

Commission on Black Ministries (COBM)
Report to Diocesan Convention
March 4, 2023

At the 2022 Diocesan Convention, after a very enthusiastic discussion about living into the justice commitments of the Diocese, the delegates overwhelmingly affirmed the need for ongoing focus on Black Ministries by passing a resolution to fund a full-time Canon Missioner for Black Ministries effective January 1, 2023. The Reverend Canon Clive Sang, Dcn, was appointed by Bishop Stokes to fill this role on an interim basis until the new bishop appoints a permanent staff. The COBM was also successful in obtaining funding in the Diocesan budget for 2022 and 2023.

Members of the Commission include:

Canon Annette Buchanan (Chair), Canon Wendy Blackman, Mr. Marcus Gales, the Rev. Canon Andy Moore, the Rev. Canon Dr. Martin Oguike, Ms. Shawn Phillips, The Rev. Petrina Pyatt, Ms. Linda Shomo, the Rev. Canon James Wynn and The Rev. Canon Clive Sang, Dcn. - Canon Missioner for Black Ministries.

The goal of this Commission is to advocate for the needs of Black congregations, develop vocations and support Black ministries within the Diocese.

The ten historically Black congregations that are our primary focus are listed below along with a brief status of that congregation:

St. Augustine, Asbury Park: The Rev. Dr. William Ndishabandi continues an active ministry. The feeding program, a new roof and the 132nd anniversary were highlights.

St. Augustine- Atlantic City: Continues Sunday worship and outreach ministries with a weekly supply priest and is actively searching for a new clergy.

St. Augustine – Camden: Decided to become a virtual church, meeting on Zoom only with a monthly in-person fellowship. The Rev. Petrina Pyatt supports the congregation.

St. Wilfrid – Camden: Provides a large and active outreach ministry with support from neighboring churches, intermittent services are provided by Deacon Sang.

St. Elizabeth- Elizabeth: Completed a major sanctuary renovation project costing 175k spearheaded by the Rev. Canon Andy Moore; worship includes Haitian members who are supported by the Rev. Robin Pierre.

St. Albans- New Brunswick: The congregation is led by the Rev. Sharon Sutton and continues to minister to the community as it works through building challenges.

St. Marks – Plainfield: The Rev. Angelo Wildgoose continues an active ministry; the church is in discussion about joint ministry with Grace Episcopal in Plainfield.

St. Mary's – Pleasantville: The Rev. James Wilson recently joined the church as the new Priest-In-Charge. Outreach ministry to the community continues.

St. Thomas – Red Bank: Deacon Sang successfully led the congregation in worship and outreach, search for a new priest is underway for this Black-Hispanic congregation.

Christ the King – Willingboro: The Rev. Canon James Wynn continues an active interim ministry, a hopeful, renewed search for permanent clergy is underway.

Accomplishment and priorities for the year 2022 included:

Monthly Meetings: The strength of the COBM are the monthly meetings held continuously to review areas of concern within the Historically Black Congregations. COBM also collaborates to address solutions with the congregations, Diocesan leaders, and the Canon Missioner for Black Ministry to enable congregational health and long-term vitality. The COBM also partners with the Black Clergy Caucus, and the Union of Black Episcopalians to ensure that there is active participation and representation in the diocese.

Clergy support for congregations: Currently at least three of the congregations are seeking new clergy. There are less than five persons of African descent in the process for ordained ministry. The need for permanent clergy continues to be a major concern and focus of the COBM. Work continues with the Diocesan Transition officer to ensure congregations have active and committed clergy and are cultivating interest in ordained ministry.

Racial Justice Advocacy: We continue to discuss and champion racial justice issues in the diocese. These initiatives were all supported by the COBM 1) educational forums and advocacy actions of the Reparations Commission, 2) the Anti-Racism Commission training and outreach and 3) the Task Force for Urban Development that continues to spearhead the expansion of Haitian ministry in the diocese to now include Elizabeth, Rahway, Asbury Park, and Bradley Beach. The 2023 goal is to include Red Bank and Pleasantville. The work is being led by Fr. Robin Pierre, Diocesan Missioner for Haitian ministries. The Task Force is developing a relationship with FaithX towards reenergizing Black congregations.

Black Congregations: We continue to host monthly meetings to discuss vitality initiatives. Areas that are going well include weekly worship services, outreach to the community, communication to our churches, racial justice actions and engagement with the Diocese. Areas that we are actively working to improve include stewardship, Black youth formation, return of membership to in-person services and continued financial support for churches.

Youth initiatives: We continued programming from the ECS-NJ 2021 youth grant for the Black congregations. Programs included Vacation Bible School, "Easter Celebration for Jesus," and "Birthday Party for Jesus". The programs consisted of Praise & Worship Music, Bible Trivia, Crafts, Youth Talent, and social interaction time. These fun-filled events focused on Jesus and included parents as well as clergy, youth leaders and volunteers from the Commission of Black Ministry as organizers.

We are especially thankful for the ongoing leadership of Bishop Stokes throughout his tenure as Diocesan bishop in addressing the concerns of the Black congregations. We are also grateful for the support of the Diocesan staff.

Respectfully submitted,



Canon Annette L. Buchanan, Chair, Commission on Black Ministries