

3 Essential Ingredients for a Vibrant African American Catholic Ministry

Anchor Your Plan within a Plan - We all know the positive benefits of strategic planning. However, visibility and collaboration throughout the (arch)diocese are critical to a successful ministry for and with African Americans Catholics. This is not a time for private, standalone plans. The stakes are too high.

Situate your plan within the (arch)diocesan operational plan and the National Black Catholic Congress Plan. Ask yourself, what other diocesan offices are aware of your goals and activities? Then, be like the persistent widow (Lk 11:1-6). Is the Youth Coordinator aware of your initiatives to engage African American Catholic youth? Do you host Kajenga retreats or want to send young people to youth conferences? Are your catechists included in training days as participants and presenters? Are Africentric resources available for purchase or distribution at diocesan conferences? Being a part of the (arch)diocesan plan gives notice of coming attractions. Nevertheless, it's important to cultivate the relationships needed to learn about other programs and advertise your own early.

Build a Structure Where People Can Gather - Few dioceses provide a central meeting place for African American Catholic ministry activities beyond some of the historically Black parishes. However, meeting at the Pastoral Center, Chancery Office or Cathedral puts a spotlight on your activities. Meeting there or at a multicultural parish may draw the 76% of Black Catholics who belong to shared or predominantly White parishes, along with some allies. When scheduling events for Black Catholic History Month, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King observances, retreats, leadership institutes and other initiatives, try branching out into new venues.

Also, consider building a structure that is organizational, rather than physical. Who is on your leadership team? Ask yourself, what competencies are missing? Does the team include all the expertise needed to reach your goals? Are your meetings productive?

Commit Culturally Competent Clergy - Petition for pastors, associates and deacons to serve in our parishes who respect, understand and love the people. Many clergy and religious who are not African American serve our community sincerely and well. At the same time, we take care not to exhaust those who are African American. This is a time for working together across cultural lines and for developing new and emerging leaders. Ask yourself, who from my community has the qualities needed for pastoral ministry with young adults, troubled families, new members or outreach ministry?

Finally, for Black Catholic History Month, read about a stellar example of vibrant African American Catholic Ministry that blends these essential ingredients and more to serve the Church, the local community and Black Catholics. - The Catholic Enrichment Center in the Archdiocese of Louisville.