permission of local pastors, Ambassadors seek to engage the faithful in supporting the Tolton Cause, both **prayerfully and financially**. This includes organizing events such as **meetings, reflection days, and other activities** to deepen engagement and foster community involvement.
- **Cultivating a Culture of Inclusion and Justice**: Ambassadors work tirelessly to promote a culture of **inclusion** and **social justice**, advocating for a more just social environment within the Church and encouraging participation from all members of the local faith community, especially marginalized groups.

Evaluation Component

To ensure the effectiveness of the Tolton Ambassador Program, a structured evaluation component will be introduced, allowing for continuous growth and improvement of the initiative:

1. **Feedback from Local Communities**:
    - **Surveys and Interviews**: Ambassadors will regularly collect feedback from the communities they serve, assessing the impact of educational efforts, prayer initiatives, and events. Surveys will be distributed to participants at events, and follow-up interviews with pastors and church leaders will be conducted.
    - **Evaluation of Program Reach**: Assess the extent to which Tolton's story and message have been integrated into parish life, including religious education programs and other parish activities.
2. **Tracking Prayer and Financial Support**:
    - Ambassadors will maintain records of prayer campaigns and fundraising efforts, analyzing the level of participation and financial support garnered for the Tolton Cause.
    - Regular reporting on the success of fundraising activities, including the number of individuals and groups engaged and the financial contributions made, will help track the program's success.
3. **Impact on Community Inclusion and Justice**:
    - Regular assessments will be conducted to evaluate the program's impact on fostering inclusion and justice within local parishes. Metrics will include the diversity of participants at events, outreach efforts to marginalized communities, and the development of new opportunities for participation in parish life.
    - Ambassadors will also measure the degree to which local parishes reflect a commitment to justice and equality as part of their engagement with the Tolton Cause.
4. **Annual Reports and Reflection**:
    - Each year, Tolton Ambassadors will submit a **Comprehensive Annual Report**, summarizing their activities, successes, challenges, and feedback from the communities they serve.
    - This report will also include reflections on the progress of the Tolton Cause, identifying areas where the program can grow and where adjustments may be needed to improve engagement and impact.
5. **Advisory Board Review**:
    - The **Advisory Board** of the Tolton Cause will review these reports, providing feedback and recommendations. They will offer guidance on areas for development and ways to enhance the program's reach and effectiveness within the Diocese of Oakland and beyond.

By incorporating this evaluation framework, the **Tolton Ambassador Program** aims to remain dynamic, responsive, and focused on its ultimate mission: promoting the legacy of **Father Augustus Tolton** and inspiring a more inclusive, just, and prayerful Church community.

Final Thoughts

Each of these goals requires a deep, ongoing commitment to listening to the community and ensuring that their cultural, spiritual, and social needs are met. To successfully evaluate these initiatives, ensure there is continuous communication with Black Catholics to understand their needs and experiences. This approach creates a feedback loop that will help the Church better serve and evangelize within this community.