

Commission on Black Ministries (COBM)
Report to Diocesan Convention
March 9, 2024

The goal of the Commission on Black Ministry is to advocate for the needs of Black congregations, develop vocations and support Black ministries within the Diocese of New Jersey. The COBM for the first year since its formation was awarded funding in the Diocesan budget. We also welcomed a full-time Canon Missioner for Black Ministries the Reverend Canon Clive Sang, Deacon. We presented gifts to outgoing Bishop Stokes and incoming Bishop French who are both strong supporters of the ministry. Most important we continue to collaborate with the Black Clergy Caucus, and the Earl B. Scott chapter, Union of Black Episcopalians to address leadership development and congregation vitality issues within the Diocese of New Jersey

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 Clive Sang, Dcn. - Canon Missioner for Black Ministries. With the retirement of the Rev. Canon James Wynn, the Rev. Vernal Savage was recommended as the newest addition to the Commission. Along with others we honored Canon Wynn for contributions to our ministry.

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 with challenges of post-pandemic decline in membership and finance. The Feeding Program, a new After School Enrichment program and hosting Clergy Day were some of the highlights.

St. Augustine- Atlantic City: With the Rev. James Wilson as priest, the church has joined in an affiliation with St. Mary's, Pleasantville. Services led by Fr. Wilson are provided in person on alternate Sundays. A deacon is sorely needed to enhance the worship team. Outreach ministries and fundraising programs continue.

St. Mary's – Pleasantville: The Rev. James Wilson continues as the Priest-In-Charge in affiliation with St. Augustine, Atlantic City. The Community Garden is growing in clients served. A Haitian ESL (English Second Language) program has also been formed.

St. Augustine – Camden: The Rev. Petrina Pyatt supports the congregation that continues to be a virtual church, primarily meeting on Zoom, with monthly in-person fellowship when able and also joining neighboring congregations for worship.

St. Wilfrid – Camden: With its very small congregation, the church continues to provide a large and active outreach ministry with support from neighboring churches to include food, clothing, and medical support. Intermittent services are provided by Deacon Sang. Long needed building repairs are underway with a Diocesan grant.

St. Elizabeth- Elizabeth: The Rev. Canon Andy Moore spearheads multiple community engagement initiatives with elected and interfaith partners. The church also hosted a

very successful International Food Fair. The Haitian ministry supported by the Rev. Robin Pierre that grew out of St. Elizabeth have advanced to a new worship space.

St. Albans- New Brunswick: Supply clergy currently supports the congregation. A vestry with new leadership is diligently addressing building and financial challenges. The food pantry and an international bible study program continues to be highlights.

St. Marks – Plainfield: The Rev. Angelo Wildgoose continues an active ministry. The increase in youth attendance is a highlight along with a new organist and continued community programs. The passing of members who were strong financial contributors is a challenge being addressed. Planned alliance with Grace Plainfield has been discontinued.

St. Thomas – Red Bank: The congregation thanked the Rev. Dcn. Clive Sang for his many years of service as he transitioned to new opportunities. The Rev. Dcn Kevin Thompson supports Sunday services for the Black congregation and the Rev. Jose Cantos is the part-time priest for the Hispanic congregation. Search for a new priest is underway. The bi-cultural church arrangements with the Hispanic members continue to be a work in progress.

Christ the King – Willingboro: The Rev. Canon James Wynn retired with wonderful tributes. The Rev. Vernal Savage, after years-long search, joined the congregation from Canada as the full time Priest-In-Charge. Musical programs and community outreach including clothing drives continue to be sources of satisfaction for the congregation.

Accomplishment and priorities for the year 2023 included:

Youth initiatives: We continued support for youth primarily from the Black congregations. Programs included Vacation Bible School, “Easter Celebration for Jesus,” and “Birthday Party for Jesus.” The programs consisted of 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 and Earl B. Scott chapter, Union of Black Episcopalians as organizers.

Monthly Meetings: The strength of the COBM are the monthly meetings held continuously to 1) inform and advocate for issues impacting Black congregations 2) review areas of concern within the Historically Black Congregations 3) collaborate 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. COBM members attended and helped to plan the Services for Martin Luther King Jr. and Absalom Jones.

Clergy support for congregations: The need for Deacons and their placement within the Diocese are a cause for concern. Many Black clergy are unable to take much needed sabbatical and vacation time without this support. The need for permanent clergy continues to be a focus of the COBM especially as there are very few persons of African descent in the process for ordained ministry. In the past, forums were held to encourage congregational discernment. Work continues 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's trainings and 3) the Task Force for Urban Development outreach to urban congregations to address the inherent challenges from their communities and the support for the expansion of Haitian ministry across the diocese.

Black Congregations: We continue to host monthly meetings on the 4th Tuesday to discuss congregation 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.

We are grateful for the support of the Diocesan staff. We also welcome Bishop French as she joins our monthly meetings to learn firsthand of our concerns and share updates from the Diocese. Her desire is to expand the scope of the ministry to serve all people of the African Diaspora within the Diocese of New Jersey.

Respectfully submitted,



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