

**Report of The Canon Missioner for Black Ministries**  
**234<sup>th</sup> Diocesan Convention**  
**The Diocese of New Jersey**  
**March 2<sup>nd</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2018**

Greeting in the Name of Christ Jesus.

A statement from a Diocese of the Episcopal Church (TEC) offered by the Church's Office of Black Ministry states:

**“A cultural diverse Episcopal Diocese such as ours will struggle with the issues of church identity which has been a traditional means of separation – White church, Black church, Hispanic church, etc.**

**Until we can shed the shackles of racial identity to embrace the oneness of God in Jesus Christ, injustice, inequality (unequal treatment of the populace), poverty and racial indifference will be a reality for the foreseeable future.**

**The Office of Black Ministry functions to be an advocate for issues concerning the Black Churches and Black congregants in the wider Church community.**

**As long as the separation and identity of Churches continue to be in a racial construct, the overall health of well-being of the Church suffers. The Community of Faith and the Family of God.”**

I commend the Bishop and Diocesan Staff for their foresight and vision in addressing the current state of Black Ministry in the Diocese and especially the Historic Black Churches by being responsive when called upon. Of the ten remaining Historic Black Churches, five hold Parish status and five are Missions.

While the general conditions of our Black churches have improved somewhat with the addition of clergy to the Church of St. Mary's the Virgin in Pleasantville, and the settling-in of other recent clergy in their congregations, one of our Mission churches for several years has been unable to call a clergy, and their sole purpose for existing is in support of the surrounding community, providing needed health, food and clothing services on a monthly basis. Another of our Churches is in transition to being a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic congregation which presents new challenges and requires new approaches to worship and ministry. Two of our Churches now have long-term supply clergy as they plan the next steps in preparing to call new clergy in the future. In general, our Parishes are stable with improving conditions, not unlike a medical condition requiring long term recuperation or special survival techniques.

The several maladies that confront many parishes in our Diocese - decrease in attendance, decrease in stewardship, high cost of maintaining our facilities, to name a few, - present unique challenges for Black Churches who are already facing the effects of the changing demographics in their communities. Most congregations have a high percentage of “commuting” members who continue their support while residing at a distance, and the average age of the members continue increase. In most cases Lay Leadership is to be commended for their service and support in the ongoing operation of the churches.

The financial resources available to our churches tend to be inadequate to carry out the several planned ministries, and it often requires a sense of ingenuity to move forward to do the work of discipleship. The Diocesan Staff have been very responsive to the needs of Parishes and provided consultation and assistance. We are reactive to crisis situations, and by the grace of God we frequently use solutions even when they are temporary and short term, only postponing the reality. The adage, where there is life there is hope, is apropos in describing the financial condition of our churches.

There has been a nationwide trend toward ethnic and cultural diversity regardless of the daily news we receive to the contrary. Our greatest strength within The Episcopal Church is our diversity and our willingness to overcome differences and share our ideas and feelings in accordance with the context in which we exist. We strive to accept those differences, endeavor to respect them, and work to integrate them. In some circles there is a question on the need for Black Ministry as a separate and distinct entity. A more pertinent question may be -what is the value of Black Ministry, and to that question an answer is that it provides a clearer understanding and acceptance of the Black experience in our church and in our society, which will hopefully give us the ability to address issues realistically. This can only be accomplished through increased communication with each other, with the Diocese Staff and with the community. The work of the Anti-Racism Commission of the Diocese is to be commended for their ongoing work to remove barriers to participation of all in the wider Church community.

The clergy in our Black Churches are charged with the same responsibility to see to the spiritual, emotional and physical needs of their parishioners, as are clergy in all other churches. One of the benefits of the Bishop's "Discerning Our Common Cause" sessions in the latter part of last year was the opportunity to hear from congregations their opinions and to open the lines of communications with the Diocesan staff. While this may have been brought about by the financial aspects of the Budget, it created a dialogue that was absent for some time. Communication also breaks down the insular nature of most parishes and encourages participation in the wider church community. In this respect the Black Ministry of the Diocese of New Jersey seeks to increase the communications between congregations so that there are not pockets of parishes that are in effect separate and apart – we are all one body in Christ.

As I have visited with clergy and congregations throughout the diocese there is a sense that a lot of activity is going on. In some parishes transformation is taking place without the awareness or acknowledgement of its members – decreased attendance, aging congregation, deteriorating facilities. In other parishes there is a vitality and the congregation seem inspired by the Holy Spirit in worship, in the number of active ministries, in working together to accomplish the mission of the parish. In conversations in some circumstances, I get the sense that they reserve the right to self-determination regarding the future of the Parish, yet I do not get the sense that they realize that their self-determination carries with it the responsibility to act. I commend the clergy who have responded to the changing needs of their congregation and who seek new approaches to meeting their many needs.

There is much work that lies ahead as we seek to re-vitalize our churches and re-focus our efforts in service to our members and our communities. Black parishes play a determinative, unique and distinctive role in the life of their communities and in the Diocese. Their livelihood in many respects depend on the ability of the wider church to accept their existence as an integral part of our earthly journey, and an equal partner in God's kingdom.

Respectfully Submitted,

The Rev. Canon Clive Oscar Sang, Dcn.  
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The Diocese of New Jersey