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**"In those days": African-American Catholics in Cleveland,
1922-1961**

Blatnica, Dorothy Ann, Ph.D.

Case Western Reserve University, 1992

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"IN THOSE DAYS": AFRICAN AMERICAN CATHOLICS
IN CLEVELAND, 1922-1961

by

DOROTHY ANN BLATNICA, VSC

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Thesis Advisor: Janice L. Reiff, Ph.D.

American Studies Program
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May, 1992

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"IN THOSE DAYS": AFRICAN AMERICAN CATHOLICS
IN CLEVELAND, 1922-1961

Abstract

by

DOROTHY ANN BLATNICA, VSC

This historical survey of the African American Catholic community in Cleveland, Ohio, examines the cultural question of how African American Catholics understood and expressed their religious and cultural identity in the Church in the years prior to the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). The time frame of the study, 1922-1961, marks the beginning of Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Parish, the first African American parish in the diocese of Cleveland, and its subsequent merger with the Bohemian national parish of St. Adalbert. A second African American parish, St. Edward, was established in 1943 and is also central to the research. In addition, fourteen other parishes serve as reference points for the expansion of African American Catholic communities in the city of Cleveland. The source material relies heavily on the oral histories of forty-five African American Catholics as well as previously unexamined archival and newspaper sources.

Brief written interviews are used to supplement the oral accounts as are fifteen interviews with clergy and religious personnel who served in the above parishes. The impact of the parish schools, the number of African American conversions to Catholicism, and the lack of religious vocations constitute three significant dimensions through which the reality of the African American Catholic experience is interpreted. Although institutional considerations capture some aspects of African American Catholic life, the depth of that reality is best understood through the lived experiences of the people themselves as those experiences are interpreted in their own words. This study concludes that Cleveland African American Catholics created vibrant and lasting parish communities in the face of strong social forces and racial attitudes. They both claimed and shaped their own racial and religious identity in accord with their religious convictions, and negotiated the difficult task of being a double minority in their racial and religious spheres.

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Chapter 1

"IN THOSE DAYS"

Whatever is genuinely human must echo in the hearts of the followers of Christ. In our day, the Church senses an echo that is becoming ever more intense. Its source is a spiritual heritage that has brought great joy and hope for African Americans for these three-plus centuries of our presence in this land. It is an echo that offers not only joy and hope, for on occasion it has expressed grief and anguish as well. It is an echo that tells a story born of poverty and affliction, and therefore it must be an echo that the Church receives and embraces.¹

These words introduce *Plenty Good Room*, the most recent statement of the American Catholic Bishops regarding the worship of African American Catholics. They are words which reflect the fundamental attitude of the Second Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic Church toward the cultural realities of the global human community.² They speak of "embracing" the African American

¹National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Plenty Good Room: The Spirit and Truth of African American Catholic Worship* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, Inc., 1990), p. vii.

²The Second Vatican Council, held in Rome from 1962 to 1965, was the gathering of all the bishops of the Roman Catholic Church with the Pope. Their primary goal was to consider the meaning and relationship of the Church to the contemporary world at that time. What resulted was sixteen official documents that addressed major aspects of the Church's reality. It was a watershed event in the life of the Church which brought the Church from a relatively isolationist stance into an integral relationship with the world at large.

spiritual heritage. It was not always so. It is significant that this most recent publication of the American Catholic Church on the African American experience should be addressed to matters of liturgical worship and ritual where the influence of cultural heritage can be most visibly and publicly apparent. It was precisely this question of the cultural interaction of the Roman Catholic tradition with the African American heritage which motivated this study. As is apparent from the content of *Plenty Good Room*, the implications of this interaction are the on-going challenge of the American Catholic community to the present day. Unfortunately, the appreciation of the African American spiritual heritage by the American Catholic Church is not even three decades old. The struggle of African American Catholics to become a vital part of the American Catholic Church is as old as the story of slavery in America itself.³ It is a struggle played out in dioceses across the country. It is a struggle visibly evident in the diocese of Cleveland beginning in 1922.

This study of African American Catholicism in the diocese of Cleveland begins with the birth of the first African American Catholic parish in the diocese, Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament. It concludes with the merger of that parish in 1961 with the

³For the first historical survey of African American Catholics, see Cyprian Davis, O.S.B., *The History of Black Catholics in the United States* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1990).

Bohemian national parish of St. Adalbert.⁴ The significance of both this parish and the time frame of this study is equally real and symbolic. First, the symbolic significance lies in the fact that there were African American Catholics in Cleveland before 1922 and after 1961 who were members of parishes other than Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament. However, the creation of a parish of their own symbolizes their growing numbers and their own sense of community as Catholics. The subsequent merger of this parish with a European ethnic one symbolizes the demographic changes that occurred in the central city which shaped the African American experience to the present.

Secondly, the significance is also real. The African American Catholicism which was nurtured at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament became a permanent factor in the growth of the Cleveland Catholic Diocese. The years of 1922 to 1961 mark a period of time in American Catholic history for African Americans which witnessed the movement from a European immigrant Church to one about to be catapulted into the future by the changes of the Second Vatican

⁴A national parish is one whose membership consists solely of a single ethnic group; a territorial parish is one whose membership consists of all Catholics living within the boundaries of a defined geographical area. National parishes were given boundaries only when another parish of the same ethnic group was established.

Council and by the American civil rights and black consciousness movements of the 1960s.⁵

When referring to this forty-year period, African American Catholics interviewed for this study frequently introduced their remarks with the expression, "In those days" The reference is indicative of their perception of a time which was markedly different from the contemporary position of African Americans in the Catholic Church. Indeed, it was. Though African Americans were converted to Catholicism by the hundreds before 1961, white American Catholics perceived them in a category apart from themselves because African Americans were the recipients of the Church's missionary efforts.⁶ Once Catholic, their spiritual and cultural heritage as African Americans was not regarded as critical to Catholic life by other Catholics in the way that European ethnicity was treated.⁷ African American Catholics were left

⁵For recent general surveys of American Catholic history, see Jay P. Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1985); James Hennessey, S.J., *American Catholics: A History of the Roman Catholic Community in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981); also see as a complement to these studies, Philip Gleason, *Keeping the Faith: American Catholicism Past and Present* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987).

⁶Richard A. Lamanna and Jay J. Coakley, "The Catholic Church and the Negro," in *Contemporary Catholicism in the United States*, ed. Philip Gleason (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1969), pp. 147-193.

⁷Ibid.; also Jay P. Dolan, *The Immigrant Church: New York's Irish and German Catholics, 1815-1865* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975). pp. 24-25; Dolores Liptak, R.S.M., *Immigrants and Their Church* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1989), pp. 171-189.

to their own resourcefulness to determine how to negotiate their racial identity and culture with a Catholic identity and culture. After 1961 these realities of African American Catholic life did not evaporate nor did the struggle to achieve their rightful place in the American Church become easier. What did occur was the recognition of the contribution of the African American experience to the Church and the on-going efforts to incorporate that heritage into the life of the Church as indicated by the opening passage. The Black Catholic movement in the late 1960s spearheaded the changes that occurred in the life of African American Catholics.⁸

To begin, then, the story of the African American Catholic experience in Cleveland must be understood in terms of two simultaneous and interdependent processes. The first dynamic is the interplay between social forces and religious convictions.⁹ The second dynamic is encompassed by the first, namely, the interplay between African American culture and Roman Catholic culture. Furthermore, this interplay was true for white Catholics in their response to African American Catholics as well as for African

⁸For a discussion of this movement, see Cyprian Davis' *The History of Black Catholics in the United States*, pp. 257-59; also see Lamanna and Coakley, and Liptak cited above, n. 5, 6.

⁹"Social forces" is used to encompass educational opportunities, employment practices, housing availability, migration patterns, racial attitudes, and political power. "Religious convictions" is used to indicate a deep-seated commitment to religious doctrine to the extent that the belief shapes and motivates a person's choices on a daily basis and in all aspects of life.

American Catholics. In the final analysis, social forces were the controlling factor for both groups. Religious convictions, though powerful at times, could not bear the pressure of the strong societal influences to which the Cleveland Catholic community was subjected.¹⁰

Consequently, the resolution of the interplay between African American culture and Roman Catholic culture became the sole responsibility of African Americans. The richness of their spiritual heritage was lost to the Church in any overt form until the late 1960s because powerful social attitudes merely compounded the then-current "missionary" attitude of the Church. Though African American Catholics resolved that interplay within their own lives, their cultural reality was all but denied by white Catholics. "In those days," to be Catholic was to take on a European Catholic culture. The white Catholic response to African American Catholics, though generally well-intentioned, continued to be shaped by the larger society. The African American response to Catholicism was the result of their efforts to deal with strong

¹⁰Kenneth Kusmer suggests that the analysis of external, internal, and structural forces at work in the black urban community can significantly create the needed theoretical framework for black urban history. Kenneth Kusmer, "The Black Urban Experience in American History," in *The State of Afro-American History: Past, Present, and Future*, ed. Darlene Clark Hine (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), pp. 104-106.

social forces over which they had little control.¹¹

This is not to say that both white and African American Catholics were victims of society. It is to say that the choices that were made by both groups were influenced more by societal realities than by religious convictions. Nonetheless, religious convictions were real, they were powerful at times and in certain individuals, and they shaped choices that were made. They were simply not strong enough to effect the kinds of choices that would have created the complete social and psychological incorporation of African Americans into the Catholic community. They were not strong enough to create the social justice that would have given flesh to the Catholic doctrine that all peoples are brothers and sisters within the family of God.¹² As the American Catholic Bishops said in 1990, the African American Catholic heritage is still experienced as an "echo." It could have been a full and complete voice had different choices been made "in those days."

¹¹For a summary of African American historiography which sees African Americans as actors in their local experience within a larger context of external forces, see Thomas C. Holt, "Introduction: Whither Now and Why?" in *The State of Afro-American History: Past, Present, and Future*, pp. 1-10; also August Meier, "Introduction: Benjamin Quarles and the Historiography of Black America," in *Black Mosaic: Essays in Afro-American History and Historiography* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), pp. 3-21.

¹²The American Catholic Bishops had issued pastoral letters which addressed the Church's relationship to African Americans in 1843, 1866, 1884, 1919, 1933, 1942, 1943, and 1958 in terms of this study. See, National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Pastoral Letters of the United States Catholic Bishops*, 5 vols. (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1984).

The social forces which subsequently affected both white and African American Cleveland Catholics began to build during the mass migration of African Americans from the South in the first two decades of this century.¹³ At the same time Cleveland was also trying to absorb its extensive European immigrant population. Neighborhoods were commonly identified according to the predominant ethnic population which resided there. Initially it was the same for African Americans who tended to reside in the Central Avenue area of the east side. However, as their numbers increased, discriminatory practices by whites quickly restricted them to the housing available in this area which became a ghetto by 1930.¹⁴ Discriminatory patterns in employment practices and public facilities emerged which further prohibited the growth of the African American community. Reduced to taking less skilled jobs and restricted in public services and accommodations, African Americans witnessed expanding deterioration of housing stock and neighborhoods.

When extensive Southern migration occurred again during World War II, the increase of the African American population brought an even greater intensity to the seriousness of these

¹³The Great Migration has been the subject of much recent scholarship in African American history. For an excellent overview of the literature see Kenneth Kusmer, "The Black Urban Experience in American History," pp. 91-122.

¹⁴Kenneth L. Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape: Black Cleveland, 1870-1930* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1976), pp. 157-173.

issues. Newly arriving Southern African Americans were frequently the rural poor who were poorly educated. Black residential areas expanded into predominantly white neighborhoods and public schools became increasingly segregated both for demographic reasons as well as through deliberate choices by school officials. Crime and disease increased in the overcrowded black ghetto. By and large Cleveland continued to perceive itself as the "liberal" city it had been in the nineteenth century when it exhibited a more integrationist approach, and generally did not acknowledge the growing desperation of African Americans. Little was done to alleviate the situation in any permanent or effective fashion.

White Catholics, not unlike other white Clevelanders, reacted to these social forces out of fear for their social, economic and political well-being. Their fears were frequently exacerbated by those in the community seeking to turn the situation into a financially profitable one for themselves, for example, the real estate agents who used ruthless "blockbusting" tactics. In effect, they fled the city thus isolating themselves from the black social and cultural world. This isolation of the two racial groups had long-term negative effects for the city and for the Church. It prevented any successful possibility of achieving integrated neighborhoods, not just in the city, but in

the suburbs as well, with a few exceptions.¹⁵ For Catholics, in particular, this meant that once predominantly white urban parishes became increasingly all-black parishes when they might have been racially integrated. The impact of such parishes might have had untold positive influences on their neighborhoods had they existed.

African American Catholics, like other Cleveland African Americans, had to confront the effects of these same social forces in their own lives and to survive in spite of them. Some were able to move out of the ghetto, but none were able to escape the effects of racial prejudice.¹⁶ Those who remained in the black neighborhoods of the city had to do what African Americans had learned early on to do, namely, make detestable situations as tolerable as possible. Racism in some form had always had a determining influence in the culture of African Americans and they had achieved the ability to create meaning within their own spheres when society gave them no other options. Thus they created their own businesses, entertainment, social services, banks and insurance companies, religious environment, and educa-

¹⁵At the present time, some eastern suburbs of the city are still undergoing "white flight" as whites continue to move east and south into Geauga, Portage and Summit counties. The western suburbs are even more racially segregated.

¹⁶For more complete discussion of racism in Cleveland, see Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*; Christopher G. Wye, "Midwest Ghetto: Patterns of Negro Life and Thought in Cleveland, Ohio, 1929-1945" (Ph.D. dissertation, Kent State University, 1973).

tional opportunities where possible.¹⁷ When the social forces that had been building for six decades intensified beyond containment, they exploded in the form of neighborhood riots in the mid-1960s.¹⁸

Roman Catholicism was experienced as one of those sources of meaning for African Americans. For some, it offered the possibility for educational and even socioeconomic advancement through the parish school system and contacts with the white community. For others, it became a source of social support through the relationships it provided with others who shared similar value systems. For still others, it was a source of truth that could reach beyond temporal situations to ultimate kinds of meaning.

Within this larger framework of social forces, African American Catholics faced the challenge of blending their own cultural and spiritual backgrounds with that of Roman Catholicism. They faced the situation of being a double minority. As Catholics they were a minority in the African American community. As African Americans they were a minority in the Catholic community.

¹⁷Interview with the Reverend J-Glenn Murray, S.J., Cleveland, Ohio, 5 February 1991; John Hope Franklin, "On the Evolution of Scholarship," in *The State of Afro-American History: Past, Present and Future*, pp. 13-22; Drake and Cayton demonstrated this isolation from social contact, an isolation that African Americans used to give meaning to their lives, see St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City*, 2 vols., rev. and enlarged ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1970).

¹⁸Hearing before the United States Commission on Civil Rights, Cleveland, Ohio, April 1-7, 1966 (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office).

It was, indeed, a position which demanded a clear sense of identity on their part and the effort to achieve that clarity often involved pain. Initially this effort began for the African American Catholics in Cleveland with the creation of a parish of their own.¹⁹ It was a phenomenon which they had known in the South where segregation by parishes was prevalent, but for them it also carried a significance similar to that of the national parish for the immigrant Catholics. It was the opportunity to be with one's own in what was often an unfriendly and unwelcoming environment. To that extent it served the same social function as the national parish: a kind of "way-station" in which to secure one's identity.²⁰ The difference, however, was that immigrant Catholics were "on their way" to assimilation, whereas African Americans would wait for years for full incorporation into American life to occur. Indeed, one might question whether it has yet happened. From the white Catholic perspective such a parish made good sense, since it was seen by the hierarchy, clergy and laity alike as a "mission parish" which had its own unique needs.

¹⁹There was apparently some minor dissent among the African American Catholics which protested this "segregationist" move. There was in the black business community in Cleveland at this time the same debate about "segregationist" versus "integrationist" approaches. See Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, pp. 235-274; Wye, "Midwest Ghetto," pp. 21-22.

²⁰For a discussion of the role of the national parish, see Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience*, pp. 158-194; for a case study, see Stephen J. Shaw, *The Catholic Parish as a Way-Station of Ethnicity and Americanization: Chicago's Germans and Italians, 1903-1939* (Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Publishing Inc., 1991).

Nevertheless, the creation of one and eventually a second African American parish proved to be good decisions that enabled African American Catholics to claim a full and rightful ownership of their Catholicism. Regardless of their identity as "mission parishes," they were not essentially different from any other American Catholic parish with the exception of needing financial assistance. In terms of liturgical and sacramental life, devotional life, societies, social functions, fund-raising activities, and schools they were like all other parishes. So completely was this true, that they in essence denied the existence of the parishioners' cultural heritage. Consequently, the incorporation of anything representative of a black cultural style or religious expression did not occur. What did occur, which no one could control, was the distinctiveness of the spirituality which was lived out simply because these parishioners were African Americans and not Italians or Germans or some other group. African American spirituality was then, and still is, contemplative, holistic, joyful and communitarian.²¹ Despite the fact that it had to be externally contained in European prayer forms, music, language, ritual and symbols, these attitudes or approaches were present.

For the white clergy and women religious who staffed these two parishes, the goal was to create a total parish environment for the parishioners in such a way that every social and

²¹National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Plenty Good Room*, pp. 48-49.

spiritual need could be filled by the parish. This was certainly a reaction to the social environment in which their parishioners lived. First of all, there was a great deal of transiency among many of the parishioners which created the fear that the faith could readily be abandoned if not given a firm foothold in the individual's life. Total immersion in the parish seemed a solution. Secondly, many parishioners, if not converts themselves, were from families that had non-Catholic members. The attraction away from the practice of one's faith was a ready temptation in the eyes of the parish staff members. Such temptation was particularly threatening since Catholic attitudes toward Protestantism at that time were harsh. Protestants were in a state of heresy and if they could not be converted to the truth of Catholicism, then they were to be avoided. It was an attitude that was either defensive or haughty. The fact that African American Protestants more readily incorporated black spiritual and cultural expression in their denominations must have contributed to this Catholic sensitivity unconsciously, if not consciously.

As the social forces intensified in the late 1940s and 1950s, white and African American Catholics were forced to face each other in more direct ways as African Americans joined previously white parishes. Had the social forces not been so powerful an influence, had religious convictions been stronger, had there been more hierarchical and clerical leadership, then the Catholic parishes would not have succumbed to the demographic pat-

tern created by the neighborhood housing patterns. These parishes could have provided rich opportunities for the mutual enrichment of both racial groups. Such opportunities would not have created the place for the full expression of the black spiritual heritage before the Second Vatican Council, but they would have dispelled the racial prejudice which kept African American Catholics from full incorporation in the Catholic community. The leadership that arose from certain members of the hierarchy, clergy, and laity of both races was simply inadequate for the magnitude of the task. African American Catholics themselves had repeatedly shown initiative from the 1930s on in working toward a truly integrated Church.

Consequently, the impact of these social forces was too powerful for the white Catholic community to stand by its professed religious doctrine that all people are equally brothers and sisters and should be treated as such. Nonetheless, this breakdown of religious convictions in the face of social forces was not merely a matter of faltering beliefs. Quite the contrary, the religious convictions on the part of the white Catholic community were resolute, but they were too narrow. Catholics had been trained "to save souls." Clergy and laity alike were actively engaged in the work of converting their non-Catholic

neighbors lest they perish without salvation.²² Religion was a matter of the spirit and it was susceptible, therefore, to being too easily compartmentalized as a dimension of life that did not have to confront social realities other than through charitable enterprises. For some, even, religion was the vehicle with which to override the pain of one's socioeconomic constraints. The Church's mission of taking an activist stand toward the achievement of social justice as it has been articulated in more recent decades, was the mindset of relatively few Catholics in the pre-Vatican Church.²³ This was true of the Cleveland diocese as well. Charity rather than social justice was seen as the Church's moral responsibility to social ills. The result, then, for the diocese in the 1940s and 1950s was blindness to the need for active Church leadership and intervention in the cause of racial justice, rather than a denial of the existence of such injustice which may have been more true of the city at large with its "liberal" self-image.²⁴ The Catholic leadership which was forthcoming, however, did provide fertile ground for African American Catholic leadership and participation in the diocese in the late 1950s and in

²²This belief was never the official teaching of the Catholic Church, however, it was commonly the real sentiment of Catholics toward non-Catholics whether they were religiously affiliated or not.

²³Hennessey, *American Catholics*, pp. 309-313; Gleason, *Keeping the Faith*, pp. 82-96.

²⁴*Cleveland Call and Post*, 4 February 1950; 28 March 1953; 20 April 1957.

future decades.

Though largely isolated by the white Catholic community, African American Catholics continued to create meaning within their own parish communities. In effect, they changed the function of their parishes. What originally began as a place to be with one's own without racial tension, ultimately became the foundation for identity, community, and social responsibility. For some, it is true, the parish was merely a "way-station," often on their way out of the Church. For many others, however, the parish became a place of permanency that gave lasting meaning to their lives.

When the onslaught of the movements of the 1960s struck the black community, these Catholics faced the challenge of naming their identity as African American Catholics, not painlessly, but certainly courageously. They negotiated the frighteningly profound experience of coming to terms with two social and cultural worlds. Initially these worlds could only exist in a kind of parallel relationship without actually becoming mutually engaging. Yet, in spite of this, African American Catholics who remained in the Church managed to reap the best of both of their cultural worlds. After the civil rights and black consciousness challenges of the 1960s, African Americans were forced to find ways to engage their religious commitments and their cultural and spiritual heritages in a mutual penetration rather than just in a parallel relationship. They were compelled by this engagement to

make the Church pay attention to its own statements. The "echo" was no longer deniable and eventually it was recognized for the richness of its possibilities, not just for African American Catholics but for the Church as a whole.

African American Catholics continue to refine the interplay of their religious, spiritual and cultural worlds. For some, it is still a painful experience which indicates how separate their two worlds had to be "in those days." Nevertheless, these efforts are their gift to a diocesan Church still struggling with a multicultural membership. Fortunately, many of the Catholics who experienced these original parishes are the very individuals who hold leadership positions in the diocese and in their parishes in the 1990s.

To conclude, then, the two simultaneous and interdependent dynamics of social forces with religious convictions and African American culture with Roman Catholic culture which characterized the African American Catholic experience, will be surveyed primarily through the perspective of the growth of the two African American national parishes. The effects of education, conversions and lack of vocations will focus attention on critical aspects of that growth. The impact of neighboring territorial parishes in the expansion of the African American Catholic community will be addressed in relationship to the racism which surfaced during this expansion. However, institutional perspectives alone do not capture the essence of African American Catholic life. That essence

can be perceived only through the reality of African American Catholic identity and spirituality with which this study concludes.

Chapter 2

SOCIAL FORCES

The social forces which ultimately controlled the relationships of white and African American Catholics with each other were undoubtedly initiated by the influx of African Americans into the city. As the 1920s began the city of Cleveland had a total population of 796,841 persons. The African American population of 34,451 persons constituted 4.3% of the city's residents. In 1910 they constituted only 1.5% of the city's population.¹ By 1960 African Americans constituted 28.6% of the city's population. Their numerical increase was due in part to large immigrations from the South during the two World Wars when industrial plants needed the labor they provided. The following table indicates the population increases for the time frame of this study.²

¹Kenneth Kusmer's study of the emergence of the black ghetto estimates that three-quarters of this increase came from the migration of people from the South. See, Kenneth L. Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape: Black Cleveland, 1870-1930* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1976), p. 160.

²U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920: Population*, 2:47; U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930: Population*, vol. 3, *Reports by States*, pt. 2, Ohio; U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940*, vol. 2, *Characteristics of the Population*, pt. 5, *Reports by States*, Ohio; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *United States Census of Population: 1950*, vol. 2, *Characteristics of the Population*, pt. 35, Ohio; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *United States Census of Population: 1960*, vol. 1, *Characteristics of Population*, pt. 37, Ohio.

African American Population in the City of Cleveland

Year	Total Population	African American Population	Percentage of African Americans
1910	560,663	8,448	1.5%
1920	796,841	34,451	4.3%
1930	900,429	71,899	8.0%
1940	878,336	84,504	9.6%
1950	914,808	147,850	16.1%
1960	876,050	250,818	28.6%

African Americans were not the only new arrivals to the city in 1920, however. Thirty percent of the city's population was foreign born, but this number steadily declined. By 1950 foreign-born Clevelanders constituted only 15% of the population.³ The juxtaposition of these two groups is particularly significant for understanding the experience of African American Catholics, although a comprehensive comparison is not the purpose of this study. Because Cleveland, like other midwest industrial cities, became home to thousands of European immigrants by the 1920s, its neighborhoods and its churches reflected the national origins of these people. The Catholic Church recognized the religious needs of these immigrant Catholics by establishing national parishes which frequently reflected the ethnic identity of their surrounding neighborhoods. The implications of this phenomenon for African Americans will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

By 1930 ninety percent of the African American population was concentrated on the east side of the Cuyahoga River extending

³Ibid.

eastward to East 105th Street. The northern boundary of their residential area was Euclid Avenue and the southern boundary was Broadway Avenue and the railroad line.⁴ The neighborhoods of this "Central Avenue Area" were still racially mixed by 1930, since African Americans were only sixty percent of the population. Furthermore, the census for 1930 indicates that there were at least some African Americans living in every statistical area of the city itself. Nonetheless, this situation shifted dramatically in the next two decades as the white population left the area. The concentration in this Central Avenue Area not only continued to exist throughout the time frame of this study, but the boundaries expanded and the concentration intensified as the population increased.⁵

Population increase alone is not sufficient to explain the residential location of Cleveland's African Americans. When thousands of African Americans moved into the city during the first Great Migration period (1916-1919), racial discrimination began to appear as well. Discriminatory practices were a major force in the formation of the black ghetto by 1930.⁶

Socioeconomically the identity of African American neighborhoods

⁴See Appendix C.

⁵Ibid.; Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, p. 165. This expansion will be discussed more fully in Chapter Seven.

⁶This occurred in many northern cities. See August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, *From Plantation to Ghetto*, 3rd ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976), pp. 236-237.

underwent major shifts from the early 1920s through the 1940s. Several factors contributed to this change: the continuing immigration of people; the unavailability of housing and subsequent overcharge for rental; the unemployment and change in occupations due to the Depression; and the inability for residential expansion to other neighborhoods due to discriminatory practices and racial violence.

Kenneth Kusmer records that after the Great Migration, Cleveland's black neighborhoods were segregated by class into four distinct socioeconomic zones moving from the downtown business district eastward to East 105th Street. Zone 1 stretched eastward to East 40th Street and was the most deteriorated, overcrowded, and had the least home ownership. Its residents included the most recent Southern migrants who were often illiterate. Zone 2 extended to East 55th Street and was rapidly deteriorating throughout the 1930s. The residents were occupationally the working class as the higher classes continued moving eastward. Zone 3, from East 55th to East 79th was in the transition of becoming a working class area, but from East 65th to East 79th Streets, there was still a distinct middle class. By 1930 upper- and middle-class African Americans were residing in the zone farthest east, the area beyond East 79th Street to East 105th.⁷ However, the next fifteen years changed this entire pattern.

⁷Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, pp. 209-214.

The Depression years of the 1930s produced severe unemployment in the black neighborhoods as elsewhere, and also destroyed many of the black businesses that had provided the economic underpinnings of the Cedar Avenue area. Christopher Wye's study of the ghetto conditions from 1929 to 1945 indicate that a bank, four insurance companies, six undertaking establishments, several hairdressers and barbershops, groceries and retail stores, and most restaurants went out of business by the end of the 1930s. Unemployment produced a demand for housing accommodations that were legally unrentable but desirable because of their lower costs. Clearance for the construction of the public housing projects had destroyed much available housing for African Americans without replacing it, which led to ever-increasing patterns of overcrowding. This pattern did not change in the early 1940s. Even though unemployment decreased, a new influx of Southern migrants deluged these neighborhoods seeking employment and housing. Because the occupational ceiling for African Americans leveled off at the semi-skilled range, they were subjected to rapid dismissals as white soldiers returned to work or else they were forced to hold marginal positions. As of 1950, only 5.5% of African American males were employed at the business and professional levels.⁸

⁸Christopher G. Wye, "Midwest Ghetto: Patterns of Negro Life and Thought in Cleveland, Ohio, 1929-1945" (Ph.D. dissertation, Kent State University, 1973), pp. 115-116; 123-124; 444-456.

According to Wye, some African Americans who were among the upper income group managed to move to outlying areas or "colonies" beyond the East 105th boundary as wartime prosperity made residential relocation possible. These newly expanding African American neighborhoods were in the Glenville, Hough, Mount Pleasant, and Miles Heights areas.⁹ However, the difficulties of securing mortgages, restrictive housing covenants by realtors, and the animosity of white neighbors often made these moves difficult, if not prohibitive. Meanwhile, the increase of population density and demand for housing created deteriorating conditions all the way to the East 105th Street boundary of the Cedar-Central area. As a result, by 1950 socioeconomic differentiation according to residence no longer existed in these neighborhoods.¹⁰

The 1950s witnessed the extensive expansion of the African American population into the Hough, Glenville, Mt. Pleasant and Miles Heights areas because available housing in the Cedar Avenue area simply could not accommodate the continually increasing population. Also, the city of Cleveland initiated a

⁹See Appendix. Glenville is the area located around St. Clair Avenue and East 105th Street near the lakeshore. Hough is a two-mile square area between Euclid and Superior Avenues and East 55th and 105th Streets. Mount Pleasant is the southeast section of the city centered around Kinsman Avenue between Martin Luther King Boulevard and East 155th Street. Miles Heights is southeast of the city in the Miles Avenue-Lee Road area. See David D. Van Tassel and John J. Grabowski (eds.), *The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), pp. 453, 525, 696-697.

¹⁰Wye, "Midwest Ghetto," pp. 103-109.

massive urban renewal program in the part of the Central Avenue area extending from East 14th to East 40th Street. This particular section had the oldest and most deteriorated housing stock in the ghetto. The subsequent dislocation of the lowest socioeconomic African Americans and four to five hundred black businesses created the movement into these other areas of the city.¹¹

According to a study done by The Cleveland Urban League, by 1960 ninety percent of the African Americans in the city of Cleveland lived where two-thirds or more of the population were African Americans. The Central Avenue area was 90% African American, the Hough area 74%; the Glenville area 72%; the Mt. Pleasant area 71%, the Kinsman area 66%, the University Circle area 24%, and the Miles Heights area 28% African American. Only five percent of the city's African American population lived elsewhere in the city.¹² These areas encompassed contiguous census tracts covering fifteen square miles. The boundaries had extended to St. Clair Avenue on the north, Broadway, Corlett, Lee Road, Harvard and Miles Avenues on the south, and the suburbs on the east. In this triangular shaped section of the city was located

¹¹Van Tassel and Grabowski (eds.), *The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, pp. 102-103.

¹²There were only 4,482 African Americans who lived outside the city of Cleveland, that is, in the rest of Cuyahoga County. There were 255,300 African Americans in Cuyahoga County, and 250,818 lived within the city of Cleveland. The boundaries were very clear.

the most dilapidated, overcrowded and oldest housing stock of the city.¹³

However, population and residential statistics alone do not reflect the realities of life for Cleveland's African American community. Residential segregation was compounded by the quality and availability of housing in the black neighborhoods. As the increasing population intensified the demand for housing, white landlords raised rental fees to exorbitant rates and subdivided single family dwellings into multiple units. Families were forced to take in additional persons to help pay for the rent. Such patterns quickly led to the deterioration of these dwellings as well as the fact that landlords seldom made necessary repairs. Some white families who might have stayed in the area as homeowners began to sell for profit or succumbed to the temptation to make a profit through rentals. This pattern was well established in the 1920s. By 1930 the Central Avenue area had become a ghetto.¹⁴

Adequate, affordable housing proved to be one of the severest problems African Americans had to face in Cleveland

¹³The Research Department of The Cleveland Urban League, *The Negro in Cleveland, 1950-63: An Analysis of the Social and Economic Characteristics of the Negro Population* (unpublished report, June, 1964), pp. 3-4.

¹⁴Kusner, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, pp. 166-171. For a similar period in Chicago, see Allan H. Spear, *Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto, 1890-1920* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967).

throughout the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s.¹⁵ In 1933 Cleveland Homes, Inc., became the parent corporation for a federally-funded housing project in the Central area east of East 22nd Street. Twelve million dollars was promised by the federal government if local sponsors raised two million. The major drawback of this project was that it displaced the lowest income families in that area which included primarily Jews, Italians, immigrants and African Americans.

The slum areas to be eliminated extended from Cedar to Central Avenues between East 22nd and East 30th Streets with the exception of the Juvenile Court and Detention Home. Two and three-story buildings were to house 1546 families of the highest eligible income groups. Immediately to the south of this area extending to Scovill Avenue, another 873 families were to be accommodated in similar dwellings. These were also to include some of the higher income groups as was the third projected area for 1246 families between Scovill and Woodland Avenues. None of these housing projects were to accommodate the lowest income families.¹⁶ To add to the desperate conditions these residents were facing, Ohio's law of "eminent domain" enacted in the previous year, permitted the purchase of residents' property at

¹⁵For a comparison with Chicago's housing patterns, see Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

¹⁶*Cleveland Gazette*, 16 September 1933.

less than one-fourth of its value. Further, no provisions were made for those families who were displaced by the building project.¹⁷ The new housing was to rent for \$6.50 a room per month, a price that "automatically bars both the poor colored and poor white residents of the area. The housing in Cleveland's two so-called 'slum clearance' projects, the Cedar-Central area and the Outhwaite area, are not for the poor . . ."¹⁸

Cleveland's weekly black newspaper, *The Gazette*, relentlessly attacked the injustice of the housing project from its proposal to its completion. When the local authorities assumed responsibility for rental of the housing units, the poorest socioeconomic groups were still ignored. The *Gazette's* editor, Harry C. Smith, praised City Councilman Septimus E. Craig's resolution to build a housing project for the lowest income groups who were eliminated from those under construction at the time. Craig had warned and the *Gazette* confirmed that:

Unless a similar project is planned for them, a new "slum" district will be created by them in their search for low cost housing which means the sections of the city on all four sides of the Outhwaite and Cedar-Central housing projects.¹⁹

By 1937 such a process had already begun to take place.

By August of that same year it was becoming clear to Smith that the Cedar-Central units were being saved for non-

¹⁷Ibid., 11 November 1933; 6 February 1937.

¹⁸Ibid., 1 December 1934.

¹⁹Ibid., 6 February 1937.

eligible white families whereas the Outhwaite projects were being rented to African Americans. He continued to call for a response from the African American community to City Council and the housing authorities regarding the inequitable and segregationist rental procedures.²⁰ Councilman Ernest J. Bohn maintained that the federal subsidy was not adequate enough to be able to serve the lowest income groups. He expressed hope that under the U.S. Housing Act subsidies would be substantially larger and allow for such service.²¹

By 1940 the Cleveland Metropolitan Housing Authority became the official landlord of the housing projects instead of federal officials. A re-investigation was begun of residents' incomes in order to eliminate those unqualified by too high an income. Also attempts were introduced to lower the rental rates by eliminating clerical and maintenance personnel and turning maintenance over to tenants.²² According to Thomas Campbell, families on relief were not accepted as tenants because they could not meet the stipulated rental fees. This policy was eventually forbidden in 1949 by the Taft Housing Act. However, this did not eliminate the segregated assignment of residents to certain units even though there was no official policy of segregation. A city

²⁰Ibid., 12, 26 August 1937.

²¹*Catholic Universe Bulletin*, 18 February 1938.

²²*Cleveland Call and Post*, 11 January 1940.

ordinance was passed in 1949 forbidding segregated public housing, but these practices continued into the 1960s.²³

However, government subsidized housing was not the only housing problem for this area of town. In 1937 Jane Edna Hunter, General Secretary of the Phyllis Wheatley Association, called for a united stand by African Americans against any further operating levies until the city remedied conditions in their Central Avenue neighborhoods.²⁴ She was joined in her protest by the Rev. Joseph Gomez, the new pastor of St. James African Methodist Episcopal Church, who secured the adoption of such a resolution during the St. James' Forum.²⁵ Her description indicates the toll that population and discriminatory practices had taken on the area.

She enumerated twelve critical areas that needed urgent attention: sewers clogged with waste material that washed back into the streets with every rainfall; uncollected garbage and rubbish; purse snatchers and holdup gangs roaming the streets

²³Thomas Campbell, "Public Housing," *The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, pp.805-807.

²⁴Hunter (1882-1971) was a prominent social worker and lawyer who founded the Phyllis Wheatley Association in 1911, a social service agency which provided safe and adequate housing for working African American women and also the training of service skills. David Van Tassel and John J. Grabowski, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, p. 535.

²⁵The St. James Literary Forum was begun in 1927 by the pastor of St. James AME Church, the Rev. D. Ormonde Walker, as a public platform where questions of a civic, political or other public nature could be discussed by competent individuals. David Van Tassel and John J. Grabowski, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, p. 855.

unprotected by police; unrepared and untended properties by absentee landlords; dilapidated or vacant buildings; few and uncared for trees; unwashed streets; dark or improperly lighted streets; inadequate police and fire protection necessitating increased or denied fire insurance; violations of zoning laws leading to undesirable businesses in areas with residences, schools, and churches; attic rentals without proper fire escapes; chicken coops in residential areas and spoiled meat being sold in local butcher shops. Single-family dwellings had consistently become home to multiple families. These inhuman living conditions existed to some degree in the entire area between Euclid Avenue on the north and just north of Broadway on the south, and between the Cuyahoga River on the west and East 105th Street on the east.²⁶

Needless to say such conditions and overcrowding only invited illness and crime. Tuberculosis was the cause of 12% of African American deaths in the city in 1939. The lack of enforcement of building, health and sanitation laws accounted for tragic stories on a weekly basis. Cleveland's banking companies were often the recalcitrant landlords, for example, The Mutual Building and Investment Company which owned an apartment building on East 55th Street. City officials were also indicted by the *Call and Post* and the Future Outlook League for their gross neglect of investigation and law enforcement.²⁷ Some local ministers of the

²⁶*Cleveland Call and Post*, 2 January 1937.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 7, 14 March 1940.

black churches apparently attempted to join the efforts to change these neighborhood conditions. There is no evidence that the Catholic clergy were part of this civic effort.

Such conditions prevailed throughout the 1940s west of East 40th Street between Woodland and Cedar Avenues, referred to as the "lower Central Areas." Rents climbed to \$40 and \$50 per month for housing that should not have exceeded \$25. Workers often paid half of their earnings just for rent. One particular Cleveland Heights landlord was earning \$50,000 a year on illegal Central Avenue housing rentals. His scheme involved "the illegal converting of ramshackle dwellings into tenement houses of one-room, eight by twelve feet kitchenettes, which rent for exorbitant sums." Twenty-four couples were found housed in these rooms, paying \$40 a month for rent.²⁸

One-third of the area's dilapidated houses were found to be still in use in the Central area in 1947. The majority had been built at the turn of the century and 288 were built before 1865. Forty-one percent of the family units in this area were considered unfit for human habitation, often lacking private or even indoor plumbing. In 1949 four children died in a fire in a two-family home on East 83rd Street which housed twenty-seven people. The home was described as a "firetrap." The desperate

²⁸Ibid., 7, 14 March 1940.

housing was no longer confined to the lower Central neighborhoods.²⁹

The other neighborhood blight with which African Americans had to contend was crime. In 1937 prostitution, bootlegging, dope, and racketeering in the form of "number and policy" games were sighted as daily vices.³⁰ By 1946 crime figures in the Central area had reached epidemic proportions, according to the *Call and Post* which had been frequently criticized by blacks and whites alike for its sensational coverage of such news. The editor, William O. Walker, felt that such coverage might stir citizens and city officials to action if reality was kept constantly before their attention.

We comprise but 10% of the population of Cleveland but we accounted for 840 major crimes committed last year - just 63% of the total. And believe it or not, the 486 major crimes committed by white folks represents an increase of 6% over 1945, while our reproachful total represents a 6% DECREASE over 1945.

The major crimes cited included robbery, homicides, manslaughter, shootings, stabbings, rapes, and purse snatching.³¹ Clearly the crime rates were in proportion to the poverty level and crowding of the neighborhood.

By January of 1948 an assessment of the previous year was made and statistics revealed that alcohol was a primary component

²⁹Ibid., 18 January 1941; 7 December 1946; 22 February 1947; 15 March 1947; 4 June 1949.

³⁰Ibid., 2 January 1937.

³¹Ibid., 18 January 1947.

of criminal behavior in the Central Areas. Also adequate housing clearly revealed its value as a crime deterrent. Not a single homicide had occurred in Outhwaite Homes, Carver Park Homes, Kinsman and Seville Homes, all housing projects occupied primarily by African Americans. However their immediate overcrowded neighbors were not so fortunate. The highest homicide areas spread from East 14th and Orange Avenues fanning eastward to Woodland and Cedar and outward to East 66th Street. Comparison of police district crime records indicated that better housing bred less crime, especially if the residents owned their homes. Tribute was paid to the efforts of citizens' and ministerial groups, including the Baptist Ministers Association, Interdenominational Ministers Alliance, and Central Areas Community Council, to work toward crime deterrence.³² Again, there is no indication of Catholic clergymen being involved in these community efforts in the Central Areas.

In May of 1949 juvenile delinquency was reported on the rise in the Central Areas.

Residents of the area, accustomed to civic neglect, living in overcrowded slums, frustrated by unemployment, offer feeble protests - occasionally - as their sons and daughters go through the vicious cycle of juvenile court, correction farm -- and Ohio State Penitentiary.

Understaffed social agencies and recreation centers offer inadequate facilities for luring youth away from the glitter of the bright lights, the glib tongues of the pool sharks, and the persuasive voice of the marijuana peddler.

³²Ibid., 24 January 1948.

To demonstrate the magnitude of the problem, this area housed forty-five churches of various denominations, the most churched area in the city. However, they were running against the stiff competition of 148 liquor-selling establishments and thirteen pool parlors. The area was residence to approximately 18,000 young people between the ages of five and twenty-one.³³

Clearly such social realities as blighted housing and unsafe neighborhoods only exacerbated the fears of the white population living in or bordering these neighborhoods. It was a fear that blinded many to the discriminatory practices that bred such desperate living conditions. Not surprisingly, such blindness perpetuated an already vicious circle and certainly did not engender the kinds of decisions on the part of white Clevelanders that could have helped those African Americans working to break the cycle.

Two other factors contributed to and also were the result of the viciousness of this cycle, namely, education and employment of African Americans. Kusmer's study indicates that the Cleveland public schools gradually became segregated in the black neighborhoods because of population shifts. However, during the 1930s school personnel began sending the area's black children to all-black schools even if they lived closer to a predominantly white school. Also, white students were permitted to transfer from schools that were predominantly black. Furthermore, the curricula

³³Ibid., 21 May 1949.

of all-black schools was altered from the standard liberal arts curriculum to ones that emphasized manual and home arts. Clearly, then, these students were already destined for lesser skilled types of employment.³⁴

The Urban League study for the 1950s indicates that the pattern had not changed. "De facto" segregation existed in the Cleveland public schools and the quality of education followed the residential areas according to race. The schools in the central districts of the city had the poorest level of education. Some elementary schools had no libraries. The recommended expenditure per pupil was supposed to be \$500 when in reality it was \$379 for these schools. Teacher-pupil ratio was supposed to be 50 teachers per 1000 students; in actuality it was 39 per 1000. One-third of all the children in the Cleveland school system were described as "culturally and economically deprived" by school and welfare authorities, according to the report.³⁵

The employment opportunities for African Americans were equally limiting.³⁶ In 1920 and 1930, Kusmer's study indicates

³⁴Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, pp. 182-184.

³⁵The Cleveland Urban League, *The Negro in Cleveland, 1950-1963*, pp. 8-9; Wye, "Midwest Ghetto," pp. 53-61.

³⁶James Oliver Horton argues that black class structure cannot be adequately studied until the relationship between black occupations and social status in the black community can be more accurately evaluated, because black occupational opportunities have been limited by discriminatory practices. James Oliver Horton, "Comment," in *The State of Afro-American History: Past, Present, and Future* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), p. 133.

that African American males were over-represented in proportion to their population in the following occupations: clergymen, musicians and music teachers, barbers, porters in stores, draymen, hackmen, teamsters, chauffeurs, porters, servants, and waiters. Subsequently, they were under-represented as professionals, proprietors, managers, and clerical, skilled, and semi-skilled workers. African American females were over-represented as boarding-house keepers, housekeepers, laundresses, dressmakers (not in factories), and servants. They, too, were under-represented as teachers, nurses, clerks, stenographers, typists, and textile operatives.³⁷

In his study of African Americans in Cleveland after World War II, Raymond Jirran indicates that the federal government was a major employer of blacks, particularly in the postal service. However, even there, in 1948 there were indications of discriminatory assignment of black workers to certain routes and denial of some supervisory positions. There was also "a shortage of equitable opportunities in the trade unions" after World War II. The electricians' and plumbers' unions had some of the highest paying positions available in the city, but blacks were still struggling for membership in the 1960s. William J. Ware, an African American Catholic from Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Parish, had organized the black plumbers in 1932. He waited, after repeated attempts in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, to join

³⁷Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, pp. 285-287.

Plumbers' Union Local 55. In 1964 he finally became a union contractor. As late as 1966 there was a combined total of only fifty-one journeymen and four apprentices in the following craft unions: Union of Electricians Local 38; Sheet Metal Workers Local 65; Ironworkers Local 17; Plumbers Local 55; and Pipefitters Local 36.³⁸

The industrial jobs that had become available during World War II for African Americans began to decrease after 1953 as steel mill, foundry, and machinery industries left the Cleveland area. Some 80,000 jobs disappeared while white-collar work opportunities became more available. The African American workers were concentrated in these blue-collar positions. In 1960 over sixty percent of employed African Americans were semi-skilled operatives, about twenty-six percent were service workers, and twelve percent were laborers.³⁹

The differences in employment opportunities for whites and African Americans naturally created a parallel effect in family incomes. In 1949 the median white family income was \$4060; for African Americans it was \$2530. In 1959 the gap had widened: the median family income for whites was \$7350 and for African Americans it was \$4768. In 1959 fifty-six percent of employed

³⁸Raymond J. Jirran, "Cleveland and the Negro Following World War II" (Ph.D. dissertation, Kent State University, 1972), pp. 73-75; 98-111.

³⁹The Urban League, *The Negro in Cleveland, 1950-63*, pp. 12-13.

African Americans were earning less than \$3000 a year, the national minimum. This was compared to forty percent of the white population.⁴⁰

In blatant and dramatic ways the social forces, many of which were driven by racist behaviors, controlled the lives and the neighborhoods of Cleveland's African Americans. It can only be assumed that Catholic African Americans were subjected to these forces to the same degree as other African Americans. However, those who were interviewed for this study seldom described their situations prior to 1960 in terms of the realities described above. Only a few called themselves "poor." The location of their residences indicates that they lived in all sections of the Central Avenue Area from as early as 1922, and many lived in the third and fourth economic zones described by Kusmer in the 1920s and 1930s. The parish of Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament itself was built on East 79th Street in 1923, the border of the third and fourth economic zones. However, the earliest parishioners were not limited to these areas. Likewise, they moved into the "colonies" of African American expansion in the 1940s and 1950s right along with their fellow African Americans, while many others

⁴⁰Ibid., pp. 10-11. Drake and Cayton have argued that education and style of living were the determiners of social status in the black community rather than employment or income, since job discrimination was such a pervasive reality. Therefore, employment and income could not serve as the index of status. St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City*, vol. 2, rev. and enlarged ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1970), pp. 515-519.

maintained their residences in the Central Avenue Area. What is clear from available school records, is that African American Catholics, like their neighbors, moved frequently.⁴¹ This is reasonable given the fact that many were new to the city and initially rented their residences until they could secure more preferable housing, or until they were able to become homeowners.

Using a random sample of 203 school records from the two African American parishes, it is apparent that the majority of fathers of the children enrolled in those schools were employed at or below the semiskilled level. Both in 1940 and in 1950, 69% of these men were working in semiskilled, unskilled or servant levels of employment. The greatest number of men were employed as unskilled workers, primarily laborers. Fifty-four percent were at the unskilled level in 1940, and 43% were at the unskilled level in 1950.⁴² Christopher Wye reported that 71% of African American males in Cleveland in 1950 were in the semiskilled range or lower.⁴³ The similar findings reported here suggest that African American Catholic families were not significantly different

⁴¹Bodnar, Simon and Weber found geographical mobility to be a pattern among blacks in Pittsburgh in the period 1900-1960 as well. They attribute lack of emphasis on homeownership to lack of occupational security and inability to acquire better jobs. This mobility also contributed to the instability of neighborhoods. John Bodnar, Roger Simon, and Michael P. Weber, *Lives of Their Own: Blacks, Italians and Poles in Pittsburgh, 1900-1960* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), pp. 6-7.

⁴²Papers of St. Edward Parish and Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Parish, Housed at St. Adalbert Parish, Cleveland, Ohio.

⁴³Wye, "Midwest Ghetto," pp. 115-116.

socioeconomically from other African Americans. However, it must be noted that the fathers of these school children were not necessarily Catholics themselves and the school records do not consistently report this information. Of the fifty-five African American Catholics who were actually interviewed for this study, almost all, with one or two exceptions, reported completing their high school education; eleven people reported the completion of college degrees by the close of the 1940s. However, this sample is far too small to draw any conclusions about African American Catholics in general.⁴⁴

As significant as these patterns are, the reality of life as it was experienced by those who lived it, is best expressed in their own words. Their recollections and impressions of daily life in these Cleveland neighborhoods give a texture to these statistics. They further suggest that what was worth remembering was not discrimination, blight or poverty, but the quality of human relationships between both whites and blacks alike.

Arthur Heard was born in a primarily Slovenian neighborhood on East 32nd Street off of Superior Avenue in 1924. Nine

⁴⁴In the 1930s, Chicago's African American Catholics were predominantly from the black middle class with some members from the black lower class. Black middle class church members expected race advancement and a rescuing of youth from the dangers of urban living. This would be in accord with what were possible benefits of Catholic Church membership for blacks in Cleveland as well. Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, pp. 670-688; C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), pp. 123-125.

years later his family moved to East 29th Street off of Scovill Avenue, a primarily Italian neighborhood where he lived across the street from Anthony Celebreeze, the future mayor of Cleveland and Federal Court Judge whose family had lived there from 1918 and remained there until 1945. Heard was the youngest child of his mother, widowed in 1935. Before the war, they moved to East 22nd and Central Avenue where they lived above a store which was eventually converted into a residence. This was to remain the family home for twenty years. Shortly after his marriage, Heard purchased a home in 1947 in the neighborhood of St. Thomas Aquinas Parish located on Superior Avenue and Ansel Road, and by 1954 he had moved into a brand new home which he purchased in the Mount Pleasant area. Heard went to night school for fourteen years after leaving the Marines in 1946 and graduated from Cleveland Marshall Law School. His childhood experiences with his Slovenian and Italian neighbors had been so positive that he admits he had to learn to identify with African Americans who were not accustomed to relating to non-blacks. "I actually had to learn about my own people. That's a fact. But I'm very blessed that I have been around people of all skills and all stratas of life."⁴⁵

Mary St. Clair and her sister, Helen Murphy, had experiences similar to that of Arthur Heard. They grew up in St. Bridget's Parish on East 22nd Street in a neighborhood mixed with

⁴⁵Interview with Arthur B. Heard, Cleveland, Ohio, 18 December 1990.

Italians, Irish and Slovaks. They and their white girlfriends who attended St. Bridget's School would walk each other to and from school as children were inclined to do. As they dropped each other off on the way home, mothers would invite the children into their kitchens for fruit or nuts. It wasn't until one of the girls' brothers called them "niggers" in the schoolyard one day that they realized there was such a thing as race. As Helen Murphy said, "I didn't think I was black." Later, as a young mother with three small boys, Mary St. Clair remembered her Italian neighbor encouraging her to let the boys play in his empty garages so they wouldn't have to play in the street. In turn, one of the African American men in the neighborhood helped this Italian man's paralyzed son regain the ability to walk.⁴⁶

Another woman recalled living among Bohemian neighbors on Amos Avenue when her family came to Cleveland in 1928. She lived there for eleven years before moving to Grantwood Avenue in the St. Thomas Aquinas Parish area north of Superior Avenue which she recalls being a Jewish neighborhood.⁴⁷ Barbara Robinson's childhood friend was an Italian girl on East 71st Street, the home of many Italian families. She recalled often spending the night at her home. Likewise, Barbara's husband lived near East 105th and Cedar as a youngster and he, too, had many Italian neighbors. She

⁴⁶Interview with Mary St. Clair and Helen Murphy, Cleveland, Ohio, 10 December 1990.

⁴⁷Anonymous interview, Cleveland, Ohio, 6 November 1990.

recalled that similar financial circumstances brought people together during the 30s.

We all had to struggle to get the same thing. I didn't know I lived in a ghetto until I had grown up. We didn't know what a ghetto was. We never thought about those kinds of things. Everybody took care of their property. Everybody was proud of where they lived.⁴⁸

The area around St. Edward's Parish at East 69th and Woodland Avenue was still largely a white neighborhood at the beginning of the 1930s. One woman who attended school there from 1928-31 remembered many Irish and German families in the neighborhoods there. By the late 1930s she remembered more of the African Americans moving into the area and parishioners trying to welcome them into the parish.⁴⁹ Another parishioner who married in 1931 and lived in the East 55th and Woodland area remembered that neighborhood being very safe well into the 1940s.

You could go out and walk. do anything and nobody bothered. You'd hear a lot of people say that. I used to come home just anytime, I know they did. If I had to go to a wake, it didn't matter where it was, I got out and went by myself, got the bus and came back home.⁵⁰

However, Ann Cowan reported that by the late 1940s there were only a couple of white families left in St. Edward's Parish. She herself had grown up on East 38th Street where her parents bought

⁴⁸Interview with Barbara Drake Robinson, Bedford Heights, Ohio, 16 January 1991.

⁴⁹Anonymous interview, Shaker Heights, Ohio, 21 January 1991.

⁵⁰Anonymous interview, East Cleveland, Ohio, 15 January 1991.

their own home around 1930. She remembered it being "like a ghetto" by the late 1930s although there were German and Italian families in the neighborhood when they moved there.⁵¹

Margaret Santiago describes the East 55th and Kinsman area where she grew up as a child in the late 1920s and 1930s as a "beautiful middleclass neighborhood."

Well, you know, back in those days, everybody was the same, you didn't have much relief [welfare] like they have now. We all were integrated in one class, the parents worked, nobody made a whole lot of money, we all got along. My father retired from the steel mill and we always had a car, so I didn't think we did too bad. I stayed there until I got married.⁵²

Like Margaret, Mary James was also the daughter of a steel mill worker who was transferred to Cleveland from a North Carolina steel mill during the depression in 1934. Her family lived on Quincy Avenue at East 77th Street but moved into the newly-built projects on East 46th Street within a short time. The James family left the projects in 1941 because her father's salary at the steel mill exceeded the amount which qualified people for residency. Subsequently they bought a home in the Glenville area near East 105th Street.⁵³ Another young woman who came to

⁵¹Interview with Ann Cowan, Cleveland, Ohio, 13 November 1990.

⁵²Interview with Margaret Santiago, Cleveland, Ohio, 15 November 1990.

⁵³Interview with Mary James, Cleveland, Ohio, 18 December 1990.

Cleveland in the late 1930s to seek nurses' training and also lived in the projects, recalled:

When I got married I went into the projects because at that time there was a housing shortage. We both worked. We were above what they would call poverty level. But at that particular time, because of the housing shortage, you could live in the projects and pay equivalent rent. So I lived there. They put us out after the rules changed about the salaries. Houses were hard to find. French's Funeral Home was looking for some help to keep their funeral home going when they were out. There was no salary but they did give us living arrangements. So we lived in French's Funeral Home on East 40th Street. I had two little boys there. We lived there about six years and worked as greeters and receptionists. Then we went and got a real home on Imperial Avenue.⁵⁴

Philomena Ware McClellan, whose father, William Ware, had been instrumental in securing union membership for the black plumbing contractors in the 1960s and was also an active member of the Urban League and the NAACP, recalled growing up in the 1930s and 1940s. She remembered him working very hard so that her mother would not have to go out to work.⁵⁵ Barbara Drake Robinson also remembered growing up in the 1930s and attending Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament School where Sister Emma kept a room full of donated clothing. "If anyone was there that didn't have any clothes, they always had something to wear." She described people as being "really poor," yet she added,

I guess there were some people who were on charity, but most of the people that I can think about right now all had jobs. I was fortunate to live with my mother and father and we lived in a home with my grandmother. My grandmother had a

⁵⁴Anonymous interview, Cleveland, Ohio, 20 December 1990.

⁵⁵Interview with Philomena Ware McClellan, Cleveland, Ohio, 24 January 1991.

beauty shop. My mother worked at times, not all the time. My father was a waiter. I can't ever remember being without anything, ever. It seemed like I always had enough and even a little more besides. Then there were others like me. I guess it was sort of like middle class blacks at the time. I guess we were surrounded by middle class blacks. But you didn't think about those things then.

Barbara Robinson's grandmother had a beauty shop in the front room of her house at 2187 East 71st Street which she owned herself. Her father worked in the big hotels and country clubs in the city.⁵⁶

On the other hand, Lelia Berry described many of the people at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament as poor, like her own family. She attributed their poverty to the fact that her mother was a widow. They would receive clothing and food baskets at Thanksgiving and Christmas from the parish as did many other families even during the 1920s. The Berry family lived at East 67th Street during these years and she and her sister would walk from home to Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament School on East 79th Street every day including lunchtime. She described her own neighborhood as racially mixed in those years.⁵⁷

Whether they remember these early neighborhoods as poor or comfortable, African American Catholics did not identify the crime and deterioration that obviously existed in their midst. Whether they were children or young adults at the time, they

⁵⁶Interview with Barbara Drake Robinson, 16 January 1991.

⁵⁷Interview with Lelia Berry, Cleveland, Ohio, 14 December 1990.

recalled the meshing of people's lives as the characteristic quality of those years. Many of those interviewed described racial prejudice as something that had to be taught to children by adults. Many made conscious choices to see beyond skin color as the criteria for relationships.

A woman recalled that as a young student nurse at City Hospital she was encouraged to seek out the friendship of the only other African American girl in her class. She did not personally care for this girl and could not understand their logic.

Just because she's black doesn't mean that I have to like her. My best friend was a white girl. And we ate together, we slept together, we went out together, we shared secrets, just like any other girlfriends. My mother was a schoolteacher and I think that she gave me fairly good values. She taught me to think for myself. Don't go along with prejudice and other people's opinions just to get along with them.⁵⁸

Philomena McClellan recalled her childhood:

We had white neighbors when I was coming up and we played and played around, lived next door to the playground and we were all one. We played together and went to school together and fished together and swam together and everything. You put children together and there's nothing but mankind, person-to-person relationships. Until they learn about hate.⁵⁹

Finally, the discriminatory practices that so limited black employment opportunities were not evident in every individual case. A glimpse at three situations indicates the initiative and determination of these African American Catholics who were

⁵⁸Anonymous interview, Cleveland, Ohio, 20 December 1990.

⁵⁹Interview with Philomena McClellan, 24 January 1991.

also instrumental in the foundation of Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Parish from its beginning in 1922.

William Gleason came to Cleveland as a young teenager near the end of World War I from Mobile, Alabama. He lived near East 35th and Central Avenue at the time. By the time his middle child was born in 1929, he was living on East 125th Street in the Mount Pleasant area. His family moved into the newly built housing projects around 1938 and lived there for a couple of years when they returned to the Mount Pleasant area. He and his family were members of Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Parish and all of his children attended school there. William Gleason worked for Alonzo Wright as manager of his large Standard Oil gas station at East 55th and Woodland for eighteen years and then bought a restaurant near the same intersection during World War II which eventually became Gleason's Musical Bar. Distinguished for paying his staff of twenty-two employees more than union wages, he operated this popular night club until the mid-sixties.⁶⁰

George Moore, on the other hand, was from one of the few African American families who lived on the West Side of the city. He lived at West 30th and Franklin Boulevard for nineteen years. He also made long treks across town to attend church at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Parish because there was a need for altar boys when the parish first began. His mother and grandmother both

⁶⁰Interview with William Gleason, Shaker Heights, Ohio, 28 January 1991; interview with Louis Gleason, Cleveland, Ohio, 30 October 1990; *Call and Post*, 7 August 1948.

studied nursing in Cleveland. His grandmother came to Cleveland because she had heard that there was a nursing school here which was admitting African American women. Moore graduated from St. Patrick's Elementary School on Bridge Avenue, St. Ignatius High School, and The Ohio State University. He later became a regular columnist for *The Cleveland Press*.⁶¹

One of the earliest businessmen within the African American Catholic community was Frank E. Petite who came to Cleveland in 1919. He and his wife, Fannie, bought a home on East 105th off Cedar Avenue after having lived in Akron during World War I. The Petites had come north because of the availability of work. Frank Petite was a skilled sheet metal worker. In 1928 the Petites bought a building from a Jewish owner in which they opened a combination hardware-sheet metal store at 7120 Cedar Avenue and made their residence above the store. As Fannie Petite said, "Cedar Avenue was just beginning to get Colored business at that time." Frank Petite helped to organize the Progressive Business Alliance for African American businessmen and served as its president for ten years. As mentioned earlier, the Petites were one of the founding families of Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Parish. When they later moved into the territory of St. Thomas Aquinas Parish at Superior and Ansel Road they joined that parish. They were described as being "well off" by some of their peers. Fannie

⁶¹Interview with George Anthony Moore, Cleveland Heights, Ohio, 15 January 1991.

Petite maintained the hardware store for five years after her husband's death in 1959.⁶²

The African American Catholics were a composite of all those characteristics which were typical of other African Americans in Cleveland. They had to respond to the same social forces in their environment. However, there was one characteristic which made them a double minority, unlike other African Americans, and that was their Catholicism. Catholicism placed them in a whole other world.

⁶²*Fanny Petite Memoir, Oral History Transcript, The Greater Cleveland Ethnographic Museum, pp. 14, 18-19, February 10, 1979; Call and Post, 26 December 1959.*

Chapter 3

THE WORLD OF CATHOLIC CULTURE

The Roman Catholic Church in the diocese of Cleveland was, in many ways, its own world. Yet, like all other social institutions in the city, it was subject to and participant in the same social forces that prevailed from 1922 to 1961. Because the Catholic Church has an international identity, its vision and its concerns are often shaped by that perspective. This is equally true of its national identity. It can never afford to be just a "local" church. This national and international identity creates a cultural reality that has roots deep in the past as well as extensive interactions in the present. Such a cultural configuration is both blessing and curse. It was so in the diocese of Cleveland for African American Catholics "in those days." They had to negotiate their experiences as African Americans at the same time that they had to claim the Catholic world as their own. Further, the Catholic world had a very defined sense of where African Americans fit in that world.

The Cleveland Catholic Diocese acquired its present geographical boundaries in January of 1943 when the Diocese of Youngstown was created from it. From 1911 until 1943, the Cleveland diocese covered fourteen Ohio civil counties. The split in 1943 left the Cleveland Diocese with eight counties: Cuyahoga,

Lake, Geauga, Summit, Medina, Wayne, Ashland, and Lorain. The Catholic population of the diocese at that point was 422,161 persons in a total population of 1,850,000 people. By 1957 the Catholic population had increased to 701,000 and the general population reached 2,500,000 people. The Catholic population increased 66% in that time period while the general population increased by 25%. Three-fourths of the Catholics in the entire diocese lived in Cuyahoga County, and the county itself was 34% Catholic.

The Catholic population increase was attributed to a higher birth rate than the average for the general population and to immigration. By 1957, the newest immigrants to the diocese were 12,000 Catholic displaced persons and refugees from Europe, 10,000 Puerto Ricans, and an undetermined number of African Americans. The estimate given for the total of African American Catholics in the diocese in 1957 was between 8,000 and 10,000 or about 1.4% of the total population. Immigration also contributed an undetermined number who moved from other locations in the country to the industrial employment opportunities available in Cleveland. The Catholics of the diocese were being served in 223 parishes throughout the eight counties.¹

By 1960 the statistics showed even greater increases than in 1957. It is particularly important to note that the increase occurred in other significant aspects as well, and not merely in

¹*Catholic Universe Bulletin*, 29 November 1957.

the general population of the diocese alone. One would expect school enrollment to increase with the population because Catholic parents were mandated to send their children to Catholic schools. However, religious vocations increased as well. This is significant because religious vocations among African American Catholics did not increase proportionately with their population.

Growth of the Cleveland Catholic Diocese

	<u>1943</u>	<u>1960</u>	<u>% Increase</u>
Catholic Population	422,161	791,229	87%
Priests	688	864	26%
Seminarians	202	553	174%
Women Religious	2,448	3,507	43%
Students Under Catholic Instruction	52,978	189,574	258%

The extremely small proportion of African American Catholics in the diocese is a critical factor in this study. When seen in relationship to the vast numbers of white Catholics, it is understandable that they were just one of the many groups that church officials had to consider. Nonetheless, it does not excuse any decisions that were racist in nature. Because of their small population, it appears that Bishop Joseph Schrembs, who was the bishop of the diocese from 1921 to 1945, tended to delegate his responsibility for their care.² Once delegated, he left it to the

²Both Schrembs and Hoban were given the title of "Archbishop" during their tenures as the ordinary of the diocese. In both cases, the title was given by the Pope in recognition of their service to the Church. Schrembs received the title in March, 1939, and Hoban in July, 1951. This honorary title did not change the status of the diocese to that of an archdiocese which automatically has an archbishop as its head. Both men will be referred to as "Bishop" throughout the text for consistency.

person responsible to keep him informed, but he exerted little further influence unless difficulties came to his attention. Bishop Edward F. Hoban, who succeeded Schrembs from 1945 to 1966, apparently followed a similar philosophy. Both men gave much of their time and attention to the building of parishes and institutions needed to accommodate the growing population of the diocese.³

Immigration had long been one of the major contributors to that growth. Immigrant patterns in Cleveland were similar to those in other midwest industrial cities, and like other dioceses, Cleveland erected national parishes to serve the various ethnic groups as they came to the city.⁴ Although it was the practice of Cleveland's bishops to encourage the assimilation of immigrants and to have them experience each other through diocesan gatherings, their European cultural backgrounds and languages were respected in these parishes. The common practice was to appoint pastors who were of the same nationality as the congregation, and to secure the services of religious congregations of women of that

³For short biographical sketches of the two bishops, see Works Project Administration, The Ohio Historical Records Survey Project, *Parishes of the Catholic Church, Diocese of Cleveland: History and Records* (Cleveland: Cadillac Press, 1942), pp. 26-32; *Catholic Universe Bulletin*, "Souvenir of the Fortieth Episcopal Jubilee of Archbishop Edward F. Hoban," 17 November 1961.

⁴For a discussion of the immigrant Church, see Dolores Liptak, R.S.M., *Immigrants and Their Church* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1989); Jay P. Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1985), pp. 127-346.

nationality to teach in the parish schools.⁵ Such parishes helped newly arrived immigrants to secure their identity in what was often perceived to be a hostile environment to their religion. In some cases, the hostility was real. They also enabled the immigrants to maintain their ethnic practices, devotions and language and to pass these on to their children.⁶

By 1922, within the Central Avenue Area, there were five such national parishes: St. Joseph (German), St. Anthony (Italian), St. Martin (Slovak), Holy Trinity (German), St. Adalbert (Bohemian).⁷ The first three, located near East 22nd Street, were within a few blocks of each other. There were also two territorial parishes in the Central Area, St. Bridget and St. Edward, which were not officially identified with a national group, but were in reality Irish congregations because they serviced English-speaking Catholics. St. Agnes was the third territorial parish in the area, which, when originally built in 1893 at East 79th and Euclid Avenue, was in one of the most affluent neighborhoods of the city.⁸ It was not uncommon in Cleveland to have two Catholic

⁵Michael J. Hynes, *History of the Diocese of Cleveland: Origin and Growth, 1847-1952* (Cleveland: The World Publishing Co., 1953), pp. 323-327.

⁶Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience*, pp. 158-189.

⁷See Appendix.

⁸Works Project Administration, *Parishes of the Catholic Church, Diocese of Cleveland*, pp. 53, 79, 81, 88-89, 111, 133, 145.

churches on opposite corners of a city block. This was the case with Holy Trinity and St. Edward which were two blocks apart.

African American Catholics who moved into this area of the city after World War I, were surrounded by the reality of these national and territorial parishes. They had known segregated parishes in the South because of racist policies, but in Cleveland, too, they were witnesses to a phenomenon of ethnic segregation. It was not unknown for ethnic Catholics to have little contact with each other. Thus, African American Catholics called upon the national parish model when they themselves sought to have a parish of their own.

The cultural climate of the diocese was shaped by more than ethnic realities, however. Bishop Schrembs was busy organizing and developing the social welfare institutions and programs of the diocese. Bishop Hoban increased the number and availability of hospitals, orphanages, nursing homes, homes for the aged and the disabled. The leadership provided by these two men provided lasting foundations for the Church's works of charity. Schrembs was noted for his concern for the development of the Catholic Charities Corporation and annual appeal which had been initiated by his predecessor, Bishop John Farrelly. Schrembs was a member of the National Catholic War Council which later became the National Catholic Welfare Conference, the national organization of American Catholic Bishops. Before coming to Cleveland he had been a member of the episcopal committee which issued the American

Catholic Bishops' Program for Reconstruction in 1919 following World War I. Under this appointment, then, he was instrumental in helping to advocate such practices as a minimum wage act, unemployment and health insurance, the rights of workers to organize, and means to reduce excessive profits.⁹ Consequently, the Catholics of the diocese were encouraged by this episcopal leadership to cultivate and practice attitudes of concern for others, particularly other Catholics who stood in need. Certainly in the earliest decades of this century, many Catholics were in need of the Church's charity and advocacy as new immigrant laborers. The leadership provided a necessary response.

The same Catholic concern was mobilized on behalf of the international Church when Communist regimes began to overtake countries in Eastern Europe. Not only did Cleveland offer refuge to numerous persons who fled such takeovers, but Catholics raised financial support for their escapes and staged protests on their behalf to American government officials.¹⁰

At the same time, lay Catholics were being encouraged to take an active role in the spiritual and temporal development of the diocese and their parishes through various lay organizations besides those formed as ethnic fraternal and devotional groups.

⁹Ibid., pp. 30-32.

¹⁰See the discussion in Hynes, *History of the Cleveland Diocese*, pp. 394-99; also see the weekly coverage of these international Catholic issues in the *Catholic Universe Bulletin* for these years.

Again, Bishop Schrembs had been instrumental in developing the National Councils of Men and of Women which began to have diocesan branches across the country. Other groups, such as the Catholic Youth Organization, were established under the auspices of the Catholic Charities Bureau. By 1930 the diocese boasted of at least ninety benevolent, social and religious organizations, ranging from credit unions to Marian sodalities.¹¹

In effect, there was some diocesan organization for every spiritual and temporal need of Catholics. Many of these organizations had parish affiliate groups as well. In the name of Catholic Action the laity were not only being organized into effective groups, but they were being challenged by their clergy to make those groups bear fruit. It was the role of the priest to inspire the laity to action. Thus, Catholics had numerous opportunities to involve themselves in the life of the Church beyond its spiritual activities both at the parish and at the diocesan level. Their attention and concern were frequently drawn to people and needs beyond themselves. One such effort, for example, was the nationwide Legion of Decency movement which began in the mid-1930s and extended through the 1950s. Moral evaluations of current film and newstand literature were made available, legislation was sought, public officials and store owners were

¹¹Hynes, *History of the Diocese of Cleveland*, pp. 344-49, 458-62; also see, for example, *Catholic Universe Bulletin*, 18 April 1930; 14 February, 6 March 1936; 31 October 1941; 10 April 1942; 22 January 1943.

personally contacted, and Catholics took the Legion's pledge not to frequent such establishments which promoted indecent materials. Local Holy Name Societies and the Knights of Columbus were involved in this crusade for decency.¹² Such mobilization of the laity explains, in part, the response African American Catholics received from their white co-religionists when they needed assistance in the establishment and maintenance of their parish. That they did not experience greater acceptance by white Catholics must be attributed to forces broader than the influence and resources of the Catholic Church.

Catholic culture was further shaped by the spirituality and devotional life of Catholics. Often the clergy themselves were instrumental in advocating particular devotional practices as was the bishop himself. Bishop Schrembs had great personal devotion to the Eucharist, the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ retained in Catholic churches in the form of a white host. He was also given to spectacular public devotional gatherings for diocesan Catholics which required the use of the Cleveland Stadium. In 1931, the need for a common expression of prayer was deemed necessary due to the depth of the depression and to commemorate Schrembs' tenth anniversary as bishop of the diocese. Sponsored by the Holy Name Societies of the diocese, 75,000 people jammed the stadium as an autogiro dropped roses on the Eucharistic

¹²See, for example, *Catholic Universe Bulletin*, 15, 29 June 1934; 3 July 1936; 1 November, 6 December 1940; 4 February, 9 December 1955; 28 September 1956.

procession. It was described as the "greatest religious occasion in the history of the diocese."¹³ Again in 1934, 80,000 people filled the Stadium to celebrate "Catholic Day" and to hear the apostolic delegate, The Most Reverend Amleto Cicognani, convene the gathering of the Catholic Hospital Association of America and Canada. It was his first official visit to the city.¹⁴

In 1934 Bishop Schrembs was named the promoter of a National Eucharistic Congress by the American bishops. On September 23-26, 1935, the Public Auditorium was used as the site for the Congress and the Stadium was used for the solemn closing. To say that the closing was a "climactic spectacle" was no exaggeration. A procession of 20,000 included diocesan groups, parishes, school children, clergy and hierarchy to form a living monstrance (the gold vessel used to display the sacred communion host) on the playing field. The Stadium itself was filled with Congress and diocesan participants.¹⁵ Smaller versions of this national event were held in various parts of the diocese such as Youngstown, Akron, Canton, and Painesville throughout the 1930s and early 1940s.¹⁶

¹³Ibid., 4, 11 September 1931.

¹⁴Ibid., 8 June 1934.

¹⁵Ibid., 30 November 1934; 25 January, 15 February, 20, 27 September 1935.

¹⁶Ibid., 23 May 1941.

Again in 1942 the Holy Name Societies sponsored a prayer rally for America and for victory, held in the Public Auditorium which was attended by 15,000 people.¹⁷ Such events are noteworthy because they are indicative of the extent to which Catholic life was focused on external manifestations of spirituality. The public witness of one's faith was a predominant attitude of the times and motivated such public displays of pomp and ceremony. Even though ethnic distinctions and prejudices existed among some Catholics, there were opportunities to experience one's Catholic identity from larger perspectives. That Bishop Schrembs may have had diocesan unity as well as devotion as one of his motives for these events is certainly possible. There is no evidence to indicate that African American Catholics were not a part of these diocesan activities.

If Catholics felt distanced from other Catholics because of ethnicity, they felt doubly so toward Protestant Americans because of religion. Association with non-Catholics was discouraged. Marriages between Catholics and persons of another faith were tolerated but strongly discouraged for fear of loss of the faith.¹⁸ Catholics who did marry non-Catholics received the sacrament of matrimony in the rectory or sacristy of the church rather than in the sanctuary where the wedding ritual of two Catholics was held. Catholics in such marriages were encouraged

¹⁷Ibid., 9, 23 January 1942.

¹⁸Ibid., 5 October 1945.

to pray for the conversion of their partner to Catholicism. Participation in church services of another denomination was forbidden, but attendance was permitted for reasons of social propriety, such as funerals or weddings. Thus, the Catholic world had very clear boundaries.

Catholics were taught by their Church that their religion was the one, true religion by which salvation could be achieved. Protestant Christians were no longer in possession of the fullness of truth due to the heresy of their founders which took them outside the Catholic communion of believers. The Church never officially taught that one had to be Catholic in order to be saved, however, popular belief was more inclined to hold that Catholicism was necessary for salvation. Efforts to convert non-Catholics were considered praiseworthy. Catholic churches were always ready to offer convert instructions if there were no regularly scheduled "convert classes."¹⁹

The religious distance between Catholics and non-Catholics was a particularly critical issue for African American Catholics. Many had been converts themselves and had family members who were non-Catholic. Others were married to non-Catholics. This reality had significant consequences for the African American Catholic experience and will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

¹⁹Conversation with the Rev. Thomas W. Tifft, Ph.D., St. Mary Seminary, Wickliffe, Ohio, 17 February 1992.

This particular attitude prevailed in the Catholic community well into the 1960s.

It was intimately connected to two further attitudes related to the Catholic Church's self-concept. American Catholics tended to alternate between defensiveness and triumphalism.²⁰ Often they felt the need to defend their religion against the attacks, real and otherwise, of others outside the faith. Often the defensiveness was further connected to the question of whether Catholics were capable of being good Americans. At other times, because of their certainty about the absolute truth of their religion, Catholics were condescending or patronizing in their relationships with non-Catholics. These two attitudes were prevalent before the decree of the Second Vatican Council on religious freedom. The triumphal attitude compounds the position the Church took in relation to African Americans in general. It is the Church's missionary approach which underlies the entire African American Catholic experience.

Beginning with the Second Plenary Council of Baltimore of the American Catholic hierarchy in 1866, every official statement of Church officials relative to African Americans addresses the Church's relationship to them as a "missionary endeavor." The Third Plenary Council of Baltimore in 1884, with pressure from the

²⁰Of course, American Catholics have contended with this since the colonial experience. For a discussion of this period, see Philip Gleason, *Keeping the Faith: American Catholicism Past and Present* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press), pp. 152-177.

Vatican, established an annual collection in all the dioceses of the United States for missionary work among African and Native Americans.²¹ This attitude placed African Americans in a completely different category than non-Catholics. The salvation of Protestant souls may have been questioned by some, but mission peoples truly needed salvation in the eyes of the Church. This being the case, the most noble action Catholics could take, in their own eyes, was to share the most important gift they had with others, their faith. The Catholic Board for Mission Work among the Colored People suggested it was the best restitution that could be made for the evil of slavery.²²

The fundamental attitude was sincere and authentic. However, it readily fed into social attitudes which placed African Americans into an inferior position among other human beings. The result was that African American Catholics, though baptized and full members of the Church, were still regarded as a distinct group psychologically from other Catholics. Native Americans were also in this category of mission peoples. Fundamentally, cultural differences and religious approaches distinct from European Christianity qualified a group for missionary efforts which began with European explorations in the sixteenth century. A sample of

²¹For a complete discussion of the response of the American Catholic hierarchy, see Cyprian Davis, O.S.B., *The History of Black Catholics in the United States* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Co., 1990), pp. 116-144.

²²Papers of Bishop Joseph Schrembs pertaining to Black Catholic Issues, Archives, Diocese of Cleveland (hereafter, ADC).

this attitude taken from the source material of this research is indicative of the attitude itself and of the misguided attitude it, in fact, created. The first excerpt is from the letter for the annual appeal for African and Native Americans by the Commission of Archbishops responsible for the collection and distribution of the donations:

Negroes and Indians may be strangers to us in faith but not in nativity. They are our own countrymen - stray sheep starving and shivering at our very gates.²³

The following excerpt is taken from a 1932 letter of Bishop Joseph Schrembs to Mother Mary Katharine Drexel, the Superior General of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament who staffed the two Cleveland African American parishes:

The Colored problem is in many respects today the greatest missionary problem of the Catholic Church in America, but, strange to say, very few comparatively seem to have any sympathetic interest therein. One would almost think they believe that the poor Negroes have no souls. I realize, of course, the great difficulty which comes from the social relationship between the white and the colored people. The background of slavery also is a powerful factor towards the prejudice engendered in the American people at large against the Colored race.²⁴

The final excerpt is from the 1936 letter of the Vatican Sacred Consistorial Congregation to the American Catholic hierarchy:

. . . one cannot think without sadness of how much remains to be accomplished, and of the fact that millions of these

²³Cardinal James Gibbons of Baltimore, Archbishop Dennis Dougherty of Philadelphia, Archbishop Patrick Hayes of New York, the Commission responsible for the annual appeal for African and Native Americans, 1920. Cited in *Catholic Universe Bulletin*, 13 February 1920.

²⁴Papers of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, ADC.

Negroes know little or nothing of the Divine Savior's revelation and are therefore deprived of the benefits of the faith. . . Now more than ever they are exposed to the dangers of unbelief and to pernicious doctrines of every sort; and, although they are strongly inclined to religion, by their simple nature they easily fall victims to superstitions and prejudices. There is urgent need, therefore, to take their condition to heart and to procure for them the light of the true teaching of Jesus Christ.²⁵

The diocesan paper was always ready to announce the need for conversions among African Americans as was the Bishop himself. In a confirmation ceremony at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Parish in 1932, he remarked that there was great need for missionary activity among the 80,000 African Americans in the city since only 1000 of them belonged to the parish.²⁶ As late as 1953 when Michael Hynes wrote the history of the diocese, he included the description of the two African American parishes in the chapter entitled, "The Missions." This chapter included a discussion of diocesan outreach to foreign and home missions.²⁷ The further irony of calling these parishes "missions" was the fact that some of the parishioners had been Catholics for generations, some whose Catholic ancestors pre-dated the Civil War.²⁸ They had been Catholics and Americans longer than many Cleveland Catholics!

²⁵Papers of Bishop Joseph Schrembs pertaining to Black Catholic Issues, ADC.

²⁶Ibid., 13 May 1932.

²⁷Hynes, *History of the Diocese of Cleveland*, pp. 445-46.

²⁸Interview with George Anthony Moore, Cleveland Heights, Ohio, 15 January 1991.

It is apparent, then, that this attitude and approach which so dominated white Catholic thinking placed the African American Catholics in a category unto themselves. This further prevented the possibility of full social and psychological incorporation of African American Catholics. This reality, coupled with the absence of black cultural and spiritual heritage in the spiritual life of the Church, made for the double-minority experience of African American Catholics. They, and they alone, had to assume the task of determining what it meant for them to be African American Catholics. Not surprisingly, the answers were as varied as the individuals.²⁹

They were also faced with the challenge of determining what it meant to be African American Catholics among other African Americans. These relationships ranged from awe and respect, to acceptance, indifference, misunderstanding, and even dislike. Lemuel Walcott recalled that it was difficult being Catholic because it was perceived by the black community as "a white man's church." Though it may be considered simply childhood behavior between different cultural groups, he remembered fighting the neighborhood public school kids on the way to and from school in the 1930s. "We fought. I'm not talking with words, I'm talking in a fist fight situation in many instances, just to be supportive of our faith. We were earmarked and designated as the ones to take

²⁹This topic will be discussed more fully in Chapter Nine.

abuse." The Catholic children were dismissed from Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament School a half hour before the public school dismissal to try to avoid such hostilities. It was Walcott's perception that the Catholic children had to keep proving themselves. Joe Richardson confirmed these neighborhood fights. The non-Catholic children accused the Catholics of thinking they were better than the non-Catholics because their training in school was different.³⁰

Two decades later LeMoyne Nesbitt had similar reactions from his friends. "I remember as a kid being a Catholic, you really were an outsider as a black Catholic." Catholic practices like the abstinence from meat on Fridays was a source for ridicule from many of his friends. They often expected him to act "holier" or to be somehow different than they were. It was especially difficult for him because of the sparsity of African American Catholic friends in his neighborhood. Those who were his age were often living in other neighborhoods of the city. He felt he had to hurdle barriers with black neighbors as well as white ones. "Sometimes you just didn't tell people what you were."³¹

Other relationships were not quite that volatile, but several people reported experiencing disapproval from non-Catholic

³⁰Interview with Lemuel J. Walcott, Cleveland, Ohio, 9 November 1990. Interview with Joseph Richardson, Cleveland, Ohio, 10 November 1990.

³¹Interview with LeMoyne Nesbitt, Cleveland, Ohio, 5 December 1990.

African Americans. Blontee Anderson's children experienced some difficulties gaining acceptance in the St. Agnes Parish neighborhood. The other black children could not understand why her children went to Catholic school at St. Agnes. Even her adult peers had the same difficulty. Blontee Anderson was determined, nonetheless, to have her children receive a Catholic school education because of the discipline they would receive there. The entire family eventually became Catholics. Her neighbors could not understand why she would want to subject her children to what they perceived as the false worship of saints and other such devotional practices in the Catholic religion. She, however, had her husband's support and remained adamant in her choice.³²

Another woman became Catholic because she married a Catholic and wanted to be part of his and her children's religion though she personally had great difficulty with some of its rituals and use of Latin. Her friends thought she was foolish for converting and for a long time she admits that she felt they were right. It wasn't until the 1960s when many Church practices changed that she really felt part of her religion.³³ Others, too, received little encouragement from family and friends who felt the new converts were simply making life more difficult for them-

³²Interview with Blontee Anderson, Cleveland, Ohio, 17 December 1990.

³³Anonymous interview, Shaker Heights, Ohio, 8 January 1991.

selves. "The only thing that my family said was that black people have a hard way to go as it is, why are you making it worse?"³⁴

For some African Americans, Catholic and non-Catholic, Catholicism was equated with status. To be Catholic meant to move into a higher social status which was considered an "uppity" gesture by some, and an opportunity by others. For many, this interpretation created considerable tension. For Charles Johnson, it was his family who felt he was trying to be someone he could never be. Once a member of the Church, he felt he had to fight for recognition and respect from white Catholics:

We're always proving ourselves. Not only did I have to prove myself to white people that are Catholic, but I had to prove myself to black people that I had joined the Catholic Church because I really wanted to be Catholic.

On the other hand, he also acknowledged that he himself was embarrassed by other non-Catholic African Americans who were from lower socioeconomic levels who wanted to enter the Church. Conversely, because of the perceived socioeconomic level of Catholics, many poor African Americans shied away from the Catholic Church for fear of personal embarrassment. For some African Americans, then, membership in the Catholic Church meant an abandonment of the black community.³⁵ The Reverend Gene Wilson, himself a convert to Catholicism at St. Edward Parish and a priest, confirmed these tensions that many had to negotiate internally and with their

³⁴Anonymous interview, Cleveland, Ohio, 20 December 1990.

³⁵Interview with the Rev. Mr. Charles Johnson, Cleveland, Ohio, 17 December 1990.

peers. He agreed that some came to the Church precisely for a change of status. When these persons experienced rejection from other blacks in the community, they would often attribute the rejection to jealousy.³⁶

The need for status most certainly had many roots, but one sociological factor may have contributed to the apparent awareness of class distinctions among African Americans and that was the arrival of the less educated from the rural areas of the South. Fannie Petite reported with pride her ability to speak English so clearly that people could not believe she came from the South, whereas, she noted, those who were more recent arrivals needed to be taught not only the correct pronunciation of English, but also manners of dress and style.³⁷ She attributed her refinement to the education she received in the South from the Sisters.³⁸ Similarly, Margaret Santiago felt that some Southern blacks misused their new-found freedom in the North and the unfortunate image they created was projected onto all African Americans. Northern-born African Americans frequently resented

³⁶Interview with the Reverend Gene Wilson, C.S.S.P., Cleveland, Ohio, 6 August 1991.

³⁷See Kenneth L. Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape: Black Cleveland, 1870-1930* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1976), pp. 215-220. For a discussion of this adjustment period in Chicago for the Great Migration, see James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), pp. 132-156.

³⁸*Fanny Petite Memoir, Oral History Transcript*, February 10, 1979, pp. 42-43.

the assumption that all blacks came from the South.³⁹ That there was a need for social adjustment and adaptation on the part of newly arrived Southern African Americans was confirmed by the regular "Do's and Don'ts" cartoon featured for years in *The Call and Post* which gave pithy little maxims regarding acceptable behavior and manners.⁴⁰

Many African American Catholics found acceptance by their non-Catholic associates. Louis Gleason was part of the Boy Scout troop at Antioch Baptist Church before Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament had its own troop.⁴¹ Sister Rosella Holloman credited the acceptance she experienced to the fact that many of the Catholics were from families that still had Protestant members, and so the religious variety created the grounds for mutual acceptance of each other.⁴² For some, their families were pleased that the person was embracing a religious commitment of some kind. This frequently led to another family member's conversion to the faith.⁴³

³⁹Interview with Margaret Santiago, 15 November 1990.

⁴⁰See for example, *Cleveland Call and Post*, 8 March 1952.

⁴¹Interview with Louis Gleason, Cleveland, Ohio, 30 October 1990.

⁴²Interview with Sr. Rosella Holloman, C.S.A., Cleveland, Ohio, 23 November 1990.

⁴³Interviews with Mary James, Cleveland, Ohio, 18 December 1990; Lelia Berry, Cleveland, Ohio, 14 December 1990; Ann Cowan, Cleveland, Ohio, 13 November 1990.

Finally, there were those who vividly recalled the outright respect and admiration they received from non-Catholics. Fannie Petite warmly remembered a conversation with the Reverend Wade McKinney from Antioch Baptist Church, when he came to visit her husband in the Cleveland Clinic. Both men had never encountered the other's religion among blacks until their adulthood, and both shared a mutual admiration for the other's religious commitment. Frank Petite had only known Catholic African Americans in Louisiana, and Wade McKinney had only known Baptists.⁴⁴ Barbara Robinson remembered as a child feeling that "We were put on a pedestal. We were different. We didn't feel different, but most of our friends thought we were different. They kind of looked at you funny."⁴⁵

Similarly, George Moore recalled a great deal of respect for African American Catholics in the early days. He attributes this regard to the dignity and solemnity of Catholic worship which was so different from the more emotional style of some of the Protestant denominations in the neighborhood:

One thing, too, that I've found out, even the strangest and most unshackled and the most unbridled, disorganized black that I can think of - they've all had a lot of respect for the Catholic Church. It's always been there. It's always been an abiding thing.⁴⁶

⁴⁴*Fanny Petite Memoir, Oral History Transcript*, February 10, 1979, p. 26.

⁴⁵Interview with Barbara Robinson, Bedford Heights, Ohio, 16 January 1991.

⁴⁶Interview with George Moore, 15 January 1991.

For Florence Jolly, the admiration was particularly noticeable when the Catholic children would assemble in the churchyard for some devotional procession when they would be attired in veils or some other kind of distinguishable clothing. The non-Catholic mothers on the street would line up their own children to marvel at the sight.⁴⁷

Besides the relationships African American Catholics developed in the black community, they also fully enjoyed their distinct cultural heritages. Some people vividly recalled their appreciation of musical aspects of their culture. Mary St.Clair remembered her fondness for the neighborhood barefoot preacher who would walk the street in the summer with a little band of followers playing drums, tambourines and a little organ. She said it was the drum that somehow attracted her long before identifying it with African origins.⁴⁸ Both Mary James and Philomena McClellan recalled their mothers singing spirituals around the house while they cooked or cleaned. Philomena McClellan believed it was her mother's way of instilling religious and moral values in her children as they learned her favorite hymns.⁴⁹ Numerous persons made reference to the popular and long-lived nationwide radio program,

⁴⁷Interview with Florence Jolly, East Cleveland, Ohio, 10 January 1991.

⁴⁸Interview with Mary St.Clair, Cleveland, Ohio, 10 December 1990.

⁴⁹Interviews with Mary James, 18 December 1990; Philomena McClellan, Cleveland, Ohio, 24 January 1991.

"Wings Over Jordan," which originated in Cleveland in 1938 and celebrated its 500th broadcast in 1947. The choir at Gethsemane Baptist Church, East 30th Street and Central Avenue, became so renowned in the city that WGAR Radio agreed to air their talent on the local program, "The Negro Hour." When the station became affiliated with Columbia Broadcasting System, "Wings Over Jordan" became the featured Sunday morning choir. Eventually the choir began airing on a fifteen-minute daily basis.⁵⁰

African Americans admit that it is almost impossible to identify African American culture as a single phenomenon because of the diversity of their places of origin and the regional backgrounds from which they come. Nonetheless, they readily immersed themselves in whatever cultural expressions that they identified as their own.

One final characteristic that certainly had to influence relationships both inside and outside the black community as well as cultural boundaries, was the fact that many African American Catholics were the offspring of interracial marriages. In many cases the marriages had occurred among grandparents and great-grandparents. Some had taken place in slave situations, although that does not seem to be true in all cases. Often the non-African

⁵⁰*Cleveland Call and Post*, 5 January 1939; 4 January 1940; 18 January, 19 July, 8 November 1941; 24 May, 2 August 1947.

American was a Caucasian, but there were frequent reports of Native American parentage as well.⁵¹

And so a paradox remains. African American Catholics were both a part of and not a part of their black community. Immersed in its neighborhoods, its culture, its relationships though they were, they somehow stood apart from it all in their own eyes and frequently in the eyes of other African Americans. Clearly they were a minority. The source of this distinction is also to be found in those same neighborhoods. It was the life and culture created at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament and St. Edward Parishes.

⁵¹For example, interviews with Louis Gleason, 30 October 1990; Ocilla Gayters, Cleveland, Ohio, 4 December 1990; Dorothea Hite, 7 November 1990; LeMoyné Nesbitt, 5 December 1990; Fannie Petite, Cleveland, Ohio, 9 November 1990; Mary St. Clair, 10 December 1990; Anonymous interviews, Cleveland, Ohio, 6 November, 20 December 1990; Akron, Ohio, 21 December 1990.

Chapter 4

OUR LADY OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT PARISH

When Archbishop Francis Janssens established the first black parishes in the diocese of New Orleans in 1895, he did so firmly believing that African Americans would appreciate having their own parishes where they would not be forced into passive roles as they had been in the predominantly white parishes. Described by Cyprian Davis as "a daring, innovative man," Janssens exhibited genuine pastoral concern for African American Catholics, unlike many other Southern bishops of his day. During his tenure as archbishop, the black parishes were maintained like the national ones in that membership was optional, that is, African Americans were free to continue to belong to territorial parishes. By 1909 under his successors, however, membership in the black parishes was no longer optional.¹

When a group of Cleveland African American Catholics, several of whom were from New Orleans, sought to establish the first black parish in the city, they shared Archbishop Janssens philosophy. The motivation in both cases was for the opportunity to claim full ownership for Catholicism. They acted out of the

¹Cyprian Davis, O.S.B., *The History of Black Catholics in the United States* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Co., 1990), pp. 208-209.

recognition that they were not likely to change the attitudes of white Catholics in the territorial parishes. They chose to accommodate the situation so that they, like any other national group, could experience full participation in the life of their parish. Certainly their neighborhoods in the Central Avenue Area had sufficient models for their "national parish," but it is more plausible that they acted out of models they knew from the South.²

On January 29, 1922, about fifty African American Catholics organized themselves as a social club at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Williams. Harriet Williams and her friend, Anna Lomax, had already spent several years making the acquaintance of other Catholic African Americans as they became aware of them in the city. The social club had located at least a hundred other African Americans of whom ninety percent were estimated to be Catholic and the others very much interested in the faith or wishing to reclaim it. It was the ardent desire of this small club to seek the formation of a parish. Through the efforts of Oliver G. Waters, a fifteen-year member of St. Philomena's parish, they were able to secure the friendship of the pastor, the Reverend Joseph F. Smith, who met with them on March 28th and enthusiastically assured them that their hopes could be realized. A committee was

²Free people of color were not unknown to have been economically well situated in Louisiana. Davis, *History of Black Catholics*, p. 208. In some places, Creole Catholics had their own parishes apart from African American Catholics. Anonymous interview, Akron, Ohio, 21 December 1990; for an example, see Gary B. Mills, *The Forgotten People: Cane River's Creoles of Color* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977).

formed to make a formal petition to Bishop Joseph Schrembs for diocesan recognition of a parish. The committee consisted of Oliver G. Waters, chairperson, and Mrs. Anna Lomax, Mrs. Harriet Williams, and John F. Johnson.³

The words of the petition dated April 3, 1922, are striking in their astute description of contemporary realities and attitudes:

Among the many diverse nationalities that go to make up the Catholic body of this large cosmopolitan city . . . there are about two hundred persons of Negro birth, who are scattered throughout the various parishes and consequently so overshadowed and hidden by the countless thousands of other worshippers [sic] as to be unknown and almost of no consequence.

. . . we are nevertheless deeply conscious of the fact that our usefulness is greatly curtailed. That the holy aspirations which surge within the hearts of our boys to serve as acolytes at the altar of their God, or the virgin longing that inflames the souls of our girls for the loving, devoted service in the various activities of a Catholic parish, is in nearly every case, either smothered in the inception or finally withered away through lack of opportunity and encouragement.

It is by no means in a spirit of pique or resentment that we view these matters; recognizing as we do that the world is not governed by idealistic principles, and that it is the part of discretion to deal sanely and wisely with social and economic forces as we find them both within and without the church.⁴

The social club had encountered some resistance to this proposed parish from among some of the Catholic African Americans who maintained that such a parish would only create greater

³Papers of Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Parish, ADC.

⁴Ibid., Papers of Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Parish (hereafter, OLBS).

segregation.⁵ However, the club maintained that such a parish was needed for "material uplift" as well as for spiritual reasons. The club professed to be a charitable organization as well as a social one. Undoubtedly they were aware of the temporal needs of newly arriving African Americans to the city and felt that the educational and charitable services available in a parish would be a benefit. Further, they recognized that the parish could readily serve as a source for effective "evangelization of the masses," again, a responsibility that was frequently the work of the laity in the South.⁶

Bishop Schrembs, in turn, saw it as his duty to provide the means for the gospel message to be brought to African Americans. It was his feeling that unless a parish be established for them, their numbers would be even more drastically reduced as the years unfolded. He cited the value of parish schools as a means of evangelizing non-Catholic students who could potentially be instrumental in their parents' conversion to the faith.⁷

⁵Kusmer discusses this integrationist vs. segregationist philosophy among Cleveland's African Americans. It could be found in the business and civic communities as well. See Kenneth L. Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape: Black Cleveland, 1870-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976), pp. 235-36. James Grossman suggests that Southern migrants preferred the security of black institutions and had, therefore, a "pluralist" rather than an "integrationist" view of social institutions. James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 8.

⁶Davis, *History of Black Catholics*, p. 210.

⁷*Catholic Universe*, 14 April 1922.

In this, he and the African Americans saw eye to eye. Where they differed was in a more fundamental understanding. Schrembs, like many of his contemporary colleagues, saw African Americans as unfortunate souls needing the missionary efforts of the Church to elevate their lives materially and spiritually in much the same way as did peoples who were recipients of the Church's foreign missionary work. African American Catholics, on the other hand, understood their authentic membership in the Church and had no doubts as to their rightful place in it.

Thus, on April 11, 1922, the bishop met with this group of African American Catholics in St. Bridget's Parish Hall and officially announced the formation of their parish. He noted that a group had protested the church's establishment for fear of creating greater segregation as well as inviting greater discriminatory behavior by the diocese itself. He dismissed their objections as untenable. He announced:

My plan is to put up a building that will take care of the present needs, with two school rooms attached. The building will be so constructed that it can be enlarged when the need arises. I contemplate that the cost will not exceed \$25,000. I consider the establishing of this parish an historical event, and if any one wishes to give the amount needed and have the church built in memory of some of their loved ones, I will give to them the privilege of naming the church.⁸

He appointed the Reverend Thomas E. McKenney pastor. The white pastor, a member of the diocesan clergy, already had experience in the neighborhoods from which his parishioners would come,

⁸Ibid., 14 April 1922.

but more importantly, he had some understanding of the African American people. After ordination he had been assigned to St. Agnes Parish under the Reverend Gilbert Jennings and then served as an Army chaplain with an African American regiment in World War I. Upon returning to Cleveland he eventually began helping at St. Philomena's Parish where he became better acquainted with the pastor, the Reverend Joseph Smith. Smith had already made attempts at evangelization of the African Americans, establishing him as a key figure in this phase of the project.⁹

The persons who came forward and donated the suggested amount were none other than Catherine and Emma Smith, the sisters of the Reverend Joseph Smith who had originally supported the group's proposal. The donation was given in the name of their deceased brother, James, who had held an executive position in the Standard Oil Company. Having died without heirs, he made them and their priest brother his beneficiaries. The Smith commitment to the development of the new parish was to be a long and faithful one.¹⁰ The bishop himself donated \$1000 to the new parish as did the Reverend Monsignor Francis T. Moran, pastor of St. Patrick's Parish in 1923. The Cathedral parish contributed \$1,430 and Monsignor Smith's parish, St. Philomena, donated \$2,300. Priest friends of both Smith and McKenney also contributed and became

⁹Ibid., 14 April 1922.

¹⁰Papers of OLBS, ADC.

instrumental in securing the assistance of their parishioners on behalf of the new endeavor.¹¹

The new parish began to hold services on June 18, 1922, in the chapel at St. Joseph's Franciscan Monastery on Woodland Avenue until the church building was constructed on a 150 X 169 square foot piece of property at 2354 East 79th Street between Central and Quincy Avenues. The parishioners began to receive assistance from a number of sources. Undoubtedly the need for funds was imperative, but the *Catholic Universe* reported that the Smith donation was contingent on a matching amount being raised to enable the parish to get a healthy financial start. A special collection for the parish was taken throughout the diocese in late spring. A bazaar was held on June 23-24th in the Eagles' Hall at East 55th and Central Avenue as the first of many fund-raising events. It featured the normal bazaar attractions but advertised, in addition, "two colored orchestras; all the musicians are ladies and are directed by Mrs. Pickett, a member of the parish." The proceeds were designated for the purchase of the convent.¹²

A group of women called the "Tabernacle Society" was formed in July to sew vestments and altar linens and to care for

¹¹Papers of OLBS, Archives, Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, Bensalem, PA; Papers of OLBS, ADC; *Catholic Universe*, 14 April 1922; 5 January 1923.

¹²*Catholic Universe*, 28 April, 23 June 1922.

the altar and sanctuary after the church was built.¹³ The members were racially mixed and this relationship of interracial cooperation and help was typical of those early years. Apparently they also met at the Ursuline Convent and received assistance from the Sisters. Further help was rendered by Company 29 of the Cleveland Fire Department on East 79th and Woodland who built the original altar for the church. Father McKenney is reported to have served as chaplain for such groups and obviously managed to obtain mutual aid from those relationships. He engaged in a number of projects that apparently were sources of financial income for the parish, at one point leading a pilgrimage to Europe in 1930.¹⁴

It is clear that Bishop Schrembs kept his promise to permit the donor to name the parish, but apparently this did not occur before a preliminary name had come into use. The *Catholic Universe* uses the name "St. Monica" at least twice in its coverage of the parish throughout the summer months of 1922. The name would have been entirely appropriate, given the fact that Monica was a saint of African birth. The source of this name is not clear, but it is certainly possible that it came from the

¹³The officers were Miss Emma Disette of Lake Shore Road, West, the President; Dorothy Lawton of 1255 East 73rd Street, Vice-President; Miss Rose O'Neil of 2071 East 83rd Street, Secretary; and Miss Anna Gunn, Treasurer.

¹⁴*Catholic Universe*, 21 July 1922; Papers of OLBS, Archives, Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament.

parishioners themselves.¹⁵ However, the wishes of the Smith sisters were respected and the parish was given the name of "Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament" by the time of the cornerstone laying in December of 1922.¹⁶

Social and fund-raising events continued on a fairly regular basis throughout the 1920s involving the efforts of blacks and whites alike. Card parties, bazaars, rummage sales and chicken dinners, and a lawn fete and social in August, 1922, were held on the parish grounds. These were open to anyone of either race who wanted to assist the parish. Other fund-raising events were held, for example, at St. Thomas Aquinas Parish Hall and the Moose Hall on East 9th Street. These off-parish sites were used, it seems, when the white friends of the parish sponsored the activity. White Catholics, particularly those who were friends of the clergy involved with the new parish, readily responded with assistance. Nonetheless, it was a response to a missionary appeal rather than a sense of equality with the new parishioners.

¹⁵The diocesan newspaper, *The Catholic Universe*, uses "Catholic Church for the Colored" in most of its reporting and this same title appears on official parish letterhead in November of 1922. The point merits emphasis in that it is indicative of just how unusual this new parish was considered to be both by the press and probably the diocese at large. Headlines consistently appear larger or bolder when the parish is reported, at least in the first couple of years. Clearly this was not the typical new parish in the diocese.

¹⁶*Catholic Universe*, 16 June; 25 August 1922; Papers of OLBS, ADC.

Occasionally these events featured entertainment provided by the parishioners themselves. On one occasion in 1925 entertainment was alternately provided by an Irish piper and violinist and a "colored" jazz orchestra. In 1929 Cleveland radio artist Billie Banks performed spirituals as part of a musicale at a chicken dinner along with concert baritone Oliver Waters; soloists Mrs. Robert Corom [sic] and Mrs. Hazel Lyons; and concert violinist Louie Jones.¹⁷ One of the founding parishioners at age ninety-five recalled those early events as times of hard work yet filled with eager enthusiasm:

We used to have bazaars and how I worked on those bazaars. We would have 'em on the grounds and people would just come off the streets, you know, and walk in the yard because it was around the church and downtown stores would send us things to sell. Hough Bakeries was just getting started and they'd send stuff over for us to sell. . . . Nobody knows how we enjoyed everything, everybody was just bubblin' over tryin' to help that church and tryin' to do things for it.¹⁸

Bishop Schrembs straightforwardly asked the Knights of Columbus to take the financial support of the parish as a special work. Again, his attitude is sincere, but revealing of the missionary mentality of the Church:

We have a responsibility for the Negro. He has a soul that is as white in the sight of God as yours and mine . . . Look at the Negro in your midst and give him the blessings of the religion that is yours . . . There is a little Negro church that is trying to build something out on 79th Street with a

¹⁷*Catholic Universe*, 26 January, 16 March, 6 April, 23 November 1923; *Catholic Universe Bulletin*, 4 September, 23 October 1925; 29 January 1926; 24 May, 27 September 1929.

¹⁸Interview with Fannie I. Petite, Cleveland, Ohio, 9 November, 1990.

young and devoted priest who is giving his life to that work. I saw him but this afternoon, and he is my inspiration for what I am saying to you tonight. There are three Sisters there - three white Sisters. What are you doing for them? Do you want something to do? . . . Then I say adopt that little Negro parish and other parishes in the diocese of Cleveland that likely will grow up, and make that your work for the present . . . The Negro question in the city and in the diocese of Cleveland is a vision that is worthy of the Knights of Columbus . . .¹⁹

Such a tone from the lips of the diocesan bishop may have motivated financial aid, but it also reinforced the missionary mentality for this prestigious group of white business and professional men relative to their black fellow Catholics.

The cornerstone of the new church was laid on December 3, 1922. Fannie Petite recalled that day since it was her husband, Frank, a tinsmith, who had helped construct the box which held the contents of the cornerstone:

Frank and Father McKenney went to the contractor and they drew up the wordings of this cornerstone. Oh, how many times I heard the words of that cornerstone! I remember that Sunday they laid the cornerstone, people standing all the way out on 79th. The bus used to go through 79th then and they had police protection all around, keeping people out of the way of the bus going through, you know, 79th is narrow. But I'll never forget that Sunday! And we thought our work was finished and we could sit down and enjoy our church, but we had just got started.²⁰

The small brick \$40,000 church was built with the help of the parishioners and was ready for use by June of 1923. It had a seating capacity for approximately 250 people and displayed such donations as a fifteenth century sanctuary bell donated by a non-

¹⁹*Catholic Universe*, 20 October 1922.

²⁰Interview with Fannie Petite, 9 November 1990.

Catholic family, and the organ donated by John D. Rockefeller, Sr., former neighbor and friend of the Reverend Monsignor Joseph Smith. The new parish had grown to 130 families in the first year of its existence. On Sunday, June 24th, Bishop Schrembs dedicated the church in a solemn ceremony accompanied by a male-female choir of parishioners under the direction of the Reverend Joseph Trainor, the diocesan director of music, and Murray Adams, the parish organist.²¹

Just like the pastors of national parishes who sought women religious suited to serve their congregations, Father McKenney wasted no time in securing women religious to staff his new parish. By the summer of 1922 he had gone to Cornwells Heights, Pennsylvania, to arrange for the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament to come to do social and educational work. The order had been founded in 1891 by Mother Katharine Drexel,²² the then-current General Superior, for ministry exclusively to Native and African Americans. Mother Katharine was a frequent visitor to the city after her Sisters took up residence at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament and she regularly visited with parishioners in their

²¹*Catholic Universe*, 23 February, 30 March, 6 April, 22, 29 June 1923.

²²She was the daughter of Francis Anthony Drexel of the Philadelphia banking family, and had inherited over \$2 million which she had used to establish and maintain her religious congregation. Katharine Drexel was elevated to beatification by the Catholic Church in 1988, a stage in the process by which a person becomes a canonized saint. For a biography, see Sr. Consuela Marie Duffy, S.B.S., *Katharine Drexel: A Biography* (Bensalem, PA: The Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, 1966).

homes. Joe Richardson remembered her well since she had introduced his father and mother to each other in Virginia. His mother had attended the Sisters' school in Rock Castle, Virginia, and his father knew Mother Katharine from her frequent use of the train on which he was a Pullman porter. She often visited the family here in Cleveland after they relocated in 1904. When asked to describe her, Richardson said:

Very saintly person. Very saintly. Well, like most people who are used to wealth, they're usually humble. You can always tell the johnny-come-latelies because they want to swing their wealth around. But she, as I remember her, was very humble and a very decent person as I look back on her.²³

Katharine Drexel's background is significant not just because it makes for a remarkable story, but because her influence on the women of her congregation enabled them to stress the educational and cultural advancement they knew was possible for African Americans. A woman of culture herself, this value seems to have pervaded the ministry of her Sisters.

Sister Mary of Lourdes, Sister Mary Evangelista and Sister Mary Amelia were the first Sisters to arrive in Cleveland in August of 1922. Since the convent was being rebuilt over a foundation of a previous building, the Sisters lived in a temporarily vacated home of one of their relatives, Mr. William Schmoldt. The Ursuline Sisters had prepared a welcoming ceremony

²³Interview with Joseph Richardson, Cleveland, Ohio, 10 November 1990.

with the children of the parish, while their parents had arranged for a garden party.

For the first two years the Sisters engaged primarily in social work, visiting the homes of the people in the neighborhoods both Catholic and non-Catholic alike. They also visited hospitals and other institutions, gave classes in religious instruction, and started a manual arts club for the children.²⁴ This social work was to continue as part of the regular ministry of the Sisters even after the school was opened. Though this was a regular practice of this particular religious congregation of women, it was not common in most parishes. These women had adapted their ministry to the needs of the people they served.

In 1924 a frame, three-room school was built at the rear of the church property housing a kindergarten, combined first-second grade, and a combined third-fourth grade classes. The first year's enrollment was about one hundred children. A Parent-Teacher Association was also organized to help manage the expenses of the school. In the summer of 1925 two more classrooms were added to the school building so that seven grades were being taught by 1927. Additional property was purchased adjacent to the school in 1928 and a house on the property was remodeled and enlarged for use as a new convent. The original convent building

²⁴Papers of OLBS, Archives, Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament.

became the "Annex" and was then used to house the seventh and eighth grades. By 1930 the enrollment reached about 180 pupils.²⁵

Lelia Berry described her years at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament school where she began in 1924, the year her father died. She was six years old and had a sister a year younger. The family was not Catholic, but her widowed mother was attracted by the care she knew was extended by the Sisters to the children:

The Catholic school was the best for us at the time. And the learning was better, always has been. They [the Sisters] would walk us down the street, they would see that we got home and they were all interested in giving home visits. Oh, they were good. I know that at the time we thought they were very strict, but as you look at things now, they were beautiful, beautiful. I can remember incidents where they would take us into the convent and give us our lunch . . .

They had an interest in us. They taught us to dance. . . . They wanted us to be musicians if we had the talent. Those that could take music, they saw that we had music lessons.

Referring to the home visits, she added:

They never told you when they was coming either. That was the way they did it. Sometimes we would be standing in the window or outside playing and then we'd look up and I would say, "Oh, mama, here comes Sister So-and-so." They never would tell you when they were coming. . . . They would just come up and say, " We come to make a visit to see how you're doing and do you need anything." Especially my mother being a widow woman, we just had the two girls. I guess they did it to other people, but I know they were very good to us . . . They had the person's family's interest at heart - in the school and out of the school.²⁶

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Interview with Lelia Berry, Cleveland, Ohio, 14 December 1990.

Other parish activities, however, were quite typical of the Catholic territorial parish. Within a short time a vested male choir was providing music for Sunday Mass. This was a notable achievement and indicative of a strong commitment by the men of the parish since choirs demanded weekly practices. Work schedules and other organizational commitments often prevented men from such participation. Then, too, it was not uncommon for church to be seen as a woman's place. This choir, however, was described as having "unusual merit" by the *Catholic Universe*. The Christmas Midnight Mass in 1923 featured "an augmented chancel choir and orchestra." They sang the traditional hymns of the Christmas liturgy.²⁷

Fannie Petite remembered with sheer pride and delight one particular Christmas Midnight Mass. It represented for her the ownership and identity that the parishioners had rightfully achieved. When Bohemian Catholics from a neighboring national parish took advantage of a convenient Mass time, Father McKenney directly reminded them whose parish it was:

And the Hungarian [Bohemian] church, St. Adalbert's, those people began to come over to our church, especially Midnight Mass because they didn't have Midnight Mass. One I'll never forget; I guess it was the second time we had Midnight Mass and the place was packed. He [Father McKenney] told us, told the visitors that he would be very pleased if they would give their seats to the parishioners because after all it is their own church, you're welcome. I'll never forget him saying that. Oh, my God, how could he say that! There were a lot of people standing around, you know, some of ours who came

²⁷Papers of OLBS, Archives, Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament; *Catholic Universe*, 23 November, 21 December 1923.

late, and whatnot. Some moved and some didn't move, but he sure said that, I'll never forget it.²⁸

The parishioners formed organizations and activities that were characteristic of Catholic devotional life in the diocese at large. A Young Ladies Sodality met weekly for Marian devotional prayer and a business meeting. In 1927 a Study Club for students attending public high school was started under the direction of one of the Sisters who gave religious education instructions. A men's society, the Knights of St. John, was managed entirely by them. Father McKenney also organized the League of the Sacred Heart which apparently flourished from the very beginning of the parish. He had every family in the parish individually consecrated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Every day after school, he and two of the Sisters would visit a home, set up a small altar with a crucifix, candles and holy water, and with the family gathered around, he would lead them in prayer. The family would receive a large picture of Jesus with the date of the family's consecration.²⁹ This was a very popular devotion among most Catholics during those years. Lelia Berry proudly displayed the picture she still keeps in her home to this day, dated June 21, 1927. It reads:

We consecrate to Thee, O Jesus of Love, the trials and the joys and all the happiness of our family life, and we beseech

²⁸*Fanny Petite Memoir, Oral History Transcript, The Greater Cleveland Ethnographic Museum, 10 February 1979.*

²⁹Papers of OLBS, Archives, Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament.

Thee to pour out Thy best blessings on all its members, absent and present, living and dead, and when one after the other we shall have fallen asleep in Thy blessed bosom, O Jesus, may all of us in Paradise find again our family united in Thy Sacred Heart. Amen.³⁰

By 1928 the parish boasted of a confirmation class of 300 people, 230 of whom were adults. It was the second confirmation for the parish and indicated the growth that was happening. The parish numbered some 600 individuals and 260 families. The school enrolled 170 children who were indeed instrumental in bringing their parents into the Catholic faith. The original enrollment year had about 66% non-Catholic children. By 1928 all were Catholic. Bishop Schrembs acknowledged the remarkable growth of the parish and expressed a desire to establish similar mission parishes in the diocese at the confirmation ceremony:

Your success is an indication that the colored people are hungering for the truth, hungering for the graces and blessings the Church alone can give them. One of the outstanding sins of omission of the Church in this country has been its neglect to care for the colored race . . . You are apostles of the faith just as I am, and as the priests and sisters are, and it is your duty to go out and bring others of your people to the faith.³¹

Though the bishop addresses this African American congregation as co-workers, his words were entirely appropriate to the meaning of the reception of the sacrament of confirmation. He might have said similar remarks at any parish in the diocese. That he genuinely meant what he said is certain. However, he continued to see

³⁰Interview with Lelia Berry, 14 December 1990.

³¹*Catholic Universe Bulletin*, 9, 16 November 1928.

these people in a category different from the way he perceived other Catholics in the diocese.

Besides the large percentage of converts who constituted the congregation, the parishioners were also from diverse cultural and geographical backgrounds as the years passed.³² There were Northern-born African Americans as well as numerous persons from various regions in the South. In addition, there were parishioners of African descent from the West Indies, the British possessions, and the Portuguese and the Dutch colonies.³³ Lacking a homogeneous cultural background which might have unified them the way ethnicity gave solidarity to immigrant Catholics, the parishioners worked hard to establish a family spirit in the parish. They found the unifying principle in the faith itself which had brought the original parishioners together. Seven decades later, George Moore remembered best the spirit of the parish:

It was the spirit of the parish . . . the spirit of those people, they really loved being Catholic. They thought it was a great gift and an honor, especially the blacks that came from the New Orleans area. Sometimes my folks would let me stay over the weekend with one or the other parishioners' families who lived on the east side. . . The friendships were wonderful. Here I was staying at his house and I didn't know a thing about him really. The spirit between the people

³²*The Catholic Universe Bulletin*, 18 April 1930, estimated that 99% of the 1000 members were converts and that an average Sunday Mass had five to ten Protestants in attendance.

³³*Catholic Universe Bulletin*, 18 April 1930.

was just so sincere and so warm, so gracious. There was such a feeling of togetherness.³⁴

Perhaps the love for Catholicism is reflected in the youthful dedication of Moore, who was one of the parish's altar boys.

Unlike the others, however, he lived on the west side of Cleveland.

For a number of years, I used to serve 6:30 Mass at the parish. I'd get up at 5:30 in the morning and take the street cars and it would take me an hour to get over there in those days. It was like going from here to Europe in those days. But I had a lovely time being an altar boy there.³⁵

He was not the only one to mention the spirit of the parish as its most memorable feature. Others frequently described it like a "family," a place where you could be yourself without having to worry about "wearing big hats and fine clothes;" its smallness was one of its attractive qualities. Even those who could have passed for Caucasians and attended white parishes chose to return Sunday after Sunday to be with those with whom they shared this familial relationship.³⁶ For some parishioners, if not for all, the spirit of the parish transcended socioeconomic and racial distinctions that they obviously experienced in other churches. Even for those

³⁴Interview with George Anthony Moore, Cleveland Heights, Ohio, 15 January 1991.

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Interviews with Louis A. Gleason, Cleveland, Ohio, 30 October 1990; Barbara Robinson, Bedford Heights, Ohio, 16 January 1991; Margaret Santiago, Cleveland, Ohio, 15 November 1990; Lula B. Williams, Cleveland, Ohio, 20 December 1990; Rev. Gene Wilson, Cleveland, Ohio, 6 August 1991; Anonymous interview, Cleveland, Ohio, 8 January 1991.

who could have avoided racial distinctions, there was obviously an identification with fellow parishioners at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament that no amount of "passing" would create in white parishes.

To the tribute of the parishioners themselves, this description is reported by parishioners from the founding of the parish through the entire period of this study and does not seem to be affected by the change of the parish staff whatsoever. It is in this area, rather than in more external expressions like music, that a noticeably African American spirituality was exhibited. Highly communitarian, it was a spirituality that was experienced more than it was expressed in the tangible forms of cultural expression.

Though African American religious culture in the form of music and prayer styles was not part of the parish's religious style, there were numerous occasions and opportunities where it was obviously present. Most frequently these occasions were social or fund-raising events. Usually in Catholic parishes even today, social events are used as fund-raising opportunities. It was no different at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament.

Fannie Petite recalled the Mardi Gras festivities the early families would organize at the parish. Both she and her husband shared the responsibility of cooking chicken, okra and shrimp gumbo for these events which reminded them of their Creole

heritage.³⁷ Florence Jolly remembered some years later when the pastor arranged a parish social exchange with Our Lady of Good Counsel Parish and the parishioners served grits and bacon, sausage and ham, much to the delight of the white visitors.³⁸ George Moore recalled the Southern culture that accompanied these types of events which enabled people to preserve Southern traditions. He remembered particularly the chicken dinners. "That's a culture that's part of the black church. No question that was very enjoyable. You were proud of that too."³⁹

Juxtaposed with these events were other cultural experiences of a more traditionally classical variety. The parishioners reported not only enjoying these, but valuing the opportunities they provided. Due in large measure to the influence of the Sisters and the parish musicians and organists who were trained in classical music, the parishioners engaged in numerous musical productions. A school orchestra was organized in 1930 to entertain the parish and the neighborhood with classical music.⁴⁰ Lemuel Walcott recalled performing operettas for the parish, as did several other parishioners. He remembered being involved in at

³⁷*Fanny Petite Memoir, Oral History Transcript*, February 10, 1979, p. 27; Interview with Fannie Petite, 9 November 1990.

³⁸Interview with Florence Jolly, East Cleveland, Ohio, 10 January 1991.

³⁹Interview with George Moore, 15 January 1991.

⁴⁰Papers of OLBS, Archives, Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament.

least four of them including "HMS Pinafore," "The Mikado," and "A Star Is Born." The performances would take place on Friday afternoon for the children and on Sunday afternoon for the adults. These performances in the 1930s and 1940s also attracted some of the non-Catholic neighbors as well. The organization and production of these events took place on the stage of the church basement. The adult choir was also involved. Another participant recalled doing parts of Handel's "Messiah" as an eleven-year-old child, while still another woman remembered the "Pirates of Penzance." Lemuel Walcott was also part of an eight-member group of school boys who went in the late 1930s to other parishes to sing there. They performed such traditional Catholic hymns as "Ave Maria" and "Panis Angelicus." The parish music director and organists who contributed their professional expertise to these events were Clarence Brown, Murray Adams and Otis Dixon.⁴¹

The focus of parish life centered around the spiritual activities of the congregation, and many of these activities drew non-Catholic African Americans to the faith in the 1930s. Because Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament was an African American parish, the parishioners had every opportunity to take active roles in these events and organizations, rather than being mere observers as they might have been elsewhere. Among the parish organizations

⁴¹Interviews with Lemuel J. Walcott, Cleveland, Ohio, 9 November 1990; Philomena Ware McClellan, Cleveland, Ohio, 24 January 1991; Anonymous interviews, Cleveland, Ohio, 6 November 1990; Shaker Heights, Ohio, 21 January 1991.

which were of a spiritual nature were the twelve-voice male choir, the Knights of St. John whose chapter was called the St. Benedict the Moor Chapter (a black saint), a branch of the Federation of Colored Catholics in America, an Altar and Rosary Society, and a young ladies' sodality called the Children of Mary Sodality. Plans were in place for a Holy Name Society for the men of the parish which was eventually formed. A photograph of seventeen young altar boys revealed a group of lads ranging from perhaps nine years of age to teenagers, a striking group in their white robes with red capes and large bow ties.⁴² In 1932 the parish numbered 1400 parishioners with a yearly convert average of about seventy-five people. Thirty-five people were baptized on Good Friday evening in April of 1932, the largest single class of men and women to that date. Father McKenney received the assistance of the Rev. C. J. Bartlett of Our Lady of the Lake Seminary in Cleveland and Rev. Joseph P. Walsh of St. Agnes Parish. Monsignor Joseph Smith, parish benefactor, was still very much involved in the life of the parish and gave the sermon that evening. Father McKenney spoke about the faith life of his parishioners and his own desire to spread the faith on this occasion:

If the Most Rev. Bishop gives me an assistant, as I hope he will after the coming ordinations, then I feel that I can do a much greater work in making the Faith known to a larger number of the Colored race. As it is now, I am alone except for the welfare, school and catechetical work by the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament. If I am given an assistant I feel safe in predicting that I may reach many others who may come

⁴²*Catholic Universe Bulletin*, 18 April 1930.

in the Church after the matter has been put before them as it should be. Interest in the Faith is often aroused by the visitations of the Sisters who are constantly working in the neighborhood after school sessions, and it is these good women who form the first contact with some of the converts. To my people religion is a very vital part of their life and they are zealous in observing it all the time. Once they accept the Faith the leakage is very small.⁴³

The religious life of the parish included the regular sacramental and liturgical celebrations of Catholic life. The reception of the sacrament of the Eucharist for the first time, called First Communion; the reception of Confirmation, and certainly baptisms were celebrated with much festivity. First communicants made a three-day retreat in preparation for this day and then were served breakfast after the First Communion Mass. The church was beautifully decorated with flowers for this day as well. Though not considered a liturgical or sacramental event in itself, the graduation of children from the parish school was celebrated with festivities also. Mass was offered for them on the day of graduation and was followed by a banquet. Diplomas were given later in the afternoon or evening at another ceremony. Lemuel Walcott spoke of the honor he felt being an altar boy and being selected to carry the bishop's crosier and mitre for some of these events, and eventually becoming the master of ceremonies for the bishop's visit. He felt it was one of the events in his life that taught him real leadership. Certainly the emphasis on the spiritual life of the parishioners could not have been lost on

⁴³Ibid., 22 April 1932.

those who were inquiring into the faith. For many, its ceremony and solemnity were a source of attraction.⁴⁴

Besides the regular celebration of liturgical worship in the parish, there was a rich devotional array of opportunities typical of many American Catholic parishes which were not ethnically homogeneous. McKenney had inaugurated a shrine in honor of St. Therese of Lisieux in 1927 and religious exercises were held every Wednesday evening to show devotion to her.⁴⁵ A solemn novena was held every October for her feast day. Annual missions, a kind of parish retreat which usually lasted a week or longer, were given by members of various religious orders of men to foster the spiritual growth of the parish community.⁴⁶ Philomena McClellan recalled the May Crownings and especially the year she was selected to be the person to place a crown of flowers on the statue of Mary in the church. Others, too, remembered the May devotions and processions that accompanied them. Another woman remembered participating in the Sacred Heart novena faithfully for the eleven years she was in the parish. Sr. Rosella Holloman recalled the Corpus Christi processions around the church grounds, and Lemuel Walcott remembered the procession the altar boys formed

⁴⁴Papers of OLBS, Archives, Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament; Interview with Lemuel Walcott, 9 November 1990.

⁴⁵A young, French Carmelite nun (1873-1897), she was an extremely popular saint with Catholics during these decades due to her canonization in 1925.

⁴⁶Papers of OLBS, Archives, Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament.

each year at Christmas Eve Midnight Mass to place a statue of the infant Jesus in the creche. It was his observation that

The parishioners had to make sure they were there by 11:30 otherwise they were standing outside. The neighbors, this was just the heart of the neighborhood, the whole neighborhood was into it. I mean, even non-Catholics as well as Catholics. Standing in the aisles.

Other processions were recalled by Barbara Robinson such as those that accompanied Holy Thursday services when children would wear white dresses and suits as they did for First Communion. Perhaps one of the more telling incidents was related by Florence Jolly who remembered her non-Catholic grandmother attending what obviously must have been a moving Good Friday service with young Florence at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament in 1936. She started "shouting" in true black Protestant style during the service much to her granddaughter's dismay who tried to tell her such things weren't done in the Catholic Church. To her edification and surprise, the priest told her to leave grandma alone and that it would be better if a lot of people would let that spirit out. However, traditional Catholic silence seems to have prevailed and the priest's remark taken as rhetorical comment.⁴⁷ Perhaps one of the notable accomplishments of Father Michael Stevenson's pastorate at the parish was the erection of a statue of the then Blessed Martin de Porres, a Dominican lay brother from

⁴⁷Interviews with Philomena McClellan, 24 January 1991; Lemuel Walcott, 9 November 1990; Sr. Rosella Holloman, C.S.A., Cleveland, Ohio, 23 November 1990; Barbara Robinson, 16 January 1991; Florence Jolly, Ohio, 10 January 1991; Anonymous interview, Cleveland, Ohio, 6 November 1990.

Peru who was of African descent, in the sanctuary of the church.⁴⁸ It is to Stevenson's credit that he acknowledged the racial identity of his parishioners with the saint-to-be as an important part of their spiritual and devotional lives.

Throughout the Depression years of the 1930s, the white friends of Father McKenney continued to assist the parishioners' own efforts to maintain the financial support of the parish. One such event was sponsored by the "Sock Club" who annually supplied Christmas stockings filled with candy, peanuts, popcorn balls, nuts and fruit for the children of the parish. St. Monica's Guild was a group of women including McKenney's mother and sisters and their friends who contributed money to supply meat and vegetables for soup for those children who did not go home for lunch on school days. Sister Mary Amelia was the designated soup maker and the pastor purchased mugs for the sixty or so children who were served daily. In addition, other friends of the parish sponsored a food shower for the Sisters to stock their shelves with canned goods as a way to decrease the food bill for the parish.⁴⁹ In 1932 the "friends of the parish" hosted what was called an annual turkey raffle for the benefit of the parish, and in 1934 about 200 Catholic policemen and firemen of the city organized an evening of

⁴⁸*Catholic Universe Bulletin*, 25 June 1937; Papers of OLBS, ADC.

⁴⁹Papers of OLBS, Archives, Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament.

boxing and entertainment for the same purpose.⁵⁰ George Moore, reflecting on this help, felt that it came from serious concern for the parish for the most part, but that at times, there was a sense of "novelty" in their motivation.⁵¹ Regardless of their intentions, the effects of the Depression took their toll on the financial status of the parish.

By 1934 the parish was in danger of foreclosure, and Father McKenney was transferred in August and made pastor of St. Malachi's Parish in Cleveland. Father Michael Stevenson, also a diocesan priest, succeeded him with the understanding that he would try to stabilize the parish financially. In a letter dated October 6, 1935, he expressed his predicament: "Hoping that in time I will be able to pull this parish out of the hole."⁵² Stevenson minced no words. Unfortunately Stevenson did not succeed. Both pastors were highly regarded by those who remembered them as hard-working, sincerely dedicated priests who never patronized the parishioners.⁵³

Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Parish had begun with an optimistic financial future, but the Depression left the parish bankrupt. Even with the best efforts of the parishioners and the

⁵⁰*Catholic Universe Bulletin*, 18 November 1932; 2 February 1934.

⁵¹Interview, George Moore, 15 January 1991.

⁵²Papers of OLBS and unpublished history of OLBS, ADC.

⁵³Interview with George Moore, 15 January 1991; Anonymous interview, Cleveland, Ohio, 6 November 1990.

benefaction of the friends of the parish, the parish had to rely heavily on donations, monies from the national collection for Indian and Negro Missions, and monies from fund-raising events. From the beginning of the parish in 1922, the parishioners' personal contributions increased from only 39% of the parish's ordinary expenses in 1924 to 48% of those expenses by 1935.⁵⁴ The increasing percentages of the contributions indicate the earnest efforts of the parishioners and perhaps their own expanding economic situations, but they remained in need of the support the "friends of the parish" provided.

By 1934 Father Stevenson reported that interest had not been paid on a \$15,000 mortgage for two years, a foreclosure on a \$5000 mortgage was threatened and there were outstanding bills amounting to \$6000. The diocese had given Father McKenney \$2000 in 1933 and the Board of Colored Missions had given \$600 without which Stevenson felt the parish could not survive if this were denied them in 1934. Father Stevenson accepted only \$700 for his own salary that year. The Sisters' convent was put on a sheriff's sale; however, it was not sold. On December 22, 1936, Guardian Savings and Trust Company foreclosed the mortgage on the entire parish. New lenders were demanding a normal income from the parish before risking additional loans, a reality the parish had not been able to achieve to that date. However, the parish was rescued by none other than Monsignor Joseph Smith who took over

⁵⁴Papers of OLBS, ADC.

the mortgage from Guardian Bank in early 1937. This marked the second time Smith had given life to the parish.⁵⁵

During the spring months of 1937 diocesan officials were negotiating with a religious order of men, the Society of the Precious Blood, whose American province was located in Carthagen, Ohio, to accept the administration and staffing of Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament. The reason given for the proposed transfer was the Bishop's concern that a religious community could provide greater stability relative to personnel. Apparently Bishop Schrembs had some fear about being able to provide diocesan clergy who would be willing or able to staff the parish. The financial status of the parish certainly must have been a prevailing concern since the diocese itself was under financial constraints. It is to the Bishop's credit that he chose to maintain his commitment to this parish.⁵⁶ By June the transfer of the parish to the Society was completed.

Such a transfer meant that the parish remained under the authority of the Bishop of Cleveland, but its clergy personnel would be appointed by the Society's Provincial who at the time was the Very Reverend Ignatius A. Wagner. These men also shared the prevailing missionary philosophy of the Church toward the work

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Davis observes that this was not the usual pattern in many dioceses. When financial resources and personnel diminished, the black parishes were often the first to be eliminated. Davis, *History of Black Catholics*, p. 136.

they were about to assume for the first time. Unlike some other male congregations which had undertaken work with African Americans as their special ministry, this was a new venture for this congregation in the United States. However, it was in keeping with the purpose for which the order was established in Europe, the service of the poor. The contractual agreement of the transfer had other interesting stipulations which give evidence of the Society's philosophy regarding their work in the parish:⁵⁷

The Society agreed to permanently supply two "competent and acceptable priests . . . for the care of the Colored Catholics of the City of Cleveland" and to send additional priests as the demand increased.

The Society agreed to accept as remuneration only the amount of living expenses for the two priests as long as the parish required financial support from sources outside the parish.

The Society agreed to propagate the faith as a work of charity among the non-Catholic African Americans of the city as far as resources permitted. Their plans included additional Sisters for home visitations, more school facilities for non-Catholic children, another Catholic school in the city (including a high school), newspaper articles and paid notices in the African American press.

The Society assumed the responsibility for liquidating the parish debt (approximately \$22,500) and to loan this amount to the parish and the diocese at a rate of 4%. All future funds donated by official diocesan mission organizations were to be used to liquidate the debt and to propagate the faith.

The Society demanded that it be given first choice of accepting additional church properties which might become available to the diocese for use by African American Catholics. The Society anticipated "white flight" and cited its occurrence in other cities. This stipulation included the first choice of accepting the staffing of any such parishes which might be established near Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament.

⁵⁷The following material is quoted from the archival documents, but the legal terminology has been paraphrased here for easier reading.

The Society stipulated that the diocese continue to allow the usual means of fundraising for the parish throughout the city due to the missionary character of their work. The Fathers agreed to carry out such activity "without becoming obnoxious to the clergy of the city."

The Society stated that white people are to be discouraged from attending services, particularly their Sunday Mass at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Church, unless they are married into Colored families. It will be the duty of the clergy of the parish to discourage any practice to the contrary. This is not meant to exclude casual attendance.⁵⁸

This last stipulation appears nowhere else in the sources. So totally was the Society convinced of the missionary nature of their work, that apparently they wanted to pursue it in a manner appropriate to that philosophy. In the years that followed, the clergy who staffed the two African American parishes placed heavy emphasis on the propagation of the faith or what today would be called evangelization. Certainly evangelization was understood as one of the responsibilities of the clergy in any parish, but the effort with which it was carried out by these men was outstanding.⁵⁹

The Society of the Precious Blood appointed the Reverend Melchior Lochtefeld as the new pastor in June of 1937.⁶⁰ He served as pastor until 1943 when he was appointed pastor of St. Edward Parish, then designated the second African American parish

⁵⁸Papers of OLBS, ADC.

⁵⁹It is also possible that they wanted to maintain the parish as a kind of "national parish," although no reference to this model is ever used in the sources.

⁶⁰See Appendix A.

in the diocese. His twenty years of ministry were to leave a permanent influence on the lives of Cleveland African American Catholics. On September 10, 1937, he received the assistance of an associate pastor, the Reverend Henry Langhals, who had been ordained in May. It was the first time the parish had the benefit of two clerics on the staff.⁶¹

During the ensuing years, the parish witnessed significant growth through the work of evangelization that was carried on by the new staff of priests.⁶² Between 1937 and 1943 the parish received 440 converts into the Church. This figure does not include infant baptisms which numbered 188. In 1942 the population of the parish peaked at 1,525 persons which included 315 families.⁶³

The priests used every opportunity to keep the activities of the parish available to as many persons as possible, especially non-Catholics. The following is an example. In September, 1937, a perpetual novena in honor of Blessed Martin de Porres was initiated at the parish.⁶⁴ The novena devotions were offered twice each Tuesday, after the 8:00 A.M. Mass and at 7:30 in the

⁶¹Papers of OLBS, ADC.

⁶²This is discussed in detail in Chapter Six.

⁶³*Status Animarum Reports*, OLBS Parish, ADC.

⁶⁴A novena consists of prayers in honor of Mary or one of the saints of the Church which are recited faithfully for nine consecutive times. A perpetual novena means that another novena begins immediately when one ends. Thus, these devotions would be held every Tuesday of the year.

evening.⁶⁵ Subsequently, the *Call and Post* ran an article announcing a public invitation to the novena in October and explained the meaning of a perpetual novena as well. A week later the same newspaper praised the Catholic Church for honoring Martin de Porres as a contributor to the history of the world regardless of his race. Two weeks later the paper announced the beginning of the second novena and even ran the order of services to be held: a hymn in honor of Mary, recitation of the rosary, sermon, novena prayers to Blessed Martin, and benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.⁶⁶ The new pastoral staff was keeping up their promised efforts to propagate the faith through local news organs.

The priests viewed the parish as the place of missionary outreach, which it was. However, for those African Americans who were already members of the Church, the parish was the place for them to satisfy spiritual and social needs. The two perspectives were not incompatible or contradictory, but they do indicate that the parishioners made the parish work to their own benefit as well.

They continued to develop their parish life according to their on-going interests and needs: a vocational training program of which little seems to be known; the formation of a Catholic Youth Organization (CYO), a diocesan-wide organization; the forma-

⁶⁵*Catholic Universe Bulletin*, 17 September 1937.

⁶⁶*Cleveland Call and Post*, 28 October; 4, 18 November 1937.

tion of a children's choir and glee club for teenagers. The latter two groups contributed to the development of the light opera productions which were so fondly remembered. Playground equipment for the schoolyard was purchased and included four teeter-totters and a merry-go-round. Boy Scout Troop 354 was eventually formed but the date is not identified. On February 11, 1940, a local chapter of the National Catholic Interracial Federation was finally formed at the parish.⁶⁷ In August of that same year three members of the parish chapter attended the annual convention of the Federation in Detroit: Frank Petite, president of the chapter, Helen Banks Smith, and LeRoy Heggs. They were joined by George Anthony Moore who had recently graduated from The Ohio State University. Moore was to address the youth section of the Federation on "The Importance of Catholic Education." He himself had graduated from St. Patrick's School on Bridge Avenue and St. Ignatius High School.⁶⁸

On July 15, 1940 Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament formed a parish credit union, a move that many parishes were taking following the Depression.⁶⁹ By spring of 1943 there were some forty parishes in the diocese that had organized credit unions. The parish report for 1942 indicated a membership of 73 parishioners

⁶⁷OLBS Parish Archives, housed at St. Adalbert Parish, Cleveland, Ohio; Papers of OLBS, ADC.

⁶⁸*Catholic Universe Bulletin*, 30 August 1940.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*

with a total share balance of \$385.50. Nineteen loans had been made that year totaling \$435, and 36 loans had been made since its foundation totaling \$868. Membership in the credit union required an entrance fee of \$5.00. Credit unions were an obvious asset to people who did not have large sums of money to invest, but who could help each other by pooling their resources.⁷⁰

Lemuel Walcott told a touching story of Father Lochtefeld's encouragement to use the credit union's services and to learn what proved to be a life-long value. Walcott was a seventh grader at the time and he desperately wanted a bicycle of his own which he did not have, nor did anyone else in his family. Lochtefeld took him to Sears Roebuck where the priest purchased an \$18.00 bicycle for young Lemuel. He further loaned Lemuel \$3.00 to add to the \$2.00 he already had so that Lemuel could join the parish credit union and secure a loan for the payment of the bike. This was to be Lemuel's first experience with extended credit, as he said in relating the story. The monthly payment to the credit union amounted to \$1.06 with the interest. This event was a treasured learning experience in his life which he values to this day:

Father Lochtefeld taught me that things are attainable if you go about them in the right way. This was a very significant

⁷⁰*Catholic Universe Bulletin*, 3 April 1943. At Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament, the Board of Directors was headed by Mrs. Florence Austin, president; Mrs. Leanna Baltimore, vice president; Mrs. Marie Brooks, Mrs. Nellie Asbury, John Gentry, and Miss Maxine Blanton. Other committee heads included Mrs. Mary Newman, Stanford Berry, Jr., and Mrs. Eleanore Bailey.

thing to have happen to me. I was a middle child and the first to have a bike in my family. It was an experience of independent ownership unlike other kids whose parents bought it [a bike] for them. I still live out of this lesson that he taught me.⁷¹

Involvement in the parish potentially extended to every facet of the parishioners' lives and not to religious matters only. To this young boy, and presumably to many others, valuable lessons were learned that gave them skills with which to claim a responsible future for themselves.

Lemuel Walcott also recalled the spirit of athletic determination instilled in Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament football team by Father Selhorst, their coach. Though the team lacked a playing field, had second-hand equipment, and practiced on an empty lot, they were convinced that they were as good as any other school in the Catholic Youth Organization (CYO) League. He convinced them that if they overcame the obstacles in their way, then they were even better than the teams who were given quality equipment from the start. He taught them to turn negatives into positives for themselves and to see the obstacles in life that way too.⁷²

Parish activities continued to be ready sources of involvement for the parishioners. In January of 1948 Mrs. Byron S. Riff and Mrs. Minnie Christopher became Our Lady of the Blessed

⁷¹Telephone interview with Lemuel Walcott, 7 December 1990.

⁷²Interview with Lemuel Walcott, 9 November 1990.

Sacrament's members of the Committee for "Our Lady's Chapel" Fund sponsored by the Catholic Federation of Women's Clubs. This was a fund-raising delegation sponsoring the renovation of the Marian chapel in St. John's Cathedral which itself was undergoing major renovation at the time.⁷³ Bessie Riff was the president of the Altar and Rosary Society at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament. In 1949 the Society sponsored its fifteenth annual St. Patrick's Day Card Party which was such a success that it had to be held at St. Edward's Parish Hall in order to accommodate the overflow crowd. Other officers of the Society included Mrs. J. Evans and Mrs. N. Newman.⁷⁴

Father Aloys G. Friedrich, C.P.P.S., succeeded Father Lochtefeld as the pastor at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament.⁷⁵ Father Friedrich was succeeded by Father Francis J. Vecker, C.P.P.S., as pastor in 1948. Father Vecker remained in that position until 1951 when Father Leonard Sudhoff, C.P.P.S. became the new pastor. Father Sudhoff, who had been assistant pastor from 1941-49, would remain in that position until 1965.⁷⁶ A woman who attended the parish school during the years that Sudhoff was there, remembers his personal friendliness. She recalled that he

⁷³*Cleveland Call and Post*, 24 January 1948.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 26 March 1949.

⁷⁵Unpublished history of OLBS, ADC. "C.P.P.S." are the initials for the Society of the Precious Blood congregation.

⁷⁶OLBS Parish Archives, housed at St. Adalbert Parish, Cleveland, Ohio.

would visit with her father in their family home and the two would have a bottle of beer and smoke together while they talked. She particularly recalled how relaxed and normal it all seemed to her at the time.⁷⁷ Lula Williams remembered how hard-working the priests were and unafraid to do manual labor at the parish. She also commented on their warm relationships with the parishioners:

They were hard-working people. And they were close to you. They really loved you and they were really there because they wanted to, too. That's what I knew. They couldn't have been as dedicated if they didn't want to be there. And that's what I loved.⁷⁸

In 1952 Father Sudhoff completed the canonical visitation questionnaire for the bishop, a kind of summary of the status quo of the parish. It gave an insight into the life of the parish in the early 1950s. There were a total of eighty Catholic families, that is, both parents were Catholics, and 175 families with one Catholic parent. There was a total of 1100 individual Catholics in the parish at that time.⁷⁹ There was continued effort to invite non-Catholics to embrace the faith through regular

⁷⁷Anonymous interview, Cleveland, Ohio, 8 January 1991.

⁷⁸Interview with Lula B. Williams, Cleveland, Ohio, 20 December 1990.

⁷⁹The parish's annual report to the diocese also substantiates these figures which were typical from 1949 through 1953. From 1954 through 1961 the total number of individual Catholics ranged from 1200 to 1375; families numbered 207 to 278 for the same period. This was a drop, however, from the 1940s when the lowest individual population was 1310 and the highest 1535; families ranged from 274 to 315. The war time migration might account for the difference in the two decades since the drop began in 1949. Also there was a change in pastors four times between 1943 and 1951. *Status Animarum Reports*, OLBS, ADC.

availability of convert instructions. Parishioners were encouraged to invite their interested family members and friends. The weekly holy hour for this intention continued as did the successful month-long summer school for non-Catholic children which will be discussed in a later chapter.

Parish societies included the forty-member Holy Name Society which also helped to finance projects, according to the report. The forty-member Altar and Rosary Society helped to care for and clean the altars, visit the sick, and to aid with social activities. The twenty-member Young Ladies Sodality tended to be primarily a devotional society which practiced a daily routine of prayers and spiritual exercises. Due to a shortage of male members, there was a mixed choir at this time.

The novena to Blessed Martin de Porres was noted as one of the special devotions of the parish. As in most, if not all, Catholic parishes, there was the observance of the First Friday and First Saturday devotions.⁸⁰ In March there were special prayers said daily, probably after Mass, in honor of St. Joseph, and the Litany in honor of Mary was recited every day in May. The rosary was recited in church every evening in October. These three months were dedicated to these two outstanding saints in Catholic devotional life.

⁸⁰The observance of First Saturday devotions is in honor of Mary, the Mother of God. Attendance at morning Mass and perhaps the recitation of prayers in her honor constituted the devotional ritual. Saturday was the day of the week dedicated to Mary.

The pastor concluded his report with the observation that, given the incredibly crowded and lamentable living conditions of many of the parishioners, they were living "very good lives" and "the spiritual condition is very good." He noted that most parishioners had to come to church by bus.⁸¹ When Bishop John Krol visited the parish in 1955 he added an addendum to this report by noting that the parish school was drawing students who were making poor progress in the public schools.⁸² The regular round of activities for young people included athletic teams and scouting. About 1956 the operetta, "Windmills of Holland," featured school children in Dutch costumes on the Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Parish stage.⁸³

By the middle to late 1950s, the physical plant at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament began to show deterioration due to its age and a financially tight budget for maintenance. The school was filled to capacity, the church building was in constant use, and the small, formerly-private homes which were the rectory and convent were showing the effects of their age. The situation

⁸¹The implication here is probably to the fact that most parishioners did not own cars, yet they were conscientious about their participation. There were parishioners in the immediate vicinity of the church who would normally walk to church.

⁸²Papers of OLBS, ADC. Among those who served as councilmen during this time period were Eugene Favre, Edward Gentry, Amos Severino, and Thomas Willett.

⁸³OLBS Parish Archives, housed at St. Adalbert Parish, Cleveland, Ohio.

was becoming increasingly critical in its demand for some kind of remedy.⁸⁴

Moreover, the increasing number of African Americans in the neighborhoods as well as in the parish, was having serious ramifications on parishes in the Cedar Avenue Area. Boundary changes for local area parishes were discussed among the pastors with Bishop John Krol and Bishop Floyd Begin, both auxiliary bishops of the diocese, in 1956. Several pastors had requested the discussion primarily for two reasons. First, because the number of African American Catholics was increasing in the boundaries of the territorial parishes of the area as well as in the two African American parishes, there was a need to clarify the parishes to which they belonged. Because Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Parish was like a national parish and had no boundaries, technically any African American Catholic in Cleveland could claim membership there. When St. Edward was declared a black parish, it retained its original territorial boundaries which encompassed Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament. Needless to say, there was legitimate confusion for pastors and African American Catholics alike.

Secondly, the national parishes of St. Adalbert, Holy Trinity and St. Marian, whose neighborhoods were fast becoming black, wanted territorial boundaries set for themselves as well, because African Americans were beginning to attend their parishes which had no boundaries. They did not intend to turn the African

⁸⁴Unpublished history of OLBS, ADC.

American Catholics away, but they had no boundaries to determine who might reside in their parish. The primary concern was that pastoral responsibilities be clarified so that the small parishes where congregations had depleted as whites moved away, could continue to exist, and other populated parishes would not be over-taxed and African American Catholics would be served responsibly.⁸⁵

The winds of change for Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament were beginning to stir as the 1950s drew to a close. African American Catholics were encountering their white co-religionists in ways that had not been anticipated four decades earlier when 150 people banded together for identity. The numbers, though still not large, were increasing daily and significant enough to begin to force identity issues in altogether new ways as African American Catholics moved steadily into white parishes.

⁸⁵Papers of OLBS, ADC.

Chapter 5

ST. EDWARD PARISH

In January, 1941, the *Cleveland Call and Post*, the weekly black newspaper, featured two successive articles which discussed the challenges urban life posed for African Americans recently arriving from rural environments. According to the paper, every aspect of life required a major adjustment for these new Clevelanders. Among the areas which proved problematic for them were attitudes and behavioral habits relative to religion, sex, economic activity and "general social rituals." City life was described as freer, less controlling, transient and impersonal. For those accustomed to a stable and fixed set of social and economic expectations, this new way of life was often found to be "demoralizing." Often ridiculed by experienced city dwellers, the rural migrants found themselves particularly vulnerable to illegal practices in their need to find some source of income. Their demoralization often gave way, said the paper, to license and impulse. There were others who were able to surmount the obstacles and adapt to urban living by using their new experiences responsibly. The articles concluded by observing that the migrants were creating further socioeconomic distinctions among

blacks depending on their ability to adapt and succeed in the city.¹

As a new wave of southern migrants entered the city in the 1940s, they arrived in the neighborhoods surrounding the two African American Catholic parishes.² The neighborhoods experienced dramatic changes, and, as the above article described, the new arrivals brought with them attitudes and behaviors unfamiliar to life-long northerners. Yet, it was these same individuals who were being invited to join the Catholic churches. These people were the "missionary fields" that the hierarchy and clergy of the Church had said needed to be served.

For the clergy and religious who staffed these parishes, this called for an intensification of effort in their parishes that might counteract the deterioration in their neighborhoods. Already committed to a missionary philosophy toward their ministry, they consciously and deliberately tried to create parishes that would become total environments for the parishioners. They created a Catholic culture to withstand the countervailing forces of crime, demoralization, and deterioration due to lack of resources and services in the neighborhoods. These men and women were convinced that in order to "save souls," there had to be something to attract people in the first place. Then, once drawn into the Church, there had to be a holding-power strong enough to

¹*Cleveland Call and Post*, 11, 18 January 1941.

²See Chapter Two for discussion of this topic.

keep them there. They wanted to create a wholesome, moral and nurturing environment for new and long-standing African American Catholics.

The proliferation of churches that occurred with the increase of population was also a source of concern to the clergy. Storefront churches as well as established denominations were available within blocks of their neighborhood.³ For new converts, especially those who had Protestant family members, this kind of contact was threatening to a new-found commitment. Again, the solution was the same: surround them with a total Catholic culture so that attitudes, practices, and values would have the opportunity to take firm hold. Such was the environment created at St. Edward Parish at East 69th Street and Woodland Avenue.

This is not to suggest that the parishioners at St. Edward were more in need of such an environment than those at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Parish. Nothing suggests that this was the case. However, the source material available for St. Edward Parish strongly suggests that this attitude was operative there as well as at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament. Basically

³Christopher G. Wye, "Midwest Ghetto: Patterns of Negro Life and Thought in Cleveland, Ohio, 1929-1945," (Ph.D. dissertation, Kent State University, 1973), p.26. Bodnar, Simon, and Weber report the same increase in Pittsburgh by 1930. The focus of these churches was evangelism and not social welfare. John Bodnar, Roger Simon, and Michael P. Weber, *Lives of Their Own: Blacks, Italians and Poles in Pittsburgh, 1900-1960* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), p. 199; A similar pattern in Chicago is described by Allan H. Spear, *Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto, 1890-1920* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967), pp. 174-179.

the two parishes were quite similar in terms of organization, societies, social and fund-raising events, and in liturgical worship and devotional practices. The parishioners who were interviewed did not indicate any noticeable differences and some even moved from one parish to the other when they changed residences. There is nothing in the sources to suggest any differences in the congregations.

The parishioners of St. Edward Parish were as committed, dedicated and loyal to their parish and used it as a source of stability and meaning in the same way as did the parishioners at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament in the 1940s and 1950s. When speaking about the quality of life and the benefits she experienced from membership in St. Edward Parish where she grew up, Patricia Polk said:

No, I didn't move my membership from that parish even though I left the neighborhood. When I was married, I left the neighborhood right away. But I went back. I moved a few blocks from here [St. Henry Parish] and I went back to St. Edward's because that was my parish. I didn't even think of boundaries or this church being in this area, that was just my family church, that's where I belonged.⁴

Her sentiments were expressed by others as well in less direct terms, some of whom continue to be members of the parish.⁵

⁴Interview with Patricia Polk, Cleveland, Ohio, 19 December 1990.

⁵Interviews with Ann Cowan, Cleveland, Ohio, 13 November 1990; LeMoyne Nesbitt, Cleveland, Ohio, 5 December 1990; Barbara Price, Cleveland, Ohio, 28 January 1991; Mary St. Clair, Cleveland, Ohio, 10 December 1990; Anonymous interview, East Cleveland, Ohio, 15 January 1991.

The contrast in the presentation is purely to demonstrate the intensity of the Catholic cultural world that African American Catholics encountered in these "mission parishes." Furthermore, this Catholic cultural world stood, at times, in stark contrast to some of the values and institutions which also were part of their neighborhoods. What this contrast of cultures did, in effect, was to place the responsibility for their personal identity as African American Catholics squarely on their own shoulders with little assistance from the Church. If this seemingly was not an issue for them at the time, for some it became an issue in later decades; for some it was of crisis proportions, and for some it even meant leaving the Church.⁶

In August of 1943, the ministry of Father Melchior Lochtefeld, C.P.P.S., to Cleveland's African American Catholics began its second phase when he became pastor of St. Edward Parish. The parish had been established in 1871 as a territorial parish serving primarily an Irish congregation. The parish had continued to increase in size until reaching its highest membership from 1910 to 1920, when a gradual decrease began. However, in 1930, Father Kieran P. Banks, the pastor, reported to Bishop Schrembs that there were no African American parishioners in the parish. This information was based not only on parish records but on house to house visits by the priests. Nevertheless, after 1935 there was a continuous decrease in white parishioners. By the mid-1940s the

⁶This topic will be discussed in Chapter Nine.

neighborhood of the parish was predominantly Irish, African Americans, German Jews and Italians.

Many of these African Americans were attending church and/or the school at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Parish which was becoming increasingly overcrowded, particularly the school. In 1941 there had already been efforts made toward expanding the ministry of the Precious Blood Fathers among the African American people, thus the transfer of St. Edward's to their administration and ministry was a logical one. The parish was located in the midst of the growing African American community and the spaciousness of the parish buildings provided the much-needed room for staff residence, worship and education. Consequently, Father Lochtefeld was appointed pastor at the request of Coadjutor Bishop Edward F. Hoban because of his familiarity with the pastoral situation.⁷ Father Vincent Parr, C.P.P.S., was assigned as his assistant.⁸

The transfer of the parish to the religious congregation officially made St. Edward's the second African American parish in the diocese. Bishop Hoban, in his letter to the Precious Blood

⁷Bishop Hoban was installed as Coadjutor Bishop with the right of succession to Bishop Schrembs in January, 1943 due to the failing health of Bishop Schrembs.

⁸Papers of St. Edward Parish, ADC; St. Edward Parish Archives, Housed at Holy Trinity-St. Edward Parish, Cleveland, Ohio. In 1880 Holy Trinity Parish was established two blocks from St. Edward's at East 71st Street to serve German-speaking Austrians living east of East 55th Street. The two parishes existed side-by-side until they were merged in 1975.

Fathers, gave a semi-acknowledgement to the fact that this might provoke even further loss of white parishioners to St. Edward's:

The present Parishioners of St. Edward's, if they do not desire to continue there under the changed circumstances, could go to Holy Trinity nearby. This change however could take place gradually. It would, too, give more room for development of the new project.⁹

There was obviously no intention of working toward an integrated congregation at St. Edward's on the part of the bishop, nor does it seem that this was ever considered by the Precious Blood community. The exact meaning of the bishop's last sentence quoted above is unclear, but apparently the implication is that the absence of white parishioners would enable the intended missionary endeavors to proceed with a single-minded purpose. Certainly this can be read as supportive of the ministry to African Americans, however, it can also be read as a lack of awareness or indifference to the work of true integration. The new bishop, like Bishop Schrembs, also held to the missionary philosophy toward ministry to African Americans.

It is clear that the work undertaken at St. Edward's received the support of both the Bishop of Cleveland and the superiors of the Precious Blood congregation. In 1946 an assistant pastor was transferred from the parish by the provincial of the Society because he "has just not fitted fully into the picture. He is a good priest, but he has not been able to whip up that love for the Colored cause which alone will spell complete success and

⁹Ibid.

a real harvest."¹⁰ Thus the ministry which began at St. Edward's followed a pattern similar to that of Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament.

In 1944 the parish consisted of 145 Catholic families or 445 individual Catholics. The population of the area served by the parish was about 50,000. Obviously the work of evangelization had great potential in the neighborhoods. Subsequently the Catholic population of the parish kept climbing steadily, reaching its highest membership in 1956 with 2,118 persons.¹¹ The increase of parishioners must be attributed to the efforts of the priests, sisters and parishioners who worked tirelessly to reach out to those unfamiliar with the faith of the Catholic Church. The spiritual wealth of the Church was constantly held out as the source of salvation and sanctity.

The parish bulletins printed weekly after October of 1943 stress repeatedly the richness of the faith. Clearly the presentation of the announcements in style and philosophy is the work of Father Lochtefeld who used every opportunity to instruct as well as to inform. His paternalistic style was not atypical of pastors in the 1940s. Nonetheless, the consistency of this style indicates his awareness that those parishioners new to Catholicism needed on-going instruction about the practice of their faith. He was not reluctant to employ the use of guilt or the threat of sin

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹*Status Animarum Reports*, St. Edward Parish Archives.

if he felt those were necessary. For this man, nothing was more important than the preservation of the faith. The following excerpts are indicative of the kind of emphasis that was placed on the religious practices that nurtured the spiritual life:

Wednesday evening at 7:45 - Holy Hour. Novena in honor of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, rosary for the soldiers and benediction. Come for your own good and for the good of the boys and girls in the army. We should all be thankful that we are spared the horrors of the battlefronts, but let it never be said that we forgot the boys and girls, who are sent to these fronts, in our prayers. (October 31, 1943)

The Catholic Church has dedicated the month of November to the poor souls in purgatory. It becomes our duty to listen to the voice of the Church and pray daily for the poor souls. Remember they cannot help themselves so they depend on your charity to free them sooner from the purging flames of purgatory. Also remember that some day you may be in that prison of fire and then you will want others to pray for you. Do for others what you would like them to do for you. (October 31, 1943)

Next Sunday at 8:30 Mass, Communion for all the grade school children of the parish. Parents will please see to it that their children are here. Unless the children learn as children to be faithful to their Communion Sunday they will be negligent when they grow older. (January 16, 1944)

Mission in the parish February 3-10. Do not make any other plans for that week. Your immortal soul needs all your attention during that time. (January 6, 1946) Certainly anyone neglecting to attend this mission cannot be excused from sin. (January 13, 1946)

Mass and Communion Breakfast for all families of the parish at 8:30 Mass, June 6th. (May 30, 1948) Summer temptations for new Catholics: to miss Mass on Sundays and to eat meat on Fridays. (July 4, 1948)

Anyone who deliberately neglects to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation on this occasion [November 22] is guilty of mortal sin. (September 25, 1949)

High School Students Attending Public School: You have an obligation to attend Religious Instructions; if you neglect this you are guilty of mortal sin. (October 2, 1949)

Lenten Devotions, Wednesdays, 7:45 - Holy Hour for Conversions - During Lent you can spare that 45 minutes to pray that God will give to your relatives and friends the Grace to accept the One, True Church. (February 11, 1951)¹²

The responsibility of living the Catholic life was impressed upon the youngest children to the oldest adult and it was intended to provoke constant, daily vigilance and devotion.

To support the spiritual life, the parish offered membership in spiritual societies which provided social relationships as well. The adult men of the parish belonged to the Holy Name Society which sponsored a group Mass and Communion Sunday once a month followed by a business meeting.¹³ The adult, married women belonged to the Altar and Rosary Society whose activities were patterned similar to those of the Holy Name Society. The young men had the Junior Holy Name Society, the young women had the Young Ladies Sodality, the school children belonged to the Children of Mary, the Guardian Angel Sodality (for little girls) and the St. Aloysius Sodality (for little boys).¹⁴ The children's societies, like the adults', had a designated Sunday when they were to attend Mass and receive Communion as a group. Because almost all of the parishioners' children were in the parish

¹²St. Edward Parish Archives.

¹³During this time period it was not a common practice to receive the Eucharist each time a Catholic attended Mass. Therefore, to encourage at least the regular reception of "Communion," parishes frequently designated certain "Communion Sundays" for various groups in the parish.

¹⁴St. Edward Parish Archives.

school, these societies constituted the school population. On other Sundays, the children were to attend 10:00 A.M. Mass together. Barbara Price fondly remembered the children's Sunday Mass:

One of the Masses dealt strictly with children's issues. The homily was delivered so that children could understand. We were a part of the Mass. We didn't do the readings or anything like that, but everything about that Mass was geared toward us and for our understanding.¹⁵

The children sang hymns that were their own as well during the appropriate places in the liturgy.

Throughout the 1940s and 1950s the spiritual life of the parish revolved around the seasons and festivals of the Catholic liturgical calendar and the devotional practices of the clergy and laity: Christ Child novenas in preparation for Christmas; midnight Mass with its angel procession to the Christmas crib and choir selections; Lenten devotions on Friday evening and Sunday afternoons (the Sunday services were obligatory for the school children); Holy Week and Easter liturgies; First Communion Sunday with May Crowning ceremonies in the afternoon; Confirmation ceremonies; Forty Hours Devotions; Wednesday evening Holy Hour with its novena to Our Lady of Perpetual Help and prayers to Blessed Martin de Porres; public recitation of the rosary in October. A family Mass and Communion Breakfast was held in June

¹⁵Interview with Barbara Price, Cleveland, Ohio, 28 January 1991.

of 1948 and a similar event for the Boy Scouts of the parish was sponsored by the pastor in January of 1949.¹⁶

A shrine in honor of Blessed Gaspar del Bufalo, the founder of the Society of the Precious Blood, was placed in the rear of the church in 1944 by Father Lochtefeld. Vigil lights were burned there by the parishioners in honor of this future saint who had been devoted to the poor and the sick and for whose canonization the priests and the parishioners were praying. In October of that same year, Lochtefeld erected a shrine in honor of the Precious Blood of Jesus, for which his own religious community was named, and again made large vigil lights available for purchase by the parishioners.¹⁷

This type of religious devotionism was characteristic of Catholic life in those years.¹⁸ Its particular appeal lay in the fact that the average Catholic was able to identify with other human beings who had achieved the recognition of sanctity and, therefore, served as models for their own lives. The display of

¹⁶William Hughes of St. Edward's Parish received the Ad Altare Dei Award, one of the highest Catholic Scouting Awards, from Bishop Edward Hoban in a ceremony at St. John's Cathedral in 1952. He was a ninth grader at Cathedral Latin High School at the time. *Cleveland Call and Post*, 9 February 1952.

¹⁷St. Edward Parish Archives. These "shrines" most likely consisted of a large statue or painting and a rack of vigil lights. The payment for the vigil lights helped to provide for the devotional expressions of the parishioners by defraying the cost of the shrine.

¹⁸Jay P. Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1985), pp. 221-240.

statues and the burning of candles engaged the senses as well as the spirit and invited greater involvement in the spiritual life. Catholic churches displayed such iconography in abundance. The interior of Catholic churches was readily recognizable by the sights, sounds and smells that were unmistakably "Catholic." For the un-churched, and even for the non-Catholic, the first encounter with the physical environment of the parish church told them they were in a "Catholic world."

In December of 1944 weekly devotions in honor of Blessed Martin de Porres were inaugurated with the following announcement:

You will notice the new statue of Blessed Martin de Porres in the sanctuary. The new statue will be blessed today after the 10:00 Mass. We do not know who sent us the statue, but we certainly will place the donor or donors on our list of benefactors and pray for them every day. Prayers in honor of Blessed Martin will be incorporated in the Wednesday evening devotions. Novena pamphlets and the life of Blessed Martin will be found in the rear of the church.¹⁹

The devotional practices of the parish were often those favored by the priests themselves as was the case in many parishes. However, the donation of the statue encouraged the devotion to a future saint with whose race the parishioners could identify. The life-size statue maintained a prominent place on a pedestal in the sanctuary of the church where all could readily see it.²⁰ This

¹⁹St. Edward Parish Archives. Martin de Porres was a seventeenth-century Dominican lay Brother of Peru who did extensive social work among the poor of Lima. He came from racially mixed parents and was acknowledged as a "Negro" saint and patron of social workers. His cause for canonization was being sought at this time, but would not happen until 1962.

²⁰Ibid.

devotion was certainly an acknowledgement of the distinctive racial identity of the parish. Nevertheless, many of the devotional practices of the parishioners favored the traditional white Catholic saints. This was both a sign of the universality of the Church's prayer life as much as it was an indication of the widespread lack of awareness of the many black saints who fill the ranks of the Church's sanctified. The popular version of the hagiology of the Catholic Church managed to "forget" the racial identities of those saints of Africa and other regions who were clearly not Caucasians.

In effect, there was some spiritual activity, event or organization for every age group in the parish. In addition, these organizations often sponsored social events or fund-raising events for the support of the parish as well. Week after week, the parish bulletin featured announcements of things to do in and around the parish and even the diocese. The parish became a social center for its members as well as a spiritual one. For many of its parishioners, especially those who grew up attending the parish school, a large portion of their lives rotated around the activities, events and feasts of the parish. It became a total environment that was not shattered until the young person went off to high school. Even then the parish continued to be a center of social and spiritual life.

Opportunities for social life were as frequent as those for spiritual life. Rummage sales in the school hall sponsored by

the Altar and Rosary Society, and card parties and dances for men and women were some of the frequent and regular social events in the parish. Additional occasions for social life among the young began in 1944 when roller skating was made available on Sunday evening from 7:00 to 9:30 in the school hall for Catholic high school students. "Principally we urge the parents to send their children to these supervised recreations and not to public places of recreation as long as we provide good facilities here." The admission was twenty-five cents. Eventually a loud speaker was obtained so as to make music available and refreshments were sold. In 1945 skating was available on Wednesday evenings after the devotions during the summer months, a possible attempt to bring the young people to church more frequently for prayer. In 1948 school children were invited to skate on Wednesday afternoons from 3:00 to 5:00 on a newly sanded and polished floor.

Similarly, family entertainment was provided by the weekly showing of religious feature films and seasonal features for Christmas, Lent and Easter. Adults were charged twenty-five cents and children ten cents. A new film projector was purchased in 1945 for this purpose. "In accord with the pledge of decency special movies will be presented on our own screen. We, therefore, do hope that in the future more people will avail themselves of the opportunity to see good movies."²¹

²¹Ibid.

There were occasional musical and dramatic productions offered by the school children for the entertainment of the whole parish. Barbara Price recalled the annual spring concerts she participated in as a student:

Every child should have a spring concert. That was a big event. Every class had a skit and we used to fill the auditorium. Parents and grandparents would bring everybody. People came from out of town. That was important.²²

In 1946 there was dancing for all young people sixteen years and older on Friday evenings from 7:30 until 10:00. Young married couples were especially encouraged to attend this affair. Formal and informal dances were also sponsored by the Young Ladies Sodality. In 1948 the parish attempted to form a CYO League softball team for boys in grades eight through twelve. Shrove Tuesday Parties were held in 1949 on the day before Ash Wednesday for the school children in the afternoon and for high school students and adults with dancing in the evening.

The Altar and Rosary Society hosted an Easter party in 1947 for the entire parish as well as buffet suppers at \$1.00 a plate. They also sponsored a Halloween Masquerade Ball for the adults of the parish. The Altar and Rosary Society continued to offer parish dinners in 1949, including a Father's Day Dinner. In 1951 a fish fry dinner was held every Friday during Lent with the invitation to stay for Lenten devotions following the dinner. In

²²Interview with Barbara Price, 28 January 1991.

August of 1951 a parish picnic was held at Euclid Creek Park at Euclid Avenue and Glenridge Road for everyone in the parish.²³

The announcement of Catholic radio programs frequently appeared in the parish bulletin accompanied by the familiar admonition. Undoubtedly these Sunday programs were seen as alternatives to other types of religious and non-religious programming that were available for listeners:

By listening to such fine programs you will learn to enjoy good things which are so much better for you than all the husks that the world offers its pleasure-loving public. Always be careful what you listen to and what you see. Your eyes and ears can do much toward helping you go to heaven.²⁴

Similarly, a consciousness of the surrounding neighborhoods and environment prompted the plethora of activities that were held at St. Edward in the attempt to provide not only a wholesome moral and social life, but, more mundanely, to protect young people from being victimized by troublemakers. Brother Norbert Hoying, C.P.P.S., was stationed at St. Edward's from 1946 to 1955. He recalled the numerous social activities that were made available at the parish:

Father [Lochtefeld] had all kinds of projects. Sometimes it sort of wore you down because he'd come up with more things. We had dances in the school hall and we had roller skating. He started square dancing with the kids and stuff. We used to have these things and we didn't have any security or anything. Father or I would stand at the door and take in the money for admissions. We had certain rules. The boys, they had to wear a tie. Be dressed properly to get in. If they came up without their tie on, it was "Hit the road, boys."

²³St. Edward Parish Archives.

²⁴Ibid.

It never bothered me except when a gang would come off the street. Say ten or twelve guys and they'd look rough and maybe you could smell that they had been drinking or something, then I was scared. We'd just say, "You've got to leave." So they'd pick up and leave. Sometimes they'd give you a little trouble. . . .

I'm sure the thinking of Father was, if we got them [young parishioners] here, they are in good company and they'd also make the parish a community. . . . ²⁵

Parishioners certainly had the opportunity to get involved in the life of their parish in direct ways that cultivated leadership and responsibility for the life of the parish. Two bulletin announcements are indicative of this involvement which they may not have had in a predominantly white parish:

The organist from Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Church has offered his services free of charge to start and direct a church choir in our church. Practice will be Wednesday evening after the Holy Hour. We therefore request all who can sing to attend this practice so that at least by Christmas we will have a choir to sing the Mass on that great feast day. (October 31, 1943)

Group Baptisms at St. Edward at 2:30, April 29. We need more sponsors for the children. If you are willing to act as one, please let us know today. First Communion will be at 8:30 Mass on May 13th. Confirmation will be May 29 at 4:00. Tell your friends about these great events in the church and invite them to attend. By doing so you may plant the seed of true faith in their hearts. (April 15, 1945)

Pilgrimage to the Sorrowful Mother Shrine near Bellevue on Sunday, July 2nd. Everyone is welcome, \$3.00 per person; a chartered bus will be available. (June 11, 1950)²⁶

²⁵Interview with Br. Norbert Hoying, C.P.P.S., Bellevue, Ohio, 14 January 1991.

²⁶St. Edward Parish Archives

Parish life at St. Edward's was rich and active and rewarding for both those who served on its staff and those who were its parishioners. Their testimony to this fact is emphatic. Reflecting on the degree to which race had been minimized as a barrier between the white staff and the black parishioners, Brother Norbert said:

I remember one time, we were talking about different things, and one of the people said, "Well, you're one of us." I really took that as a compliment because I figured they were at ease with me and they knew they could trust me. We could work together. It was just a great experience and I just loved it. It was pretty hard to leave there. . . .²⁷

Catholicism, not race, had obviously become the focal point of parish life. More importantly, this religious Brother who had come to "minister" had successfully moved beyond any superior-inferior mode of relating to the parishioners.

Similar affection for the parish and the people was reported by Sister Mary Alma Egan, S.B.S., who was principal of both Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament School from 1946 to 1952 and of St. Edward School from 1956 to 1962:

We had very vibrant parishes at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament and at St. Edward's. The Sunday services were alive and enthusiastic and inspiring. They had very fine organists and the congregation responded with great spirit. The priests delivered well-prepared practical homilies. As in all parishes constant encouragement and reminders were needed periodically. New converts begin very enthusiastically but do need constant help from the clergy.

I believe the establishment of an all-African American parish and school at that time was a tremendous help to the people. . . . They took a deep pride and interest in its estab-

²⁷Ibid.

lishment. This gave them a sense of ownership, security and belonging. At that time the doors of the white or nationalistic churches were not WIDE OPEN for the Negro people. Many of them who tried to worship in "white" parishes felt that they were only tolerated. Having their own church enabled them to be themselves and to worship freely and happily the God Whom they loved, trusted and adored. They made many, many sacrifices to maintain their church and school..²⁸

Father Werner Verhoff, C.P.P.S., was an associate pastor at St. Edward's from 1948 until 1952. He succeeded Father Lochtefeld as pastor in 1957 and remained in that position until June of 1968. He was also an associate pastor at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Parish from 1955 to 1957. He recalled:

Most of our people were deeply spiritual; many had been searching for something that would make their life more meaningful. They took a very active part in the Liturgy. Mass and Liturgical Services were well attended. Both parishes had excellent choirs. These people developed a close bond between members of the parish; they were working for a common goal - their salvation. Even as they moved from the inner city, many continued their membership in one of these two parishes, and attended both the Liturgical and social functions of the parishes. The Priests and the Sisters were highly respected in the neighborhood, and many of the non-Catholics, especially the teenagers, attended many of the social functions..²⁹

Brother Norbert believed that the fact that parishioners stayed in the parish was an indication, not just of the discomfort they experienced in other parishes, but of the vitality and quality of life they enjoyed at St. Edward:

I would say this, people that became Catholics at St. Ed's stayed. I don't know if they didn't feel welcome in other

²⁸Written interview with Sister Mary Alma Egan, S.B.S., Bensalem, Pennsylvania, 25 January 1991.

²⁹Written interview with Reverend Werner Verhoff, C.P.P.S., Burkettsville, Ohio, 24 December 1990.

parishes. I think that's one thing that I can easily appreciate. You go into a church that's practically all white people and at St. Ed's they knew they were at home. We had people coming from all over the place. Way out on the east end by the lake, and then by Kinsman and that area, and even by Shaker Square and that area.³⁰

LeMoyne Nesbitt who grew up in St. Edward's in the 1940s and 1950s recalled:

Back then St. Edward's was warm, everyone knew one another and genuinely cared if your mom was sick. They would come, the priest would be there. I remember the priest making house calls, but we had many more priests then, I think at St. Ed's we had three or four, plus a brother. And they were always canvassing the neighborhood, always stopping by for coffee. In our particular house they were coming by for whiskey because Daddy did not offer Pepsi Cola, "Father, you want a drink?" "Yah, Nesbitt." And they'd sit and have beer or stronger spirits and my father and mother used to look forward to that, Dad especially.³¹

LeMoyne Nesbitt's father eventually became a Catholic, his mother had been Catholic from birth.

Nesbitt was not the only one who remembered the caring that was extended by the parish staff. Ann Cowan recalled the interest and attention the entire team of clergy extended to those who lived in the projects, the determination to have a high school available to the girls of the parish without having to fight discrimination in the Catholic academies, and the family visitations during times of illness.³²

³⁰Interview with Brother Norbert Hoying, C.P.P.S., 14 January 1991.

³¹Interview with LeMoyne Nesbitt, 5 December 1990.

³²Interview with Ann Cowan, Cleveland, Ohio, 13 November 1990.

Another former parishioner remembered that a few of the former white parishioners remained at St. Edward after the parish was declared an African American parish:

When Father Lochtefeld came, we had roller skating parties right in the school hall. He wanted a place for the young people to come and enjoy themselves, he skated right along with us. We had blacks and whites skating. A choir started, we had blacks and whites in the choir. Everything was interracial for a long time. Of course, at the very end there were only two whites left.

She remembered other innovations that date from his pastorship such as coffee hours after Sunday Mass, the attending of parishioners' wakes whether one knew them personally or not and regardless of race, and the wedding showers that were sponsored by the Young Ladies' Sodality when one of its members was to be married. She recalled, too, the beauty of the four-part voices the choir provided for Sunday worship and other great feasts. She herself had been a member of the choir and recalled that members of the Cleveland Orchestra had accompanied them for at least two out of the four First Masses that were celebrated at St. Edward's by four newly ordained white priests who had grown up in the parish. Finally, she still retained with pride the Marian statue that had been given her by the priests of the parish at the time of her wedding. She observed that this was a practice of the parish for all marriages.³³

³³Anonymous interview, Shaker Heights, Ohio, 21 January 1991.

There is no question that the parish staff of clergy and religious offered the best of what they knew for the benefit of the parishioners. The fact that what they offered was the best of their own culture, diminished the importance of the culture of the parishioners, at least unconsciously. In retrospect, the cultural anomaly of some of the activities becomes apparent. One such activity was the square dancing that Father Lochtefeld taught the school children. Not only did they display their talents for the parish, but apparently they went to other parishes as well, and even managed to be televised. The priest's motivation is unknown. His character does not suggest that he did it for mere public display, nor did anyone suggest that as an explanation. It is more plausible that he was simply proud of what had been achieved and wanted others to know it. In any case two women who were part of the experience shared their reactions. Barbara Price recalled that she enjoyed it. "Father Lochtefeld came from a German background and we didn't have gym [physical education], but we had square dancing and we used to go throughout the diocese square dancing. That was fun."³⁴ Patricia Polk enjoyed it at the time, but saw it differently in retrospect:

We never know what we should do when we try to be church and help people. Talking about cultural things, I remember this. We used to have square dance lessons. In the 1950s, we would have square dancing three times a week and once every two or three months, we'd have a big show - all the children in the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. The parents would be

³⁴Interview with Barbara Price, Cleveland, Ohio, 28 January 1991.

invited and we would be in the gym. . . . He taught us during school time and I remember once going to Channel 5 and we were on television. As I look back now I don't like it, but then it was a privilege. I think now what we must have looked like in 1950-something, square dancing.

As I talk about it now, . . . I don't think that was the thing to do, to have these black children down there square dancing. There could have been so many other kinds of things he could have done for us to help us be in touch with who we were as a people. Now I don't mean to beat up on the man because he probably did the very best that he could, but when I think about that now, I think, "Oh, my God, how did he ever do that!" Here we were, little minstrels. And the parents would come. It was a big thing. That's the way I see it now, but maybe it's unjust to speak of him in that way. It was the best he knew how.³⁵

Regardless of the good intentions, the cultural dissonance was there. Regardless of the degree to which it was accepted, African American Catholics needed clergy of their own race. They needed to know not just what it meant to be Catholic, but what it meant to be an African American Catholic in cultural terms equivalent to those enjoyed by white Catholics.

That Father Lochtefeld was sincere is unquestioned. If his cultural approaches were inappropriate at times, he nevertheless managed to communicate a credible message about the innate dignity and worth of every human being. Barbara Price remembered the strong leadership he provided for that message:

We all came under the leadership of Father Lochtefeld who was like a father to me. And I think it was because of his strong leadership and, as I've always said, he was a man before his time. Although there wasn't a whole lot said about black catholicism at that time, he always made us feel that we as blacks were just as important as anyone else and that if we wanted to be somebody, we had to be educated and

³⁵Interview with Patricia Polk, 19 December 1990.

take an interest in ourselves. I think that's probably why the people that came through St. Edward during his time are still Catholic and a lot of them are still working in the Church. . . ³⁶

Needless to say, the extensive activities of the parish were costly in financial terms. Parish records indicate that in 1943 the parish received a loan of \$12,500 from the Precious Blood Society and still ended the year with a deficit of \$436.03. Again in 1944 there was a deficit of \$206.54.³⁷ In 1947, in a letter to Bishop Hoban, Father Lochtefeld explained the financial dilemma:

All is well at St. Edward's except for our financial difficulties. We are falling behind more and more every month. I am very certain now that we cannot operate this plant on five hundred dollars income from the parish and four hundred dollars from the Fathers of the Precious Blood (we make this money by helping out in other parishes) per month. We find that the ordinary expenses amount to about \$1200.00 per month, for salaries for the Sisters and housekeepers, food, fuel, light, taxes and insurance, etc. That leaves nothing for extraordinary expenses. As you know, this is an old plant, well built in its day, but major repairs have been and will be necessary.³⁸

Presumably the bishop responded positively to Lochtefeld's plight since the next extant financial report for 1950 indicates a receipt of \$20,382.14 from the diocese of Cleveland. As predicted by the pastor, there were \$7,741.06 of extraordinary expenses that year. However, the parish successfully completed the year with a balance of \$367.68. The diocesan assistance apparently continued throughout the 1950s. The financial report for 1959 given by

³⁶Interview with Barbara Price, 28 January 1991.

³⁷St. Edward Parish Archives.

³⁸Papers of St. Edward Parish, ADC.

Father Werner Verhoff indicates \$27,270 of diocesan financial aid to the parish.³⁹

The parish bulletins for 1943 through 1951 are wrought through with as many financial appeals, reports, and fund-raising events as they are with spiritual and social announcements. The pastor was relentless in his almost weekly reminders to the parishioners about their obligation to support the parish. Yet, in his above letter to Bishop Hoban he twice refers to them as "poor." The fact of the matter was that there was a limit to what they were able to offer due to their own socioeconomic status and Father Lochtefeld knew that. Take for example a parish bulletin announcement from 1947:

Every Sunday find the *Universe Bulletin* and *Our Sunday Visitor* in the vestibule of the church. We ask for 5 or 10 cents per copy to be put in the poor box. The money is to be used for the poor. If you are real poor than you may take a paper without giving a donation. (March 9, 1947)

However, they were equally relentless in their efforts to raise money for the parish through fund-raising activities. Card parties, rummage sales, semi-annual raffles, sales tax stamps, bingo, even the purchasing of the main sanctuary light and votive lights were all attempts to supplement the regular weekly donations of the parishioners. The school children were also engaged in the raising of funds and did their share with the selling of raffle tickets. Major repair work, including the painting of the interior of the church, was frequently undertaken by the priests

³⁹St. Edward Parish Archives.

themselves with the assistance of others. On several occasions, the pastor cancelled school due to a shortage of coal. The coal bill was the object of a special collection during each of the winter months. Names of those parishioners who contributed to the support of the parish and the amounts that they gave were listed from time to time in the vestibule of the church and in the parish bulletin. This practice, however, was not unique to this parish. Any occasion that might lend itself to additional funding was utilized.⁴⁰

Outside assistance for the parish came periodically through the donations of benefactors such as those who paid for the large paintings that were placed in the sanctuary in 1945.⁴¹ Bishop Hoban himself returned his Confirmation stipend from the parish in 1953.⁴² The Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament also helped to alleviate expenses when they requested the formation of the St. Pius X Guild by some of their own relatives. The Guild, begun in 1957 by Irene Beriswell, raised money for the financial needs of the Sisters, especially for hospitalization funds, and also supplied clothing and Catholic literature for the work of the Sisters among the parishioners. By 1960 there were some 130 men and women in the guild.⁴³

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Papers of St. Edward Parish, ADC.

⁴³Ibid., 21 October 1960.

In 1959 the parishioners initiated a two-week fund drive to help defray operating and improvement expenses by increasing parish income by one hundred per cent. Cash contributions and increased offertory donations were targeted to cover new lighting, wiring, roof and gutters in the school. Improvements in the faculty living quarters and new paving in the church and school yards were anticipated. Eighty-five members of the parish formed a committee to undertake this campaign.⁴⁴ Though resources were often thin, the parish continued its efforts to offer spiritual, educational, and social opportunities to all parishioners.

For many parishioners, then, the parish did provide a total environment for their lives.⁴⁵ Barbara Price summed up her experience this way: "There was very little reason for me to seek a social life outside of the church because it was there for me. Everything I did more or less revolved around the church."⁴⁶ The same was true for Patricia Polk who also grew up in St. Edward's Parish and attended school there as well:

We went to church every day. There was Mass every morning. Three or four times a week, we went to evening novenas. You know, the church was really the center of what we did in those days. . . . In my world, everybody that belonged to my world belonged to St. Edward's Parish. I walked past Holy Trinity Church every day and I never even thought of that church as Catholic. It was just a building like the corner store you would pass if you had no need for it. . . .

⁴⁴*Catholic Universe Bulletin*, 23 October 1959.

⁴⁵Interview with Mary St.Clair, Cleveland, Ohio, 10 December 1990; anonymous interviews, 19, 21 January 1991.

⁴⁶Interview with Barbara Price, 28 January 1991.

My church was very important in my life. That parish of St. Edward's, everything in my life happened around that parish. There wasn't a lot going on in our lives. My father's family lived away. My mother had a very small family. We were so big in number, there were nine of us. We were family and the church was family and that was the extent of our lives. . . . If something didn't happen in our home, it had to have happened in church. That's kind of the way I was raised. The Church was very important, the people in the Church were very important, namely, the nuns and the priests. They were very close to our family. I don't know whether it's because we lived so close in the neighborhood, but we were always at the convent; we were always at the rectory.⁴⁷

The parish, indeed, became a total environment for those who chose to participate. It provided a cultural environment for the parishioners that could withstand the influences of a surrounding neighborhood often marred by crime and poverty. "The salvation of souls" which seemed so uppermost in the mission of the clergy and religious encompassed mind, spirit, heart, emotions and bodies as well. The appeal extended to the very youngest child and to the most aged adult so that all lives might be enriched by the values and meaning of the Catholic faith. Furthermore, the apparent enthusiastic response of the parishioners to this invitation indicated the value they in turn placed on a Catholic way of life.

Though financially strapped much of the time, there were parishioners who found that it was rich in the spiritual resources it had to offer them. Patricia Polk found it to be so for her:

It was a safe haven. It was the extended family. It was everything you needed. Something either happened in your

⁴⁷Interview with Patricia Polk, Cleveland, Ohio, 19 December 1990.

church or it happened in your home. And I don't remember life other than that way. What I received in that parish community has been so rewarding and it was so complete that I've stayed with the Church. For myself, it's made a difference in my life.

There's been times when I've made decisions simply because I remember something a nun said to me. There was one nun, Sister Bernadette, and she would take me aside and she would just talk to me sometimes, and she seemed to really care about me. You know, who I was as a person, not as a part of that classroom. . . .And she would say things that were affirming. And as I would go through my life and I would encounter certain things, I could hear her talking to me and it made a difference. Some of the choices I've made have been because of people like that. . . .

I can remember the good times and the supportive times and the times there was confusion and chaos in the family, and the Church was that staying power. And because of that past experience, I've been able to stay with the Church and the Church has been able to keep me here. . . .⁴⁸

To the extent that there were others who felt the same way as Patricia Polk, then the "mission parish" was a success.

⁴⁸Ibid.

Chapter 6

EDUCATION, CONVERSIONS, VOCATIONS

On August 24, 1936, the Sacred Consistorial Congregation issued a letter to the American Catholic hierarchy commending them for the work they had done on behalf of African Americans and urging them to even greater energies in this direction.¹ The occasion was the fiftieth anniversary of the Third Plenary Council of Baltimore of the American hierarchy. One of the effects of this Council was that the bishops established the Commission for the Catholic Missions among the Indians and Negroes.² The letter was indeed timely and, although positive in tone, it urged more extensive work for minority conversions and vocations, the establishment of more churches, chapels and schools, the allocation of greater financial resources, and the involvement of greater numbers of clergy and religious in this ministry.³ There was an urgency to the letter and rightly so. The American Church was not

¹The Vatican Congregation or department of the Roman Curia which was responsible for general church affairs, for example, national synods of bishops.

²It is a common practice in the Roman Catholic Church that anniversaries of major events are used as occasions to address more contemporary but similar or related concerns. This was just such an occasion.

³Papers of Bishop Joseph Schrembs Pertaining to Black Catholic Issues, ADC; *Catholic Universe Bulletin*, 18 December 1936.

distinguished for its efforts to welcome African Americans into its fold, though there were notable individuals who did so.⁴ It was, in fact, Rome itself through the Congregation of the Propaganda that initiated these efforts which were then assumed by the Third Baltimore Council.⁵

Consequently, in 1936 the agenda for the American hierarchy relative to African American Catholic ministry covered three critical areas: education, conversions, and vocations to the priesthood and the religious life. By 1936 the diocese of Cleveland was addressing the first two areas through the work being done at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Parish. There is no evidence to suggest that clergy in other parishes where African American Catholics were attending were being encouraged to exert any extraordinary efforts on their behalf, nor were they so encouraged in the 1940s and 1950s as many more African American Catholics began moving into other parishes besides Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament and St. Edward Parishes. The predominant attitude seemed to leave those efforts to the discretion of the individual pastors. Because large numbers of African American Catholics became members of the Catholic Church through the

⁴See Cyprian Davis, *The History of Black Catholics in the United States* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1990) for a recent history of the African American Catholic experience.

⁵Cyprian Davis, *The History of Black Catholics in the United States*, pp. 132-135. At that time, the Congregation of the Propaganda was the department of the Roman Curia responsible for the missionary activity of the Church.

parochial school system, education was of primary importance in African American Catholic ministry. Beyond this, efforts to draw people to the Church required extensive evangelization procedures. These were mobilized at the two African American parishes because evangelization was one of the primary reasons for their establishment. However, evangelization did occur at other parishes as well for African Americans. The final issue of the agenda, vocation recruitment, set before the American bishops by the Vatican, did not fare well in the Cleveland diocese. These three aspects are the topic of this chapter. They are the three sources from which the growth of the African American Catholic community occurred.

The role of the Catholic school in bringing the Catholic faith to African Americans was emphatically acknowledged in the letter of the Sacred Congregation. This could not have been truer in the Cleveland experience. Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament School and St. Edward School, in particular, were the seedbeds of innumerable conversions not only on the part of students, but their parents as well. They were sources of spiritual and intellectual learning, but they were also sources of a compassionate caring that was the ministry of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament. As related in chapter four, the Sisters had been at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament School from its beginning. They assumed the staffing of St. Edward School in 1943 when the parish was designated as an African American parish.

The work of the Sisters included more than education in the school. They maintained a parallel social work of home visitations well into 1960 as a weekly part of their ministry. Daily, and later twice weekly, for about one hour after school, the Sisters would visit the homes of their students from the day school or from religious instruction classes held for public school students. Their intent was to call upon their parents, to address any family concerns relative to the children, to encourage the parents' active involvement with the school, and to invite parents to church and church activities. Clearly the work of evangelization retained its primary focus in the various aspects of their ministry.⁶

Evangelization, however, comes in many forms and is often preceded by the establishment of ordinary human relationships. Patricia Polk remembered the Sisters being very important in her life because they gave her a sense of her own potential:

Sister Maria Goretti would spend time with me. She would say things that would make me think about my future, "when you're older . . .; when you're an adult . . .; when you have children . . .; when you're a mother . . ." And she would say things that would make me feel good about myself. They were things about my character - me as a person.⁷

⁶Papers of OLBS and St. Edward Convents, Archives, Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, Bensalem, Pennsylvania; Written interview with Sister Mary Alma Egan, S.B.S., Bensalem, Pennsylvania, 24 January 1991; *Catholic Universe Bulletin*, 14 February 1941; 21 October 1960.

⁷Interview with Patricia Polk, Cleveland, Ohio, 19 December 1990.

Similarly, Barbara Price remembered the personal touch of their home visits when they would join her family for dinner. She remembered with particular fondness her first grade teacher, Sister Mary of the Holy Child, and her sixth grade teacher, Sister Maria Gracia, as the two Sisters who did the most for her own personal development. Another woman who went through Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament School during the 1950s remembered Sister Lucita who would keep up with the graduates as they moved through their high school years. She was instrumental in discouraging some of them from entering into hasty, premature marriages.

When Barbara Price was eight years old her mother became employed outside the home and she and her sister would wait at the convent after school for about an hour until her mother was able to pick them up. The Sisters apparently extended the hospitality of their own home to their parishioners. The Sisters kept four or five children from one family in their convent for about two weeks after the mother of the family suffered a mental breakdown. The parish housekeeper would tend the smallest ones during the school day.⁸

The personal kind of caring that seems to have typified the ministry of the Sisters was due to the influence of their

⁸Interview with Barbara Price, Cleveland, Ohio, 28 January 1991; Anonymous interview, Cleveland Heights, Ohio, 19 January 1991.

foundress, Katharine Drexel.⁹ Furthermore,

Mother Mary Katharine Drexel from the very earliest years insisted on quality education. She would not tolerate anything second rate for our students. The Sisters and teachers were well prepared and operated with a high degree of competency. At times allowances were made for individual pupils who had special needs. All our works were sprinkled with kindness especially to our students from "broken homes" or dysfunctional families as they are called nowadays.¹⁰

Evangelization, then, was a natural outcome of this personal interest. The non-Catholic children who attended the parish schools were expected to receive the religious instruction along with the Catholic students although they were never required to join the Church. Non-Catholic parents were expected to attend adult instruction classes so that they might be familiar with what their children were experiencing and learning. Sister Mary Alma Egan described the families she knew as principal at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament School in the late 1940s in the following manner:

The students were in various levels extending from upper middle class to below the poverty level. The parents had a percentage of professionals, the larger number were middle class and about twenty percent bordering on the poverty level. The parents were hard-working, sincere people, mostly blue-collar workers. They were extremely interested in their children's welfare and were most anxious that the children get a good, sound education. They made numerous sacrifices for this quality education. They had a good home life with the majority having both parents in the home. Many times both parents were working to maintain their standard of living.

⁹Interview with Florence Jolly, East Cleveland, Ohio, 10 January 1991; Joseph Richardson, Cleveland, Ohio, 10 November 1990; Anonymous interview, Cleveland, Ohio, 6 November 1990; Written interview, Louis J. Massey, Wickliffe, Ohio, 4 January 1991.

¹⁰Written interview with Sister Mary Alma Egan, S.B.S., 24 January 1991.

About 90% of the students were Catholic from Grades one through eight. Classes were held on a regular basis for non-Catholic parents. Many of these embraced the Catholic faith. The children were baptized with the parents.¹¹

Ten years later Sister Mary Alma was principal at St. Edward School and described the student population there as largely non-Catholic at the time of their admission to school, although many eventually embraced the faith along with their parents. However, many parents in both parishes were prevented from full membership in the Church because of previous marriages. Sister Mary Alma continued:

The conversions seemed genuine for the most part. There was no pressure placed on parents and students. They were invited, encouraged and accepted. However, at times it was necessary to refuse the children baptism in cases where the parents did not show interest and cooperate, or if they refused to promise that the children would be helped by them to live up to their obligations. In school the non-Catholics received the same religious training as the Catholics and were expected to participate in any practices/activities that took place during the school day.

In both schools the day began with Holy Mass at 8:30 A.M. The children were strongly encouraged to attend but not coerced in any way and were never penalized for non-attendance. Non-Catholic students who were not affiliated with a church were expected to attend Sunday Mass. This was strongly encouraged by the Sisters and priests by showing personal interest in each student.¹²

As early as 1938 a parish summer school was organized at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament to provide recreational, manual crafts and skills, and religious instruction for children who had

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid.

too much free time during the summer months. Initially the six-week program was conducted by Father Lochtefeld with the assistance of his associate, Father Henry Langhals and three lay volunteers. Some seventy-five children participated the first summer, half of whom were not Catholic. Eventually this activity became an annual event and by 1942 involved the Sisters as well. It continued to attract large numbers of non-Catholic children.¹³ Though this activity was an evangelizing technique in itself, it is more than probable that it reflected some competition on the part of the pastor with the Protestant Bible School sessions that were also offered in the summer by some churches.

Throughout the 1930s the enrollment at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament School generally ranged between 150 and 200 students. By 1942 the school still consisted only of five classrooms. Father Lochtefeld petitioned Bishop McFadden for some solution so that eight classrooms and eight separate grades could be conducted without necessarily beginning a new construction project for which there were inadequate funds. More rooms were needed to accommodate the student applications which were being refused due to lack of space. Further, the Sisters' convent also needed expansion. He proposed the use of St. Adalbert School four streets away which was already "practically empty because the white people have moved out of the neighborhood . . ." He recog-

¹³Papers of OLBS, ADC; *Catholic Universe Bulletin*, 29 July 1938.

nized that the use of their facilities would free up convent space as well. The proposal was obviously rejected, but the following year expanded resources were created at St. Edward's when it became the second African American parish. Starting in 1942 the average enrollment increased to a range of 250 to 300 students.¹⁴

Overcrowded conditions and the diminishing quality of education in the public schools of the Central area in the 1950s was undoubtedly some encouragement for the placement of non-Catholic students in the Catholic schools as well.¹⁵ This situation enabled the work of evangelization rather than deterred it. One non-Catholic woman remarked that the best place for an African American child in the late 1950s was a Catholic school because the public schools deteriorated both in services and resources once the white families left the neighborhoods.¹⁶

The efforts to bring the faith to the students through education certainly bore fruit. Throughout the 1950s the Sisters' mission annals from Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament indicate the number of parish school children and parents who embraced the faith. In 1953 forty-one children and adults were baptized, many of the adults being parents of the school children. In 1954 ten

¹⁴Unpublished history of OLBS, ADC, 1979; Papers of OLBS, ADC.

¹⁵*Cleveland Call and Post*, 12 September 1953; 26 January 1957. See discussion in Chapter 2 regarding the situation in the Cleveland public schools.

¹⁶Anonymous interview, East Cleveland, Ohio, 10 January 1991.

of the school children were baptized including two of their entire families. Again, in 1955 thirteen school children and some of their parents were accepted into the faith; in 1956 eleven families were baptized; in 1957 five eighth graders were baptized; in 1958 twelve school children were received into the Church and six others in 1959. The number of home visits were recorded for several years also: in 1956 there were 108 visitations to homes and hospitals; in 1957 there were 78 visits to homes and sixteen to hospitals; in 1958 thirty-two home visits and fourteen hospital visits were made; and in 1959 ninety-six homes were visited and thirty hospital patients.¹⁷

Education, apart from evangelization, was a positive experience for the most part for those who were interviewed, whether they attended Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament in its earlier years or much later in the late 1950s. They further agreed that the school was strict and discipline exact, but that in retrospect these qualities prepared them for life. They were encouraged to develop their talents and abilities and to maximize their potential as learners.¹⁸ Sister Mary Alma Egan reported:

¹⁷Papers of OLBS, Archives, Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament.

¹⁸Interview with Lemuel Walcott, Cleveland, Ohio, 9 November 1990; Karen Reid-Martin, Cleveland, Ohio, 30 October 1990; Barbara Robinson, Bedford Heights, Ohio, 16 January 1991; Lelia Berry, Cleveland, Ohio, 14 December 1990; Written interviews with Stanford Berry, Jr., Cleveland, Ohio, 18 February 1991; Louis J. Massey, Wickliffe, Ohio, 4 January 1991; Teresa B. Merritt, Cleveland, Ohio, 6 January 1991; Sophronia Reed, Garfield Heights, Ohio, 15 January 1991; Anonymous written interviews, Cleveland, Ohio, 15, 19 January 1991; Baltimore, Maryland, 17 January 1991.

The teachers instilled a sense of pride into the children. They were encouraged to do their best in studies, music, sports, etc. so that they could excel. The students were challenged to excel and made to feel that they could. They were enrolled in the adjacent libraries and encouraged to enlist in library contests and book-reading. From the earliest days they were taught about the outstanding Negro heroes, poems and songs from Negro authors, books about Negroes that stressed their good qualities, and especially they learned the Negro Spirituals.¹⁹

Lelia Berry remembered learning some of the African American history as a young student, although many others do not recall such studies. Sister Mary Alma reports that greater emphasis in this area occurred in the 1960s, which is not surprising.²⁰

There was a minimal charge or "book bill" for the families who were Catholic parishioners to cover the cost of expendable items like paper and pencils.²¹ In some cases where there were several children in the family, the older students were given chores to do at the school to help cover payments that could not be met. Non-Catholic students and, therefore, non-parishioners, did pay a tuition charge. That such costs were met indicates the value non-Catholic parents placed on the particular kind of education offered in these Catholic schools.²²

¹⁹Written interview with Sister Mary Alma Egan, S.B.S., 25 January 1991.

²⁰Ibid.; Interview with Lelia Berry, 14 December 1990.

²¹All Catholic parishes paid the tuitions of their own Catholic elementary students during this time period. They were not permitted to charge them tuition until 1971.

²²Interview with Ann Cowan, 13 November 1990; Lemuel Walcott, 9 November 1990; Anonymous interview, 19 January 1991.

The physical structure of Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament School changed very little over the years. It was a wood frame, one-story building with five classrooms lined up side-by-side without a linking corridor, although one could go from one room into the next through a doorway. Each classroom obviously opened out onto the outside which was the main source of entrance into the classrooms. There were two, and eventually three, additional classrooms in a house that had been a former private home and later became known as "the annex" adjacent to the school structure. A second private home was also purchased with the 1929 transaction, but it is not clear from the records just how this building was used. However, there is reason to believe that by 1956 this building was also used for classroom space. The school was directly behind the church and, by the late 1950s, there was a factory on the other side of the school building as well. One former student described it as "bleak" since there was no expanse of open space surrounding the building, but at the time she does not remember feeling this way about the school.²³ St. Edward School stood in stark contrast to this small, modest school.

St. Edward Parish was one of the oldest and largest Irish Catholic parishes in the city, its school building was a large brick structure with several floors, and the convent itself had

²³Interviews with Barbara Robinson, 16 January 1991; Karen Reid-Martin, 30 October 1990; Anonymous interview, Cleveland, Ohio, 8 January 1991; Papers of OLBS Convent, Archives, Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament.

thirty-seven rooms. The Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament from Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament shared the convent with their Sisters who were stationed at St. Edward from 1943 until 1953 when they returned to their original, but renovated convent. St. Edward School continued to have eight elementary grades although initially several grades were doubled.

In September of 1943, Father Lochtefeld opened the first year classes of St. Edward High School for Girls in a wing of the elementary building. The Sisters also taught in the high school whose curriculum was basically a commercial program. The priests taught the religion classes. The original ninth grade had sixteen students and an additional grade was added each year until the four years were completed. The first graduating class consisted of nine girls in June of 1947. The peak enrollment in the high school occurred in 1950 with seventy students. The high school was closed in 1958 for financial reasons.

Official records do not state the reason for the opening of the high school program. Interviewees reported that it was because the African American girls were experiencing prejudice in the area's Catholic girls' high schools. Perhaps there were financial reasons as well since tuition in the private high schools could have been considerably higher than in the parish school. In the 1944-45 school year, the high school tuition, determined by the pastor, was \$2.75 per month for ten months at

St. Edward.²⁴ No one was able to offer a reason why the school only included girls. There were those who were not able to afford even this amount and subsequently went to the public high schools.²⁵ It was clear, however, that Father Lochtefeld wanted non-Catholic students to attend the high school²⁶ and this opportunity for evangelization was a possible motive for the program as well. In any case, the idea of the high school commercial program was responsive to the employment needs of black females in general. Typically, there were almost no African American women in clerical positions in Cleveland except in several black-owned businesses. The vast majority were employed in public and domestic service occupations. Moreover, clerical positions required a high school education in business courses.²⁷ The Cleveland public schools in black neighborhoods began emphasizing home arts for black students rather than business courses. The availability of this high school program was a real opportunity for those students.

²⁴St. Edward Parish Archives, Housed at Holy Trinity-St. Edward Parish, Cleveland, Ohio; Papers of St. Edward Convent, Archives, Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament.

²⁵Interview with Sister Rosella Holloman, C.S.A., Cleveland, Ohio, 23 November 1990; Anonymous interview, Shaker Heights, Ohio, 21 January 1991.

²⁶St. Edward Parish Archives; *Catholic Universe Bulletin*, 10 September 1943.

²⁷Lois Rita Helmbold, "Downward Occupational Mobility During the Great Depression: Urban Black and White Working Class Women," *Labor History* 29 (Spring, 1988):135-155.

The enrollment of the parish's elementary school ranged from 240 students in 1944 to a peak of 450 in 1958. There was a population of about 30 to 35 Catholic students attending public elementary schools throughout the period of this study, although by 1958 there were 55 children in public elementary school.²⁸ St. Edward School merged with St. Adalbert School in 1968.²⁹ St. Edward School, like Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament, enrolled a fair percentage of non-Catholic students. In 1953, of the 432 students in the school, about 125 were non-Catholic. The policies regarding religious practices for the children and religious instruction for their parents were the same at St. Edward's as those at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament. Frequently, of course, the children were the source of their parents' conversions.³⁰

The children were engaged in a thorough regimen of Catholic spiritual life and devotional practices which included daily and Sunday Mass, lenten devotions and Holy Week services, May devotions, and Christmas pageants. The highlight event each year, however, seemed to be First Communion Sunday. Group baptisms and Confirmation ceremonies also included children of vary-

²⁸It was obligatory that Catholic children attend a Catholic school for both elementary and secondary education. Only extreme circumstances were to be permitted as exceptions to this rule of the American Catholic hierarchy.

²⁹St. Edward Parish Archives.

³⁰Ibid.; *Cleveland Call and Post*, 2 May 1953.

ing ages. Special photographs were taken of these groups and their names were published along with their sponsors in the parish bulletin. Graduation ceremonies were treated with equal solemnity and the traditional photographs each spring as the high school graduates were clothed in graduation attire and carried red roses, while the eighth grade graduates wore white formal dresses, gloves and suits.³¹ Such emphasis on these events made them available for total parish involvement if parishioners so chose. In any case, these occasions marked the major passages in the spiritual and educational development of these children. The parish school programs at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament and St. Edward were very similar to those in almost all the parish schools of the diocese.

Instructions for children attending public school, both Catholic and non-Catholic were offered once a week after school at 4:00 o'clock. These classes were usually taught by the Sisters. The other annual event which Father Lochtefeld initiated in 1944 at St. Edward as he had done at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament, was the summer school program. The program was conducted for six weeks with the help of the Sisters and lay volunteers. The program ran each morning, Monday through Friday, from 9:00 until noon and consisted of daily Mass, crafts and manual skills, recreational activities, and, of course, religious instruction. The program attracted hundreds of children both Catholic and non-

³¹St. Edward Parish Archives.

Catholic which was one of the major reasons for its existence. At times, the percentage of non-Catholic children in attendance ran as high as ninety percent. Furthermore, there was no charge for the services of the staff. A watermelon feast celebrated the end of the program each summer. This program was conducted annually well into the 1960s.³²

As the African American Catholic students entered several of Cleveland's Catholic high schools and colleges in these years, they encountered major experiences of racial prejudice. Often such racism was subtle, but, at times, it was overt. George Moore graduated from St. Ignatius High School in the early 1930s after experiencing racial prejudice from his first attempts at admission there. His mother had to challenge the results on the admissions test which he had supposedly failed and then had to resort to securing the intervention of Bishop Schrembs when the rector of the school told her that African Americans were not accepted in any of the Jesuit prep schools in the United States. Bishop Schrembs wasted no words in saying that either the young lad was to be accepted or the priests were to move the school out of the diocese. As Moore said, they chose the lesser of two evils and accepted him into the school where not one student spoke to him the entire first semester. The situation changed when he achieved

³²St. Edward Parish Archives; *Catholic Universe Bulletin*, 3 August 1956; Written interview with Sister Mary Alma Egan, S.B.S., 25 January 1991.

academic honors at the end of that semester proving he was as capable a student as any other.

He participated in extra-curricular activities such as the school newspaper during his years there. However, two further incidents awaited him before graduation was completed. His senior picture was not included in the composite picture of graduates which was displayed at the school. Furthermore, he was unable to purchase a prom bid but did so through one of his white classmates. There were tense moments when he and his date appeared at the Allen Hotel for the prom, but apologies were eventually offered before the evening was over. Moore concluded, "I graduated from Severance Hall. The night I got my diploma, the entire assembly stood up and applauded. They weren't unhappy about this."³³ Although George Moore was eventually tolerated and possibly respected for his achievements, he still questioned whether he was ever really accepted except by a few classmates.

Similar difficulties occurred with female students as well. Fannie Petite's daughter, Evelyn, graduated from Ursuline Academy on East 55th and Scovill Avenue in 1934 after experiencing difficulties with her admission to the school. Once again, Bishop Schrembs intervened and leveled the same threat he used in George Moore's behalf. Evelyn Petite was admitted to the school and was

³³Interview with George Anthony Moore, Cleveland Heights, Ohio, 15 January 1991.

the only African American student in her class.³⁴ In both cases, Bishop Schrembs' attention was brought to the matter at the intervention of the students' pastors. Notre Dame Academy at 1325 Ansel Road had the same dilemma in 1931. The matter was taken to the Apostolic Delegate, Archbishop P. Fumasoni-Biondi, in Washington, D.C., who corresponded with Mother Mary Evarista, the provincial superior of the Notre Dame Sisters, in the following manner:

You need not fear that Divine Providence will forsake an Institution that adheres to true Christian principles and is guided by the authority of the Right Reverend Ordinary, whose duty it is to uphold these principles and to safeguard the education of every soul committed to his care.

The Apostolic Delegate deferred to the judgment of the local bishop in the matter. The fear on the part of both academies apparently was that if too many African American students attended the private schools, then the white enrollment would decrease. Bishop Schrembs referred to the affair as "nothing else but a hysteria on the part of the Sisters."³⁵

Such incidents, however, continued to recur throughout the 1930s. In 1935 Auxiliary Bishop McFadden assured a concerned African American Catholic, Anthony A. Royce, that there were "two colored girls at the Ursuline College, and there is one at the Ursuline High School. There have been colored boys at John Carroll University." In 1936 and 1937 there were letters of concern

³⁴Interview with Fannie I. Petite, Cleveland, Ohio, 9 November 1990.

³⁵Papers of Bishop Joseph Schrembs Pertaining to Black Catholic Issues, ADC.

from African American Catholics in Akron over admission of their students to St. Vincent High School and Sacred Heart Academy, ". . . we do not want to face again the humiliation of being refused because we are colored." Again, in 1936 there were repeated instances of the same admissions problems at Notre Dame Academy where a student was told that the "colored quota was filled," and Ursuline Academy where the same student was told she missed the admissions examination in June, knowledge of which had not been made known to the African American students. Father Michael Stevenson appealed to Bishop Schrembs on behalf of at least six students in September of 1936 for the bishop's intervention in the matter. All were discouraged by the affair and chose to go to public school. So was Father Stevenson who remarked in his correspondence with Bishop McFadden, "Things like this hurt religion very much."

Bishop Schrembs was similarly discouraged because he again appealed to the Apostolic Delegate who was now Archbishop Amleto Cicognani. It is significant that this latter dilemma occurred at the same time that the Sacred Consistorial Congregation issued its letter concerning African American Catholics. The Bishop expressed deep concern about the issuance of this letter when the Catholic high schools were so reluctant to educate these students. He felt that a letter from the Apostolic Delegate directly to these schools might put the matter to rest:

I have been able to force one or two colored girls into the Academies of the Notre Dame Sisters and the Ursuline Sisters

but, then, the doors are shut under some subterfuge, which is insulting to the intelligence and destructive to the faith of our colored people and completely destroys any prospects for future conversions among the colored people.

The letter from the Sacred Consistorial Congregation seems to stress the establishment of churches, schools, high schools, etc., for colored people, and that is precisely the answer which the Sisters give to the pastor of the colored church and even to me - that colored high schools and colleges should be established for the Negroes. Obviously, this is now out of the question in Cleveland as the colored parish is a very small one and has little chance for growth as long as the present discriminating spirit continues.

The Apostolic Delegate simply reiterated that it was contrary to Christian principles to discriminate against applicants on the basis of race or color. Bishop Schrembs' letter implied that he would not be opposed to separate high schools and colleges if there were sufficient students and sufficient resources to establish them. Whatever subsequent action the Bishop took on the matter is not extant, but there is continuing correspondence from one parent, Robert R. Brooks, for a three-year period in which he did not receive any action on the part of the bishop except promises of future action.³⁶

In 1940 there was further correspondence from the Apostolic Delegate concerning the same admissions problems. His comments at this point seem a bit of a compromise of the Christian principles he had advocated so strongly in 1936:

Certainly it is to be highly desired that every Catholic child, whether white or colored have an opportunity for Catholic education. When these children have to be placed in the same school, it naturally lies with the local Ordinary

³⁶Ibid.

and the individual superiors of schools to find a satisfactory and tactful manner of handling the delicate problems that may arise. Certainly the future welfare of the school must be considered as well as that of individual pupils.³⁷

Neither the Apostolic Delegate nor the local bishop insisted that the institutional racism which the African American students had encountered was morally wrong. Both ultimately hedged on the "delicate problem" of white and black Catholics encountering each other. Both men succumbed to the social attitudes of their day and betrayed the gospel they were committed to serve. Institutions took precedence over persons in the end. Mother Mary Katharine Drexel had once told one of the young girls at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament as she kissed her on the cheek, "Honey, don't hold it against the Church. The Church is not prejudiced - it's people."³⁸ The African American students had to remember this frequently.

Paradoxically, as the disagreements were continuing between school and diocesan authorities, African American students who were admitted to the girls' schools and colleges were proving to be outstanding students. Mother Mary Katharine Drexel appealed to Bishop McFadden in June of 1938 for a financial scholarship to Xavier University for June Williams who was graduating from Ursuline Academy. Mother Drexel expressed concern that a religious vocation might be nurtured if the new graduate were to

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Interview with Florence Jolly, 10 January 1991.

attend this African American Catholic university in New Orleans.³⁹ Two sisters, Dora and Nina Iola Somerville, were graduates of Ursuline College and received Master's degrees in social work from the Catholic University of America. Dora, also a graduate of Notre Dame Academy, was assuming the position of assistant director of the parish service bureau of the Catholic Youth Organization in Chicago in 1942. Nina was being trained to be the director of the women's division of the National Catholic Community Service in Las Vegas that same year. Both women were graduates of Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament School as was June Williams.⁴⁰ In 1958 Katherine McQueen graduated from Ursuline College having received a scholarship from the Kappa Gamma Pi National Achievement award. She was also selected for placement in *Who's Who in American Colleges and Universities*, and was offered an assistantship in research at Marquette University.⁴¹

Needless to say, other women who either attended or graduated from the Catholic girls' high schools and colleges reported feeling very lonely and often isolated. At times there were experiences of blatant prejudice from students and even individual Sisters. Frequently in the 1940s, there were only one or two other African American students in the school and for most of these women who had grown up in their respective black parishes

³⁹Papers of OLBS, ADC.

⁴⁰Ibid.; *Catholic Universe Bulletin*, 6 November 1942.

⁴¹*Cleveland Call and Post*, 14 June 1958.

and parish schools, it was their first experience of prejudice. One woman left because it was just too difficult to be so isolated. She remarked that the girls were very friendly in school, but once they closed the school doors behind them, they became aloof even though they had to ride the same city bus to a certain point from the school. Another woman who attended Notre Dame Academy in the late 1950s had a greater number of African American classmates, but she encountered a socioeconomic prejudice on the part of both black and white students who were from more affluent neighborhoods. Attendance and participation at social events such as dances was also problematic for the African American students. Some even resorted to merely being on decoration committees so as to avoid difficulties and still be involved.⁴² That these women remained faithful to the Church is a tribute to their faith and character, for surely such experiences were, indeed, "harmful to religion."

The evangelization of African Americans was not only approached through the parochial schools, but through active and often intensive efforts on the part of both clergy and laity. These efforts were especially strong in the 1940s and 1950s. At Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament eighty people were taking con-

⁴²Interviews with Florence Jolly, 10 January 1991; Ann Cowan, 13 November 1990; Philomena McClellan, 24 January 1991; LeMoyne Nesbitt, 5 December 1990; Anonymous interviews, Cleveland, Ohio, 6 November 1990; 8 January 1991; Cleveland Heights, Ohio, 19 January 1991.

vert instructions at one point in time according to Father Leonard Sudhoff. Instruction classes were held twice a week on Monday and Thursday at 11:00 A.M., 2:00 P.M., and 7:30 P.M. The classes were arranged so as to be readily available to those people who might have to work at different times of the day, or who might be on swing shifts where the work schedule changed regularly. The same instructional material was used in each class on a given day. These classes extended for a three-month period. At the end of this time, many of those taking instructions joined the Church, although not everyone did so automatically. Both the priest and the individual had to agree that the person was ready for membership.⁴³ These efforts bore considerable fruit. One hundred twenty-nine adults and children were converted in 1941 including several families.⁴⁴

A survey of the parish bulletins at St. Edward's for the years 1944 through 1951 indicates that a similar process was used there as well as numerous other attempts to encourage potential converts. In 1944 the announcement appeared that convert instructions could be arranged at any time with the following exhortation: "Did you ever make an effort to interest someone in the True Faith: If you appreciate your faith why not give others the benefit of it?" In May of that year the first group baptism for about

⁴³Anonymous written interview, Winter Garden, Florida, 20 January 1991.

⁴⁴*Catholic Universe Bulletin*, 4 April 1941.

thirty children was held and everyone was invited to attend. In 1946 the parishioners were encouraged to invite their friends for the April group baptism of forty-six individuals which included adults and children. All forty-six names were published in the bulletin on the Sunday of the baptism. Again, in August of 1946 there was a reminder about the availability of convert instructions at any time. By September a scheduled fifteen-week class was announced for Tuesday evenings which included a half-hour religious film. All who had a serious desire to know more about God were invited and assured there was no obligation to join the Church. "The truth has never done anyone harm, so don't be afraid to come." By 1947 the general weekly instructions continued and each time a new series began, an announcement appeared in the bulletin. However in February, "special instructions" were also being offered on the four other evenings of the week in the rectory. Apparently these sessions were for those who were actually seeking membership and not those simply inquiring about general topics that were discussed in the weekly session. The intensification of the efforts, however, is notable.⁴⁵

In April of that year, Bishop Edward Hoban himself participated in the group baptism reported to be the "largest group baptism in the history of the diocese." Eighty-six persons were baptized that afternoon. The large group baptisms were always held in the spring so that those recently baptized could also par-

⁴⁵St. Edward Parish Archives.

ticipate in the annual First Communion ceremonies which were traditionally held in May in most churches of the diocese. The sacrament of Confirmation was also held every couple of years in the spring. However, other persons who were ready for baptism at other times during the year received the sacrament at that time and their names or at least an announcement would appear in the bulletin then.

Other admonitions to the parishioners also continued to appear with some regularity. In 1948, for example, "give your Catholic newspaper to a non-Catholic friend" and "bring a non-Catholic friend to Lenten devotions." In May of that year a group of eighty-five people, thirty-nine men and boys and forty-six women and girls, were again baptized at one ceremony. Bishop Floyd Begin attended the group ceremony for 114 candidates in May of 1949. New instruction classes began immediately the following week with the suggestion: "Accompany an interested person to class a few times." In 1950 the Tuesday instructions were announced for 11:00, 1:00 and 7:30 in the evening as was the practice at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament. One hundred individuals were baptized that April. In December the Wednesday evening Holy Hour was dedicated to the intercession for conversions. In April of 1951 when 131 people were baptized on Sunday afternoon, priests from the neighboring parishes came to assist the St. Edward clergy. The number of conversions for the years 1944 through 1958 totalled

approximately 2,209 at St. Edward's Parish alone. At least half of this number were adults.⁴⁶

Brother Norbert Hoying recalled the years 1946 through 1955 when he was assigned to St. Edward Parish and shared responsibility for convert recruitment and instruction with the priests. Instruction classes were only part of their efforts. He and the priests made house-to-house visits, regardless of the religious affiliation of the family, and invited people to come to church. Many came because of that simple invitation and many subsequently pursued instructions in the faith. Brother Norbert felt that people were simply "looking for something." During the instructions, a standard catechism was used with each group that met. The same instructor met with his own group until the instructions were completed.

During the group baptism, each priest and brother would meet at a station in the church with his own group of candidates that he had instructed, usually ten to twelve individuals. Often there were as many as ten or twelve such groups stationed around the church:

Each priest did his own group and he also baptized his own group. When he finished the preliminary rituals of the ceremony and it was time to pour the water, then he would bring them up to the baptismal font. When they were finished, they would go back to their station and finish the ritual and the next group would come to the baptismal font.⁴⁷

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Interview with Brother Norbert Hoying, C.S.S.P., Bellevue, Ohio, 14 January 1991.

Mary James was part of a group of four or five individuals who received instructions from Father Lochtefeld at St. Edward and was then part of the large group baptism. She attributed much of the success of the parish's evangelization efforts to the personal contact extended by the clergy in their house visitations and friendly invitation to come to the church. Another woman said that the large number of conversions was due to the fact that the priests just worked so hard at trying to draw people to the Church and that the parish had a school. She proudly displayed a picture of the adults who made their First Communion as a group in 1950. She herself had been sponsor to several who were baptized at St. Edward.⁴⁸

Often these large group baptisms included entire families of parents and children. During the late 1940s, adult candidates would receive instructions for a year or longer, and regular attendance at Mass and other devotions was regarded as indications of their sincerity for membership in the Church. The homes of parents and guardians were visited by the priests before children were accepted for baptism. It is unclear whether these practices continued as the number of candidates increased and the amount of time for instruction decreased.⁴⁹

⁴⁸Interviews with Mary James, Cleveland, Ohio, 18 December 1990; Anonymous interview, East Cleveland, Ohio, 15 January 1991.

⁴⁹*Catholic Universe Bulletin*, 7 May 1948; 17 May 1957

Personal interviews were regularly extended to those who may have had questions or difficulties with some aspect of the Church or its beliefs.⁵⁰ Other techniques of evangelization included "Pulpit Dialogues" such as that hosted at St. Edward Parish in September of 1950. Two Paulist Fathers were brought to the parish for a week during which evening presentations were given on the basic doctrines of Catholic belief. Questions and comments from those in attendance were also entertained. Such an event was opened to anyone wishing to attend, Catholic or not, and usually it was preceded by considerable publicity.⁵¹

Such efforts at evangelization were not unique to these two parishes, however. Convert instructions were offered at every parish and the enthusiasm with which this occurred depended solely on the individual priests who staffed the parish. However, the 1950s were a particularly "triumphal" era for the American Catholic Church in general, and evangelization was one expression of this mentality.⁵² Efforts to welcome African Americans and others into the Church were diligently extended at the neighboring territorial parish of St. Agnes, particularly during the pastorate

⁵⁰Papers of OLBS, ADC.

⁵¹*Cleveland Call and Post*, 9 September 1950.

⁵²James Hennesey, S.J., *American Catholics: A History of the Roman Catholic Community in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), pp. 304-306.

of Bishop Floyd Begin from 1947 to 1962.⁵³ In a letter to Archbishop Hoban in 1956, Begin's attitude is appropriately expressed:

I am under the impression that there are thousands of people in the City of Cleveland alone, and perhaps other thousands throughout the Diocese, who are waiting for an invitation to join the Catholic Church and who never receive it. Ninety percent of the converts we have had at St. Agnes' tell us that they were never asked until we asked them. Most of them have been interested in the Catholic Church for years and many of them have been attending the Catholic Church regularly.⁵⁴

The letter was a request to use a \$50,000 grant from the Knights of Columbus for advertising the Catholic Church throughout Ohio and to publish the availability of instruction classes in local secular and diocesan newspapers. Bishop Begin ran a similar "Pulpit Dialogue" at St. Agnes in September of 1960 called "Friendly Talks about the Church." He left no stone unturned relative to publicity and public invitations.⁵⁵

Local diocesan clergymen recalled his indefatigable efforts and his openness to African Americans. There were over a thousand converts within a ten-year period at St. Agnes and much of this success was due to an innovative organizational plan he carried out with his associate pastors. Father Albert Myers was one of the associate pastors under Bishop Begin from 1956 to 1962

⁵³St. Agnes Parish will be treated more extensively in the following chapter as will St. Thomas Aquinas Parish.

⁵⁴St. Agnes Parish Archives, transferred to ADC.

⁵⁵Ibid.

and recalled that there were four associates at the time besides the bishop himself. Each one of them conducted at least one inquiry group per year with at least twelve to twenty students, most of whom did enter the Church. Begin divided the parish into five sections and made each priest, including himself, responsible for that section on a permanent basis, thus making each one a kind of "mini-pastor." It was the priest's responsibility to call and visit each home in his section to inquire about the spiritual and physical needs of that family and to make subsequent follow-up contacts. This procedure also provided an on-going and updated census of the parish. The five men would meet on a weekly basis to report the work of the week.

This was clearly not the common style of parish administration in those days, and it was not particularly well received by the associates who were unaccustomed to such administrative responsibilities. Each section of the parish had perhaps a hundred or more families and individuals. The priests were very well received especially when they went door to door. The entire effort was based on Bishop Begin's philosophy that it was the task of the priest to go out to people and invite them in and not to wait for someone to come knocking. As Father Myers said, "It was evangelization in the highest sense."⁵⁶

⁵⁶Interview with the Reverend Albert Myers, Rocky River, Ohio, 18 January 1991.

Father Donald Balogh also was an associate pastor at St. Agnes from 1949 to 1958 and recalled that inquiry classes often were repeated every six weeks. The Bishop even ran contests with the associates to see who could bring in the most converts! However, the converts were sincere and many endured in the practice of the faith, sending their children and grandchildren to St. Agnes School. Father Balogh believed the receptivity and welcoming style of the Bishop was one of the key motivating factors in the response of African Americans to the Church. Also the efforts of many of the other parishioners were convincing signs that they were indeed welcome there.⁵⁷

The activity of lay Catholics at St. Agnes was well known, especially the efforts of the Legion of Mary which did extensive work in personal contacts with non-Catholics as well as other parishioners. They, too, visited homes and hospitals, providing countless services to people to enable them to practice their faith or to welcome non-Catholics to the Church. Their services were often of a practical nature, but they responded to spiritual needs as well by attending wakes, praying with people, and providing spiritual reading materials. What made St. Agnes' attempts so successful was that contacts were not restricted to the stable neighborhoods, but were extended to those that were undergoing change. African Americans moving into the parish

⁵⁷Interview with the Reverend Donald Balogh, Parma, Ohio, 28 January 1991.

neighborhoods from the central districts were uprooted from their former neighborhood churches, particularly Protestant ones, and these people were particularly receptive to an invitation of welcome to their new neighborhoods.⁵⁸

More than the average amount of effort at evangelization was extended also at St. Thomas Aquinas Parish on Superior Avenue and Ansel Road. The key to success there also lay with personal contact and follow up. After three months of instruction classes at St. Thomas, new converts were invited to join a convert club which met once a month. Parties and picnics were included with this club so that the newest members of the parish would be fully incorporated into the group. One of the outstanding leaders of this convert club was an African American woman, Hazel Person. There were two to three convert classes per year averaging about fifty to seventy-five converts a year at St. Thomas. Attempts were made to give individual attention to African Americans who were seeking instruction since it seemed that many were coming to the Catholic Church out of disappointment with local storefront churches or money-seeking evangelists. The parish structure was an attractive, stabilizing sign for many.⁵⁹ Further, St. Thomas

⁵⁸St. Agnes Parish Archives; Interview with the Reverend Thomas Gallagher, Cleveland, Ohio, 11 January 1991.

⁵⁹Interview with the Reverend Robert Pahler, Greensburg, Ohio, 5 February 1991.

attracted several persons of stature in the black community which may well have influenced others to become interested as well.⁶⁰

Another factor which Father Edward Camille, former associate pastor there from 1958 to 1961, believed was a strong attraction to African Americans from Protestant backgrounds was the Catholic sacraments, particularly the Eucharist:

I know they would often sit back in classes and say, I can't believe what you say that Christ loves us so much. But the sacraments were equally given, maybe that was the point of it, that they were given to all of us with no discrimination on who got them and who didn't. Maybe that's the point. The Eucharist was for everyone. . . It was the easiest part of the Church for them to accept.

He recalled that First Communions and Confirmations were times of great celebration and a family social event for the new converts.⁶¹

For the Catholic clergymen, their successful efforts at evangelization were a source of pride and achievement. For many African American converts, it was their first experience with mingling two cultural worlds. For some, the decision to convert was a fairly easy one with which they felt comfortable. For others, the decision was more difficult and demanded a clarity about the consequences it would entail.

⁶⁰Interview with the Reverend Thomas Gallagher, 11 January 1991.

⁶¹Interview with the Reverend Edward Camille, Brecksville, Ohio, 29 January 1991; The Reverend Gene Wilson, C.P.P.S., also reports that he believed the African Americans were strongly attracted to the Church because of the sacramental rituals. Interview, Cleveland, Ohio, 6 August 1991.

African American Catholics reported a variety of reasons and circumstances that led to their own conversions. Several, of course, came to the Catholic faith because they attended the parish school. Ann Cowan became a Catholic at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament four months after she entered the school as a seventh grader. One of the eighth grade girls would stay after school with her to help her learn her catechism. Ann Cowan said she was fascinated with the Catholic rituals which were so different from the Protestant services she had known. Her first contact was with Father Lochtefeld when she was enrolling in the school and she was struck by his kindness and acceptance of her. Philomena McClellan also became Catholic as a student at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament as did her siblings. Consequently her father, William Ware, chose to become Catholic as well. Her mother, however, retained her Baptist religion and the children learned to appreciate both traditions within their own family:

I was baptized there [OLBS] before I went to Notre Dame Academy. All of us, all of the children became Catholic. And because we became Catholic, Daddy did. My mother remained Baptist. This was the rationale, the children were Catholic and he wanted to know what it was all about. He's still a Catholic. Mama died a Baptist, but she was always supportive of us. She went to church with us and all of our functions.

Teresa Merritt describes her attraction to the Church very simply. "I was coming down East 79th Street, saw a nun leading a group of children down the street; asked my mother if I could go to that school; she subsequently enrolled me." Another woman who attended Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament School had a similar attraction

through the Sisters. "Being placed in a parochial school in the first grade and the example and caring of the order of Sisters who taught there" led to her conversion.⁶²

Father Gene Wilson experienced an initial attraction to the Church after he viewed a Catholic movie. In fact, he simultaneously felt an attraction to the priesthood as well. His grandmother had some good Catholic friends that he knew, but he felt the film was the initial drawing card for him. He enrolled in instruction classes intermittently for several years until his association with another young Catholic African American friend at work became the source of a direct invitation to attend church together at St. Edward. Two years after his baptism he entered the seminary. This was just the beginning, however. His father became acquainted with Father Lochtefeld because of his seminarian son and was very impressed. He and his wife both entered the Church. Mr. Wilson subsequently encouraged his own brother to join the Church which he did with his wife and eleven of their fourteen children. The three missing children happened to be in the army at the time.⁶³

Attraction by mere association is reported by several individuals; in one case, an attraction that went back to child-

⁶²Interviews with Ann Cowan, 13 November 1990; Philomena McClellan, 24 January 1991; Written interview with Teresa B. Merritt, Cleveland, Ohio, 6 January 1991; anonymous written interview, Cleveland, Ohio, 19 January 1991.

⁶³Interview with Rev. Gene Wilson, C.P.P.S., Cleveland, Ohio, 6 August 1991

hood. Ocilla Gayters grew up in Ireland, Georgia, and recalled being fascinated by the Catholic Sisters who would speak to her and her little sister on their way to the library. Being granddaughters of a Baptist minister they were extremely reluctant to share their newfound friends with the family, but Ocilla never forgot them. "From then on, I thought, 'Someday I'm gonna become a Catholic.'" After she got married and came to Cleveland in 1929, she did exactly that. Barbara Robinson's parents became Catholic, she believed, just because they lived across the street from Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Church. Otis Dixon, who was an outstanding organist both at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament and at St. Edward, became a Catholic after he began working at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament under the pastorate of Father Michael Stevenson when he was twenty-one years old.⁶⁴

Several women entered the Church because of its contrast with what was their current religion. Coral Mills remembered being disappointed with the response of her Episcopal clergyman at the time of her husband's death. Margaret Santiago followed her sister into the Catholic Church after being raised a Baptist as a child. She, too, was attracted to the Catholic Mass. Another

⁶⁴Interview with Ocilla Gayters, Cleveland, Ohio, 4 December 1990; Barbara Robinson, Bedford Heights, Ohio, 16 January 1991; Anonymous interview, Shaker Heights, Ohio, 21 January 1991.

woman found the Church's unwavering doctrinal and moral teachings appealing as a source of truth.⁶⁵

Other women reported that it was their children's education which led them to the Church. One woman's son who was attending St. Thomas Aquinas School kept asking her if she was going to go to Sunday Mass with the rest of the family rather than her church. Her involvement with the school and the example of her husband and family finally gave her the impetus to enter the Church. Blontee Anderson forthrightly stated that she became a Catholic because she liked the kind of education and discipline she saw happening at St. Agnes School. The Sisters there would talk to her when she went passed the playground with her little daughter who was a pre-schooler. She admitted that she had every intention of returning to the A.M.E. Church after the children finished school, but by that time her husband had converted also. She said with a twinkle in her eye, "So I decided to stay and as a friend of mine said, 'If you can't beat 'em, join 'em. Especially if it's a good join.'" She remembered being determined not to hurry her children's baptism just because Bishop Begin was ready to arrange the ceremony! Her husband's conversion was related to

⁶⁵Interview with Coral Mills, Cleveland, Ohio, 13 December 1990; Margaret Santiago, Cleveland, Ohio, 15 November 1990; The Rev. Mr. Joseph Newman, Cleveland, Ohio, 11 December 1990.

the fact that one of the priests from St. Agnes donated three pints of blood for his heart surgery in 1959.⁶⁶

Similarly, Jimmie Lee Payton shared the Church's doctrine regarding Mary even though she wasn't Catholic and wanted her son to attend St. Agnes School where he would be taught this belief. When he was ready to make his First Communion, both parents took instructions and joined the Church as well. She felt they should be Catholic along with their son. Another woman, the daughter of two teachers, wanted the discipline and quality of education she saw in the Catholic schools for her children. She became a Catholic so that she could understand what they were learning even though her husband had been a Catholic all his life. She did not like the style of Catholic worship and was ridiculed by her friends for joining a church that spoke in Latin, but her children's education was her overriding priority.⁶⁷

Some African American Catholics came to the Church out of their own need for meaning. One woman was experiencing difficulties in her marriage and the Catholic priest seemed to be readily available to counsel her. She subsequently joined the Church even though she had been a Methodist all her life. Mary James recalled being a young wife with a baby son and realizing there was yet a

⁶⁶Interview with Blontee Anderson, Cleveland, Ohio, 17 December 1990; Anonymous interview, Cleveland, Ohio, 29 October 1990.

⁶⁷Interview with Jimmie Lee Payton, Cleveland, Ohio, 9 January 1991; Anonymous interview, Shaker Heights, Ohio, 23 January 1991.

void in her life. "Deep down inside, I knew that I was missing God in my life." Her husband's family was Catholic but not practicing at the time, so she and they decided to go to St. Edward one Sunday for Mass. After Mass one of the priests invited her to come for instructions thinking she was someone else. Mary James came anyway.⁶⁸ There were those like "Mother" Brown who had searched for deeper meaning her entire life. Mary Brown was seventy-one years of age when she was baptized at St. Edward Church in 1951, the oldest candidate in the group. She had been a lay leader in the Baptist Church, thus her title, but she felt there must be more:

But all the time I felt that there was something cold about the Baptist Church. There wasn't the concern for a person's soul. I think the Catholic Church is wonderful; there's no talking, everybody comes to pray. When I see my Baptist friends, I tell them where to find the right Church.

Mary Brown felt that being a Catholic made it easier to live the manner of life she valued: "Never a lie, never a swear word, never a bad thought, never a cross word." She faithfully prayed the rosary every day, at least once. She died in March of 1952.⁶⁹

Finally, there were those who came because one other Catholic person influenced them deeply. LeMoyne Nesbitt's mother was instrumental in Ann Cowan's mother becoming Catholic. For Charles Johnson it was the influence of a fellow black man he

⁶⁸Anonymous interview, Cleveland, Ohio, 20 December 1990; Mary James, 18 December 1990.

⁶⁹*Catholic Universe Bulletin*, 2 November 1951, 14 March 1952.

admired very much without ever realizing the man was Catholic.

"When he told me he was Catholic, that just really floored me. So I took instructions." He also recalled peering up the front steps and open doors of the local Catholic Church in West Virginia when he was a young boy, wondering what was going on in there. Johnson wondered if he wouldn't have been a Catholic sooner if someone had taken the initiative to invite him into the service.⁷⁰

There were many, however, who were invited into the Church by other African American Catholics who were so enthusiastic about spreading the faith that they subsequently brought dozens, if not hundreds, of people to the faith. Bernice Jackson experienced this type of influence in Iola Ellis as did many others who are Catholics today. When Bernice Jackson came to Cleveland in 1945 as a newlywed to join her husband who was renting an apartment from Mrs. Ellis, she was immediately asked if she would like to become Catholic. Her husband, Joseph Jackson, was already Catholic. Iola Ellis arranged for Bernice Jackson to take private instructions from one of the priests at St. Joseph Parish on Woodland Avenue and also became her baptismal sponsor. This pattern was repeated many times over by Iola Ellis.⁷¹

Iola Ellis was a convert herself, married but without children of her own. Her husband, however, never embraced the

⁷⁰Interview with LeMoyne Nesbitt, 5 December 1990; The Rev. Mr. Charles Johnson, Cleveland, Ohio, 17 December 1990.

⁷¹Interview with Bernice Jackson, Cleveland, Ohio, 14 February 1991.

faith. Bernice Jackson perceived Iola Ellis' efforts as being sincere and genuinely authentic. She really wanted people to become Catholic. However, her dynamic and, at times, forceful approaches did affect some people negatively.⁷² Nonetheless, her sincerity was never questioned. Those who knew her described her in various ways. Blontee Anderson remembered her as "very forceful; it took me some time to get used to her," but someone she could turn to at a moment's notice. Ann Cowan called her a "fighter" because she never hesitated to speak out for the rights of African Americans and firmly believed in integration. Joseph Newman called her "real, she told it like she saw it." She encouraged African Americans to consider religious life, especially young girls, and she also encouraged them to attend Catholic colleges. Her own nieces, Doris and Nina Somerville, were among the first to graduate from Ursuline College. She was outspoken and did not hesitate to approach the city's politicians when something needed to be done in the neighborhood. Her strongest energies, however, were spent in evangelization of her people.⁷³

Those energies spanned at least three decades. Her most enterprising activity was the storefront thrift shop she managed at 7606 Cedar Avenue. Used clothing, furniture, toys, and other

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Interview with Blontee Anderson, 17 December 1990; Ann Cowan, 13 November 1990; The Rev. Mr. Joseph Newman, 11 December 1990.

goods were sold for the most minimal amounts to those who came to the store, but that was not all. Pictures of African American Catholic saints, bishops, priests and Sisters were prominently displayed as was Catholic literature and reading materials of all kinds. Free pamphlets and prayer materials were readily available for the taking. Consequently, hundreds of people were engaged in dialogues about the faith when they came to the store. If the interest mounted, Iola Ellis would direct them to one of the local parishes in their area for instruction classes. She was especially attentive to the spiritual needs of those who had fallen away from the Catholic Church and tried to arrange for spiritual counseling for them with a priest. Furthermore, she would follow up on those who joined the Church to see if they were attending church regularly.

The little money that was raised from the sale of the merchandise was used for donation to the missions and local poor parishes. A tiny percentage was retained for upkeep and rental of the store space. Mrs. Ellis was assisted in this work by other women among whom were Mrs. Mary Baker of Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Parish and Mrs. George Daye of St. Edward Parish as regular staff members. Iola Ellis herself was a member of St. Agnes Parish.⁷⁴ The information center was a community project engaging people from several neighborhoods and parishes.

⁷⁴Interview with Rev. Mr. Joseph Newman, 11 December 1990; Bernice Jackson, 14 February 1991; *Catholic Universe Bulletin*, 10 April 1959; 20 January 1961.

Not surprisingly, however, Iola Ellis and the clergy did not always see eye to eye. The lay evangelizer was a common figure in the African American religious tradition.⁷⁵ This was not the case in the clergy-dominated white Catholic tradition. The two traditions hit head-on in Iola Ellis. As early as July of 1936, Father Michael Stevenson, pastor at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament, wrote to Bishop Schrembs out of frustration with Mrs. Ellis' missionary endeavors. She apparently had already obtained the storefront on Cedar Avenue and was using it as a "missionary center" to give instructions in the faith and to conduct study groups. She was assisted in her efforts by three other women who the priest felt were equally incapable of giving instructions. In frustration, Father Stevenson wrote:

I am giving instructions three nights a week. Besides these classes I am taking special cases two afternoons a week. I have given those interested in the church every opportunity to receive instructions.

I want to run this parish as I see my duty in the sight of God. If I am not doing my work satisfactorily, please move me. I'll miss this parish. I'll take as assistant a priest in my home, but I will not let any layman and especially a woman take charge of the work which has been entrusted to me.

From the contents of the letter, this was not Stevenson's first communication about her to the Bishop. No reasons are offered here, therefore, as to why he felt she was so inept. It appears

⁷⁵Cyprian Davis found this to be true in the African American Catholic experience as well. See, *History of Black Catholics*, p. 210 ff.

that he felt any lay person would not be adequately trained for such instruction, and surely not a laywoman!⁷⁶

In May of 1939 Auxiliary Bishop James McFadden wrote to Father Lochtefeld at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament concerning Iola Ellis' desire to teach non-Catholics at various locations. She had nine other women ready to serve as lay apostles in this endeavor. Further, she wanted Lochtefeld or his assistant to attend the Little Flower Study Club that had already formed at the home of Mrs. Gassaway on East 89th Street and an instruction class for non-Catholic children. The bishop somewhat sympathetically concluded:

I am presenting these requests because I think you will be able to come to some understanding with her and the group who seem so puzzled about not being able to explain the faith to those who are outside the fold.⁷⁷

In the 1950s there was also consternation on the part of the assistant at St. Agnes Parish, Father Albert Myers, concerning Iola Ellis' enthusiasm for the faith. At the time, he felt she was "pushy"; Bishop Begin called her "zealous." "Obviously, looking back, she was both." A parishioner at the time, Iola Ellis was in Myers' section of the parish and frequently implored him as "pastor of that area" to make himself available at her store. Myers did not agree with that approach, though now he admits her idea was probably a good one even though he still would not use

⁷⁶Papers of OLBS, ADC.

⁷⁷Ibid.

it. She reported her difficulties to Bishop Begin, the pastor, and this led to heated disagreements between the associate and the bishop. Again, offers of transfer on the part of the priest were made, but never accepted by the bishop. Ellis accused Myers of racial prejudice, but he maintained that he simply did not agree with her style and approach. He felt he was readily available at St. Agnes Church for anyone who was interested in the faith. As Father Myers pointed out, it was a matter of two strong wills, his and hers.⁷⁸

It was also a matter of cultures clashing. Paradoxically, in this case, both cultural patterns were maintained, and even though Iola Ellis did not change the Catholic approach to evangelization, nonetheless, for almost three decades she succeeded in her own. Fellow African Americans had no difficulty accepting her message, even if the clergy did.

Father Donald Balogh who was also in the parish at the same time as Father Myers remembered her vividly:

We called her the St. Paul in the Hough area. Mrs. Ellis was not a lady to be put off. She was someone to be reckoned with, she had a faith and such a fervor. She was responsible for going to people and saying, "There's a class starting at St. Agnes on Monday night at 7:00. You be there." It would often bring them. If someone died and she thought that they needed a little special attention, she said, "I want three priests at that wake and I want you to say a whole rosary, not one decade stuff." She was just something else.

⁷⁸Interview with the Rev. Albert Myers, 18 January 1991.

There were others in the parish who shared her enthusiasm but were not quite so overt as she was.⁷⁹

One of the converts who had been touched early on by Mrs. Ellis' zeal was Ocilla Gayters who, in turn, became an equally active apostle for the Church. As an interested inquirer in 1936, Ocilla Gayters remembered going over the catechism with a little group in Mrs. Ellis' store. "She always encouraged me, she'd say, "Your're gonna make a good Catholic." I said, "Well, I'll do my best." Ocilla Gayters kept her promise. She herself sponsored fifty-nine converts when a contest was held to see who could bring the greatest number to instruction classes in a thirty-day period. She would place Catholic literature around the beauty shop which she owned. "When friends asked me about our faith I'd give them information and later take them to church with me. If they started instructions, I'd attend at least the first three classes with them." The similarity of her description of her approach to that of some Protestant approaches is unmistakable:

We went door to door. We would get in twos and then we would go on each side of the street. We used to go and take the Bible and explain, take the catechism and explain things to people. It was amazing and I was surprised that people, seemed like that's what they was waiting for - somebody to come and open up and tell them what was going on and what it was all about.⁸⁰

⁷⁹Interview with the Rev. Donald Balogh, 28 January 1991.

⁸⁰Interview with Ocilla Gayters, 4 December 1990;
Catholic Universe Bulletin, 7 October 1966.

It was precisely the similarity of these approaches to other religious projects in the neighborhood that created the clergy reaction, especially to these storefront endeavors. In Father Stevenson's letter of 1936 he informed Bishop Schrembs that priests in other cities engaged in pastoral work with African Americans had come upon what he believed were bizarre aberrations of Catholic devotions:

In fact one priest told me he found one of his women who closed her instructions with devotions to the Little Flower. There were vigil lights, a statue, she read prayers and preached at these meetings. He finally had to denounce her from the pulpit to stop her activities. She made her living by telling fortunes.⁸¹

This was not a Cleveland situation at that time; however, by the 1950s, it was. There were several varieties of this folk religion advertised in the *Call and Post*, but one of the more obvious ones was Mme. Sonora's.

Reverend Madam or Mme. Sonora, as she was alternately called, operated a Chapel of Welcome at various locations in the black neighborhoods; at one time, 4901 Central Avenue and then at 8305 Cedar Avenue. The second location was a storefront.⁸² She

⁸¹Papers of OLBS, ADC.

⁸²According to Meier and Rudwick, storefront churches were the religious expressions that some urban blacks used to give meaning to their lives. August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, *From Plantation to Ghetto*, 3rd ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976), pp. 249-251. Drake and Cayton provide detailed descriptions of storefront churches and spiritualists in Chicago in the 1930s in St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City*, 2 vols., rev. and enlarged ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1970), pp. 611-657.

offered unusual combinations of Catholic devotional prayers and religious symbolism. Prayers to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, St. Therese the Little Flower, St. Anthony, and blessings were used in combination with vigil lights, "holy" oil, incense, pictures, statues and other religious articles. Along with these she offered candle seances, readings, healings, messages, and sand readings and blessings through her psychic abilities. She also claimed to have many relics of the saints. *The Catholic Universe Bulletin* also reported that she was running a numbers business at the same location besides making money from the attraction some African Americans had for the externals of Catholic devotional life. There was a plethora of readers, advisors and healers advertising at this time period in Cleveland.⁸³

The clergymen were well aware that for those who were inquiring into the Catholic faith, there was great need for authenticity at a time when they were vulnerable to the influence of others. The externals of the Catholic tradition easily lent themselves to abuse and manipulation by those who had motives other than as an expression of faith. For African Americans inquiring about Catholicism, there was a need to sort out the authentic from the fraudulent. For many, an Iola Ellis and an Ocilla Gayters were credible sources that could be trusted for sound direction. The persistence of Father Lochtefeld and others

⁸³Cleveland Call and Post, 30 June 1951, 7 March 1953; *Catholic Universe Bulletin*, 20 February 1953.

to teach the new Catholics the devotional life of the Church was reasonable given the religious options available to them.

The fervor of many African Americans toward their faith raised necessarily the question of religious vocations, the commitment of one's life to the priesthood or to the vowed life of a religious congregation. It was here that a great paradox existed. Despite the eagerness which many church ministers exhibited in spreading the faith to African Americans, most did not express the same eagerness in the encouragement of religious vocations. The letter of the Sacred Consistorial Congregation cited at the beginning of this chapter stated the official Church attitude toward African American vocations quite clearly:

In order to increase the number of these workers who are more and more necessary, ecclesiastical vocations among the Negroes are to be cultivated with particular care and effort. . . . With the increase in the number of Catholics among the colored people there is to be expected also an increase in vocations for the priesthood; and while it has been providential that up to now colored youths have ordinarily embraced the religious life where they find together with perfection of state greater safeguards for the priestly life, still it must be considered that choice sacerdotal vocations may be had even outside the religious life. The Bishops therefore are asked to give to this point the greatest attention and care. In the Northern parts of the United States and in the areas where Negroes have been Catholics for several generations there is reason to believe that much is to be hoped for from carefully chosen youths, who might try themselves in the diocesan seminaries, to be promoted to the priesthood and employed in the sacred ministry *for the benefit of their own people.* [italics added]³⁴

³⁴Papers of Bishop Joseph Schrembs Pertaining to Black Catholic Issues, ADC.

Officially the Church expressed an inclusive attitude toward African American vocations, but, nonetheless, still restricted such ministry exclusively to African Americans. Religious orders were regarded as more fitting support systems for these vocations because they provided a community life for the individual who would not be left to his own resources to survive socially among the clergy. At least the door was opening, even though the attitudes were still obviously prejudiced by contemporary standards. Many American bishops at this time accepted the national church model, and the Vatican position would have been compatible with their own thinking.

At the local diocesan level Bishop Schrembs shared much the same attitude.⁸⁵ The bishop had tried to sponsor two African American seminarians but reversed his decision before they reached ordination. In 1927 he agreed to sponsor William Leroy Lane at St. Vincent Archabbey Seminary in Latrobe, Pennsylvania, and William Grau, a native Cleveland, at St. Mary's Seminary in Cleveland. In 1929 the bishop retracted his sponsorship in what Stephen Ochs interprets as a reaction to some negative publicity about a Detroit African American priest. Bishop Schrembs cited Lane's outspokenness regarding racial discrimination as his reason for the retraction of Lane. He cited "conditions in the Cleveland diocese that made it inadvisable to adopt a colored student" as

⁸⁵Ibid. It was customary in the Cleveland diocese during these years to assign a priest to a parish of his own ethnic background when possible, especially if he could speak the language.

his reason for discontinuing Grau's support.⁸⁶ The fear and caution displayed in the Schrembs decision were typical of many of the American bishops despite the urgings from the Vatican. Again, the bishop reflected the social mores of his city in his response to the need for African American clergy.

From that point on there was little done relative to diocesan efforts to promote African American vocations for the diocesan seminary until Bishop Floyd Begin made concerted attempts in the 1950s. He encouraged vocations for young women as well as young men to religious orders as well. Where attempts were made on the part of a candidate to pursue religious life, some eventually discontinued the process because of poor scholastic achievement. Above average scholastic ability was required for the kinds of academic work required of seminarians, both diocesan and those in religious institutes. Another barrier for local seminarians was the previous marriage of a candidate's parents.⁸⁷ As a result, there were more than several African American

⁸⁶Stephen J. Ochs, *Desegregating the Altar: The Josephites and the Struggle for Black Priests, 1871-1960* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), pp. 290-315.

⁸⁷According to Canon 1363 of the *Code of Canon Law, 1917*, the official legal code of the universal Church, a candidate for religious and clerical life who was born of a second invalid marriage was considered illegitimate and, therefore, unqualified for religious life. This law was subject to dispensation by the local bishop, however, the Cleveland policy was to refer the candidate to another diocese or to a religious order where the ministry would not occur in the Cleveland diocese and be subject to scandal.

candidates who considered or attempted seminary life, but who faced these restrictions.⁸⁸

In some cases the clergy waited for the young man or woman to express an interest but did not directly invite them to consider religious life, frequently because they knew the kind of racial attitudes the young person would be forced to endure both in training and later in ministry. Naturally such interest was limited since there were no role models in Cleveland prior to 1960 who might suggest to the young African American that such a life was possible for them.⁸⁹ There were those like Iola Ellis who encouraged vocations, but they did not have the impact they might have had without the encouragement of the clergy and the presence of role models. The exposure of African American priests and men and women religious was extremely minimal in the Cleveland diocese, so much so that the *Cleveland Call and Post* would run prominent headlines and photos extending four columns wide when such visitors made their appearances in the city. The accompanying text suggested that such persons were an unusual phenomenon.⁹⁰ Visitors to Cleveland usually stopped at Our Lady of the Blessed

⁸⁸Papers of St. Agnes Parish transferred to ADC.

⁸⁹Interviews with the Rev. Thomas Gallagher, 11 January 1991; The Rev. Msgr. Thomas J. Murphy, North Madison, Ohio, 26 January 1991; The Rev. Daniel Begin, Cleveland, Ohio, 7 January 1991; The Rev. Albert Myers, 18 January 1991; Anonymous interviews, 12, 22 January 1991.

⁹⁰See, for example, *Cleveland Call and Post*, 11 April 1940; 7 February 1948; 7 April 1951; 27 August 1960.

Sacrament or St. Edward where they were given opportunities to meet parishioners.⁹¹

African American Catholics, consequently, tended to accept the situation as "the way it was" in a white church, unless they themselves had grown up out of town where their experience was different, as in Baltimore or Louisiana, for example.⁹²

Bernice Jackson represents what was a fairly common reaction:

There weren't that many black priests in Cleveland. I've never been in a parish where there were black priests. Only recently at St. Cecilia's have I experienced an association with a black nun. I never realized any absence or presence racially of religious. In Jackson [Tennessee] we never had any black priests. I was married by a white priest. My association in the church has always been with the white priest and the white nuns. I always knew there were black religious, but I was never exposed to contact with them.⁹³

However, when African American Catholics did meet one of their own priests or religious, the event was memorable. Patricia Polk remembered her first encounter with an African American Sister:

When I was seventeen years old, there was a black nun, she was from the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament. When she came to St. Edward Parish it was such a big thing because we just didn't think there were black nuns. . . . I remember when she

⁹¹See, for example, *Catholic Universe Bulletin*, 4 March 1927.

⁹²Interview with Sr. Rosella Holloman, C.S.A., 23 November 1990; Coral Mills, Cleveland, Ohio, 13 December 1990; Anonymous interview, Akron, Ohio, 21 December 1990; Cleveland, Ohio, 6 November 1990; Written interviews with Dianne Barney, Cleveland Heights, Ohio, 25 February 1991; Louis J. Massey, Wickliffe, Ohio, 4 January 1991; Teresa B. Merritt, Cleveland, Ohio, 6 January 1991; Sophronia Bryant Reed, Garfield Heights, Ohio, 15 January 1991; Gladys Thurman-Lee, Warrensville Heights, Ohio, 6 January 1991; Margaret Washington, Dayton, Ohio, 19 January 1991.

⁹³Interview with Bernice Jackson, 14 February 1991.

came, my mother and other mothers in the parish treated her in such a way. She was such a delight because she was one of our own. We would talk with her often.⁹⁴

George Moore echoed similar sentiments. "Do you know that some of us were twenty to twenty-five years old before we saw a black nun or black priest?"⁹⁵ Patricia Polk's and George Moore's comments are especially notable because both of them were Catholic from birth.

African Americans were no different than the rest of the Catholic population in their reasons for rejecting religious life as their life's vocation once it was presented to them as an option. The difficulty was that it was so seldom presented. There were more than several who would have seriously considered the option had someone encouraged them. Again, Patricia Polk's comments are revealing:

Not one [Sister] ever said, "Why don't you become a nun?" They told me I was a nice person. I would be a good Catholic mother. I would be this or that, but never was I encouraged to be a nun. There were times when I thought of it, but no one ever said this is what you should do. . . . Had someone encouraged me, I would have. As a matter of fact, we talked about it in my home. My mother didn't seem real excited about it and she said, "Oh, that's not for you, Pat. You would never be able to do that. It's just not for you."

And as I think back now, why was she saying it was not for me? Was it because we didn't have the money? Was it because I was black? Was it because I would have a hard time? What was her real reason? I never asked her; it was just not for me. And my Dad did not like it at all. He said, "You don't really want to do that. You just think you want that." So I was really discouraged, but if I had been encouraged in the

⁹⁴Interview with Patricia Polk, 19 December 1990.

⁹⁵Interview with George Moore, 15 January 1991.

home just a little more, or if one person had said something to me, I have no doubts in my mind, that's what I would have done. It might not have been the right choice, but I would have done that.⁹⁶

There were others as well who would have considered religious life, but were not approached or encouraged or did not act on the consideration for whatever reason.⁹⁷ For some, the idea that they were not even asked because of their race is a source of anger even today because they see what might have been:

What I am saying is that as a black Catholic there were two different standards. Then people come up to me and say, "the first black bishop, etc" and I say, "Ha, ha, ha, how many priests, how many black priests would there have been had the seminary been more open? How many black nuns would there have been had the convents been more open? So that when they say a first this and a first that, it makes me feel that whitey's giving me something again. You aren't giving me anything. I should have had it. That is my problem. I never remember anyone coming to me and asking me did I want to enter the seminary, I was never questioned on that. My sisters were never asked whether they wanted to become nuns. So you see, what you're hearing from me is a certain anger. .

⁹⁶Interview with Patricia Polk, 19 December 1991. The approach of Catholics in general toward religious vocations has always reflected a mixture of attitudes. For some, religious life was held in great esteem; for others, it was often grossly misunderstood, considered too strict a life, or perceived as throwing one's life away. Some priests and religious were very selective about who they approached to consider a religious vocation depending on what they considered necessary qualities in the person. The responses here could have occurred in any Catholic home. Underneath, however, one can't help but question the degree that race was a factor. Patricia Polk has recently completed training as a lay pastoral minister in the Church.

⁹⁷Interview with Ocilla Gayters, 4 December 1990; Philomena McClellan, 24 January 1991; Mary St. Clair, 10 December 1990; Anonymous interview, Cleveland, Ohio, 8 January 1991; written interviews with Stanford Berry, 18 February 1991; Louis J. Massey, 4 January 1991; Teresa B. Merritt, 6 January 1991; Sophronia Bryant Reed, 15 January 1991; Margaret Washington, 19 January 1991; anonymous written interview, 19 January 1991.

. . but I can't help being critical. I can't help saying to myself, well, if it had been different, at least I would have had a choice.⁹⁸

On the other hand, some African American Catholics do recall receiving encouragement to consider religious life from either the priests or the Sisters at St. Edward or Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament. Barbara Price recalled being strongly encouraged by the Sisters but discouraged by her mother. One woman in particular remembered strong encouragement being given to the high school CYO group at St. Edward by one of the young priests. They were taken as a group to visit the seminary in Cleveland on one of their outings. Blontee Anderson recalled that Bishop Begin at St. Agnes often approached the parents to encourage their sons and daughters to consider a religious vocation.⁹⁹

Despite the discouragements and barriers there were those who pursued and remain committed to a religious vocation. Sister Rosella Holloman attended public high school following her graduation from Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament School. She came to know the Sisters of Charity of St. Augustine from Richfield, Ohio, through her job at St. Vincent Charity Hospital. At the same time she was receiving encouragement and spiritual direction from a young white priest at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament, Father

⁹⁸Interview with Joseph Richardson, Cleveland, Ohio, 10 November 1990.

⁹⁹Interview with Ann Cowan, 13 November 1990; Barbara Price, 28 January 1991; Blontee Anderson, 17 December 1990; Anonymous interviews, Cleveland Heights, Ohio, 19 January 1991; East Cleveland, Ohio, 15 January 1991.

Eugene Stiker, who himself had just been ordained in 1949. He continued to support her vocation through visits and other gestures until she made her final vows in that congregation in 1956 when he subsequently was assigned as a missionary to Chile. Sister Rosella recalled being welcomed and even somewhat carefully treated by her novice directress who did not want to be interpreted as racially prejudiced, although Sr. Rosella felt that she had a realistic perception of the Sisters because of her work experience at St. Vincent Charity Hospital. There were other African American women that she met in subsequent years from other predominantly white congregations who encountered strong racial prejudice in their communities. She felt she was fortunate. Someone had suggested to her that she enter the Oblate Sisters of Providence in Baltimore who were an African American congregation, but Sister Rosella did not want to be a teacher which was their primary ministry at the time.¹⁰⁰

Father Gene Wilson, whose conversion to Catholicism is related above, was ordained in the Society of the Precious Blood on May 28, 1960. He was the first African American priest in his Society and from St. Edward Parish. He went to the seminary in 1947, two years after his conversion to the faith. He felt drawn to the priesthood from the earliest days of his conversion process. Initially he went to join the Graymoor Friars in New

¹⁰⁰Interview with Sister Rosella Holloman, C.S.A., 23 November 1990.

York but transferred to his congregation in 1950 with Father Lochtefeld's encouragement. Referring to his days in the Precious Blood seminary, he said:

There was only one black family within the entire county where the seminary was located and I saw them when we went to the store. I was the only other black person in the county. I became a priest because I wanted to be a priest. And I just had to do it myself. So I just did it, but it's hard to preserve your identity.

Father Wilson mentioned the fact that some black seminarians were the brunt of jokes just as some of the African Americans were who broke racial barriers in other professions. However, he said, "You just have to suffer that for the goal." After his ordination in Immaculate Conception Church in Celina, Ohio, by Archbishop Paul Leibold of Cincinnati, he returned to Cleveland to celebrate his first Mass at St. Edward Church on May 29, 1960. He later became the pastor of St. Adalbert Parish in Cleveland from 1969 to 1977 after its merger with Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament.¹⁰¹ Lula Williams, whose son Clarence became a priest in the Society of the Precious Blood, called Father Wilson a "spiritual father" to her son, nurturing his vocation and encouraging him during his seminary days.¹⁰² Priests like Father Gene Wilson experienced not just the confrontation of cultural differences, but the full reality of racism in the Church.

¹⁰¹Interview with the Rev. Gene Wilson, 6 August 1991; *Catholic Universe Bulletin*, 27 May 1960; *Cleveland Call and Post*, 28 May 1960.

¹⁰²Interview with Lula B. Williams, 20 December 1990.

Sister Juanita Shealey entered the Sisters of St. Joseph in Rocky River, Ohio, in 1950 after graduating from St. Edward High School. She was a member of Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Parish at the time and met the Sisters during a visit to St. Joseph Academy with other students from St. Edward High School. She, too, was the first African American woman to become a member of her order. Father Nathan Willis was a student at St. Edward School and entered the Society of the Divine Word. He was ordained in 1966 and later transferred to the diocese of Youngstown, Ohio, to become a diocesan priest.¹⁰³

Father Paul Marshall of the Society of Mary, Dayton, Ohio Province, recalled the motivation he received to dedicate himself to religious leadership from the Sisters of St. Joseph during his elementary school years at St. Thomas Aquinas School in the 1950s. He was particularly inspired by the attitudes and personal approaches of Fathers Robert Pahler and Edward Camille who were associate pastors there when he was a young and impressionable student. During his high school days at Cathedral Latin High School in Cleveland, he felt his vocation grew to maturity because of the acceptance, personal interest, and encouragement of the

¹⁰³Papers of St. Edward Convent, Archives, Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, Bensalem, Pennsylvania; St. Edward Parish Archives; *Catholic Universe Bulletin*, 10 August 1951. Father Clarence Williams and Brother Hugh Henderson are both members of the Society of the Precious Blood whose vocation stories lie beyond the boundaries of this study, but whose roots stem from OLBS and St. Edward Parishes. The Cleveland diocesan clergy do not have any African American priests among their number.

Brothers and priests of the Society of Mary. What he found most convincing about them was their willingness to deal with issues of prejudice and their attempts to integrate the African American students into every aspect of school life.¹⁰⁴

The vocation account of Father Paul Marshall is a fitting conclusion to this chapter which spans some of the most encouraging and most discouraging aspects of the religious history of Cleveland's African American Catholics. As the black community expanded more and more into what had been previously all-white neighborhoods and parishes, like St. Thomas Aquinas, the issues of racism and integration and the real meaning of Catholicity loomed large in the Cleveland experience. It was in these parishes where white and African American Catholics met directly as fellow Catholics that the real impact of social forces was most visible. It was in these parishes that African American Catholics were forced to experience the full reality of being a double minority.

¹⁰⁴Interview with the Rev. Paul Marshall, S.M., Cleveland, Ohio, 31 October 1990.

Chapter 7

EXPANDING PARISH COMMUNITIES

Throughout the 1950s Cleveland African Americans began moving in large numbers from the Central Avenue area into the Hough, Glenville, Mt. Pleasant, Miles Heights and Kinsman areas of the city.¹ As they did so, the white residents of these neighborhoods reacted by leaving the neighborhoods in equally large numbers. The same social forces of insufficient housing, migrant newcomers, and neighborhood deterioration that forced African Americans from their residences, also elicited the fears of white Clevelanders. Fear of the loss of property value, fear of an upsurge in criminal activity, fear of racial differences became so powerful that any effort to work toward integrated neighborhoods was simply ineffective. In some places, racial tensions and prejudice mounted. The outcome of this population movement was a repetition of what had happened in earlier decades in the Central Avenue area, namely, a continuing isolation of two racial and cultural worlds from each other. Catholics, both white and

¹See Chapter Two for discussion of these population shifts.

African American, were part of this process. It was most noticeable in the neighborhood parish church.²

Neighborhood transitions happened quickly. Perhaps had they been more gradual, social and cultural adjustments might have occurred so as to create integrated housing patterns. It did not happen. The Hough area had an almost 95% white population in 1950; by 1960 the area was 73.6% nonwhite, mostly African American. The area changed socioeconomically as well from 19.6% semiskilled workers in 1940 to 45.5% semiskilled workers in 1957. In 1953 there were 362 cases of persons receiving General Relief and Aid to Dependent Children, whereas by 1961 there were 4,676 such cases.³

In the Glenville area in 1940 there were approximately 1000 African Americans in the predominantly Jewish neighborhoods, but they had increased to 30,000 persons or slightly less than 50% of the population by 1950.⁴ Mary James recalled the rapid change of her Glenville neighborhood where her family bought a home in

²See Appendix F for location of these parishes; see Appendix D for demographic patterns.

³Marjorie Buckholz, *Twenty-three Years of Work to Improve the Hough Area*, unpublished report, 1966, St. Agnes Parish Archives transferred to ADC. Ms. Buckholz was the area worker for the Welfare Federation assigned to the Hough area from 1944 to 1954.

⁴*Cleveland Call and Post*, 2 September 1950; 2 February, 30 March 1957; 3 December 1960. The 1950 Census supports these figures for the Glenville area. An exact figure is not offered here since it is not certain which census tracts were considered part of the Glenville area.

1941. Though her family shared warm relationships with their Jewish neighbors and shopkeepers, "homes were selling left and right." Her own parents were able to mortgage their new home only by allowing the Jewish owner's lawyer to carry the mortgage. They were not able to obtain a loan through a neighborhood bank because of their race even though many African Americans, like her father, were making a good living during the 1940s and early 1950s. Mr. James was employed in the steel mill.⁵

In the Mt. Pleasant area around East 140th and Kinsman Avenue, there were two census tracts with 25% and 59% African American populations. All the surrounding tracts were less than 8% African American in 1950. By 1960 three census tracts had from 82% to 94% African American populations, and three others that ranged from 29% to 55% African Americans. Similarly, the Miles Heights area off Lee Road, south of Miles Avenue, constituted one census tract with a population of 82% African Americans by 1950. By 1960 it had expanded to two census tracts with African American populations of 84% and 85% respectively. The surrounding tracts were less than 1% African American in 1960.⁶

⁵Interview with Mary James, Cleveland, Ohio, 18 December 1990.

⁶U.S. Bureau of the Census, *United States Census of Population and Housing: 1950*, Vol. 3, Chapter 12, "Census Tract Statistics, Cleveland, Ohio and Adjacent Area" (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1952); *United States Census of Population and Housing: 1960 Census Tracts*, Final Report PHC (1)-28 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1962).

The Catholic parishes in these areas reflected similar patterns of change in their congregations. When the Commission for Catholic Missions wrote to Bishop Floyd Begin, an auxiliary bishop and also pastor of St. Agnes Parish, in 1961 requesting statistics on Cleveland's African American Catholics, he wrote the following reply:

At the present time we have about 400 children in school and over 300 of them are colored and Catholic. I would guess that there are about four to five hundred Catholic colored families within the confines of this Parish - when I came here twelve years ago there were probably less than twenty-five or thirty Catholic colored families. Furthermore, the whole East side of Cleveland has had a similar experience. Parishes that were once solidly white and middle class economically have become well integrated and some of them now have a majority of colored or a high percentage of colored Catholics.⁷

By the time Coral Mills became a Catholic at St. Agnes in 1964 the parish was predominantly African American. She had started her convert instructions earlier under Bishop Begin. She said:

The white people had just about left the parish and, on the whole, while I was at St. Agnes, I don't remember any white people. They may have come to some of the fundraisers the church had, but I don't remember any of the white people belonging to the clubs and things they had 'round the church.⁸

At the neighboring parish of Our Lady of Fatima at 6805 Quimby Avenue in the Hough area, there were 826 families and 9,010 Catholics in the parish in 1949. By March of 1958 there were 119

⁷St. Agnes Parish Archives transferred to ADC.

⁸Interview with Coral Mills, Cleveland, Ohio, 13 December 1990.

families and 957 Catholics registered in the parish.⁹ After a parish visitation there in 1953, Auxiliary Bishop John Krol noted in his report: "People moving out of the neighborhood. Non-Catholics moving in - mostly colored."¹⁰ By 1958 the parish was described as having changed from "a well regulated Catholic atmosphere to one of missionary status" due to the changing social and economic patterns of the neighborhoods.¹¹ When Jimmie Lee Payton and her husband and children moved into the parish boundaries around 1955 and joined the parish after their recent conversion to Catholicism, "there was about a handful of blacks, quite a few Puerto Ricans, some whites - older whites" in the congregation. Her neighbor, a parishioner two doors away, was surprised to learn that the Paytons were Catholic since he did not know any African Americans who were Catholic.¹² Many African American Catholics reported experiencing this "surprise" reaction from white Catholics, and even clergymen. The reaction says more about the awareness of white Catholics than it does about African American Catholics who lived in the same city for years.

The parish of St. Thomas Aquinas on Superior Avenue and Ansel Road near Rockefeller Park, reached its peak population

⁹Papers of Our Lady of Fatima Parish, ADC.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹"The Revolution Is Over," *The Missionary Servant* 3 (October, 1958) in the Papers of Our Lady of Fatima Parish, ADC.

¹²Interview with Jimmie Lee Payton, Cleveland, Ohio, 9 January 1991.

about 1950 with 2100 families. About 90% of its surrounding neighborhood was Catholic, so much so that it was referred to as the "Irish Cathedral," though it was a territorial parish from its beginning in 1898.¹³ The Reverend Francis J. McGlynn was appointed pastor in 1945 and witnessed the beginnings of the transition of the parish from a white to a black congregation. In 1945 the parish school had about 1,050 students. When Bishop Begin made a canonical visitation of the parish in 1953 he remarked in his report that the pastor was in "panic regarding the Negro question - wants to be moved before the parish collapses!" The associate pastors there at the time were more calm about the situation.¹⁴ The pastor's fearfulness indicated the rapidity of the change and not racial prejudice only, since some African Americans had been living in the parish neighborhoods for several decades.¹⁵ In response to Bishop Begin's visit, Bishop Hoban wrote to McGlynn:

I am aware of the fact that some of the problems in the Parish are of a challenging nature, and I am confident that you are capable of rising to the challenge. The parish is a territorial one, and its services must extend to all souls within the parish limits.¹⁶

¹³*Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 20 October, 4 December 1975.

¹⁴Papers of St. Thomas Aquinas Parish, ADC.

¹⁵The *Call and Post* featured a photograph of a fourth grade African American child in her First Communion outfit. She was a student at St. Thomas Aquinas School. *Cleveland Call and Post*, 1 June 1940.

¹⁶Papers of St. Thomas Aquinas Parish, ADC.

In June of 1956 The Reverend John A. Clark was appointed to replace Father McGlynn as pastor of the parish.¹⁷ Father McGlynn's reaction was not unusual for a pastor who feared the demise of his parish. The large urban Catholic populations such as that of St. Thomas Aquinas were not being replaced in equal numbers by the African American Catholics moving into the parish. To a great extent, this fear and panic was economic as much as it was racial. The maintenance of the buildings and property of the parish alone required the financial contributions of a sizable congregation.

For African American Catholics moving into the previously white congregations of these urban parishes, the experience was equally frightening, and even discouraging from a financial perspective. In 1945 when the parish of St. Agatha was established from the outlying sections of St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Agnes and St. Philomena Parishes, there were 1000 Catholic families in the congregation.¹⁸ When Charles Johnson converted to Catholicism in 1956 he became a member of the parish. Within three to four years the neighborhoods of the parish changed drastically and the congregation rapidly decreased in size as well. When the founding pastor was transferred to another parish, many personal friends of his who were benefactors of the parish discontinued their donations. Decreasing numbers and finances disheartened the African

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Papers of St. Agatha Parish, ADC.

American parishioners of this fairly young parish. Because many people outside the parish were not aware of its previous financial benefactors, it appeared that the African Americans were not maintaining the parish. Charles Johnson said he wanted to stand on the corner and shout, "Hey, everybody, we didn't fail here at this church. This church isn't closing because black people failed."¹⁹ Almost 77% of the population of the parish left with the white parishioners. For many Catholics like Charles Johnson, the diminishing condition of the parish made them feel like failures. Serious self-reflection was needed on their part before they realized that what happened at St. Agatha's was not their fault.²⁰

Three other parishes that experienced transitions in their congregations during the time frame of this study were St. Aloysius, Epiphany, and St. Cecilia Parishes. At St. Aloysius Parish in the Glenville area, there were about 3,000 families in the congregation and 1100 children in the school in 1956 when Monsignor Thomas J. Murphy became pastor. When he was transferred from the parish in 1968, the congregation had decreased to about 500 families.²¹ The parish remained an integrated congregation

¹⁹St. Agatha Parish was merged with St. Aloysius Parish in 1975.

²⁰Interview with the Reverend Mr. Charles Johnson, Cleveland, Ohio, 17 December 1990. The Rev. Mr. Johnson is today a member of the permanent diaconate of the Church in the diocese.

²¹Interview with the Reverend Monsignor Thomas J. Murphy, North Madison, Ohio, 26 January 1991.

well into the 1970s with 75% of the congregation being African American in 1975.²²

St. Cecilia Parish is located on Kinsman Avenue on the immediate boundary of Cleveland and Shaker Heights city limits. When African American Catholics began moving into the parish in the mid-1950s, parishioners were challenged regarding their racial attitudes by the pastor, Monsignor John Ruffing. He minced no words in his bold and forthright stands regarding the moral implications of interracial justice. Both in sermons and Sunday bulletins, he challenged the injustice of refusing to permit African Americans to move into their residential neighborhoods. According to his former associate pastor, Father John Gerrity, his challenge did not arise from economic fears for the parish. He personally was convinced of the moral injustice of segregated housing patterns. Father Gerrity remembers Monsignor Ruffing's words to this day: "We stand at the crossroads of the city to welcome a new race into the Church."²³

The neighboring parish of Epiphany in the Mt. Pleasant area had a predominance of Italian families in 1944 when this territorial parish was established. In 1951 there were 1700 Catholic families in the parish. However, in 1954 following his canonical visit, Bishop Begin wrote: "Parish becoming increasingly

²²St. Aloysius 75th Anniversary/Jubilee Book, 1975, Papers of St. Aloysius Parish, ADC.

²³Interview with the Reverend John Gerrity, Maple Heights, Ohio, 2 February 1992.

'transient' but a core of good Catholic families remain." The parish reached its peak population in the late 1950s and began to lose members in the early 1960s when white parishioners left the neighborhoods as African Americans moved into the area.²⁴

As parish congregations changed in racial composition, the leadership of the clergy was as varied as the men themselves. Some, like Monsignor Ruffing at St. Cecilia, took bold and forthright positions on the changes that were occurring, others did not. Bishop Hoban himself provided little noticeable leadership for either the clergy or the laity experiencing these changes in their parishes. His remarks quoted above to Father McGlynn at St. Thomas Aquinas apparently summarize his attitude to the changes that were taking place. Each priest was left to his own conscience and his own skills to determine the action he would take in his own parish. There were several pastors in the parishes described above who chose to act in the face of the social changes that were happening in their neighborhoods.

On January 23, 1949, Auxiliary Bishop Floyd L. Begin became pastor of St. Agnes Parish on Euclid Avenue at East 79th Street, the southern boundary of the Hough area.²⁵ In July of 1952 he noted in an official diocesan report that the area of the

²⁴Papers of Epiphany Parish, ADC.

²⁵See Appendix B for a biographical sketch of Bishop Begin. The clergymen who served with him or who knew him during his years in Cleveland, all agreed that he was clearly a visionary and farsighted individual.

parish between Carnegie and Central Avenues consisted of almost all African Americans, many of whom were not Catholic. He felt that this provided "a vast potential missionary field which we have neglected." He further noted that "a number of people who belong to St. Agnes attend Holy Rosary and St. Marian's parishes and do not recognize their affiliation with St. Agnes although they are not Italian."²⁶ His remarks seem to suggest that these parishioners must have been of the white race since both of those parishes were Italian national churches. Although he offered no explanation for their non-affiliation, it appeared that they may have been avoiding a changing parish at St. Agnes. Because of its geographical location, St. Agnes consistently had a congregation that was highly transient from as early as the 1930s, which gave the parishioners little opportunity to develop a sense of parish loyalty. Furthermore, the financial condition of the parish continued to worsen. In a letter of 1958 concerning the need for a new boiler system, Bishop Begin worried:

I do not know where I can get the money. I can try to encourage our people to be a little more generous as they were last year, but I realize that many of them are out of work completely, many are working part time, and many of our best parishioners have moved away.²⁷

Given the context of the letter, the "best parishioners" in this case were those who made substantial financial contributions to the parish.

²⁶Papers of St. Agnes Parish, ADC.

²⁷Ibid.

Nonetheless, the full range of parish activities and organizations continued to be offered as in any other parish. Particular efforts were made, however, to reach those who had defected from the faith and especially those who were non-Catholic as discussed in the preceding chapter. Begin engaged the assistance of his lay parishioners in the Parish Captain Program by assigning them to small areas of the parish to do census work. The census plan included visits to non-Catholic people residing in the parish boundaries and files for them were kept at the parish. Sympathy notes were sent to every non-Catholic family on the occasion of a death.²⁸

In 1951 the total Catholic population of St. Agnes Parish was 6500 persons in an area with a total population of 26,000. By 1959, despite the more than intense efforts at evangelization, the total parish population was 3500 and the population of the area was 25,000. Converts for the years 1953 through 1959 ranged from 102 in 1953 and gradually decreased to 71 by 1959.²⁹ In 1955 Bishop Begin wrote a thank you letter to a former parishioner who sent a donation to the parish. In it he referred to the changing population of the parish:

It is an inspiration to know that you still remember your old Parish and its needs. With the shifting population and the slight change of color in this area the number of Catholics belonging to St. Agnes Parish is decreasing every day. We are

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹St. Agnes Parish Archives, St. Agnes-Our Lady of Fatima Parish, Cleveland, Ohio.

trying, by making many converts, to keep the place functioning but it is, and will be for the next five or ten years, quite a struggle.³⁰

The bishop's hope that the parish would survive demographic changes and remain a vibrant institution reflect his attitude toward the great potential that African Americans could bring to the Church. In 1958 he wrote to Bishop Edward Hoban asking that St. Agnes be exempted from certain diocesan collections since it was operating permanently in the red due to loss of parishioners and income. He expressed his personal evaluation of the situation in that letter:

This does not mean that St. Agnes Parish does not have an important role to play in the Diocese of Cleveland and the Church. It is admirably situated right in the heart of a teeming neighborhood of an ever-growing non-Catholic population. I could think of no finer Missionary project in the world. We are equipped with a beautiful church, an adequate school, convent, priests' house and a staff. Souls to be saved are on our doorstep but we cannot expect people with no Faith to support this project without help.³¹

His optimism, hard work and high regard for his parishioners, poor or not, did not go unheeded by them. One African American male parishioner wrote a letter of appreciation after the bishop gave his annual financial report to the parish in 1957:

You have a parish of poor people like myself and I doubt if any drop a \$1000 bill in the church basket at Christmas time as they do in the others. Once when I passed the basket a man dropped a \$20.00 bill in the basket. I was so surprised I leaned over and said "Thank you and God Bless you." It proves that faith and prayer can do a lot of things . . .

³⁰St. Agnes Parish Archives, transferred to ADC.

³¹Ibid.

The credit goes to you, Your Excellency. The Priests and Sisters and members believed in you and followed your ideas and helped with their prayers and contributions. You said you did not just know where the money came from but it came. Don't you know many a time I found money in my purse I did not think I had. Guess the good Lord just slipped it in there . . .

I think if each member gave an extra \$5.00 to a debt retirement fund, it could be cleaned up by summer. . . . Enclosed you will find my check for \$5.00 to start a quick retirement fund. I do so with all the ideas expresse^d above. God bless you.³²

As discussed in chapter four, in 1961 Bishop Begin requested that territorial lines be established between Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament, St. Agnes and surrounding national parishes so that persons in those neighborhoods would clearly know to what parish they belonged and not be able to evade their responsibilities to their assigned parish. Also it would prevent people from avoiding fellow parishioners as some were doing at the Italian national parishes. His final comment is the most enlightening:

These Parishes existing in colored areas should all be declared territorial Parishes and should observe territorial lines. Such action might also contribute a step in the right direction in the way of de-segregation. I think the move would be appreciated and applauded.³³

This is one of the first times the term "desegregation" appeared in the source material. The bishop recognized that if Catholics were forced to attend their territorial parish, they would have to associate with African American Catholics who might also belong to

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid.

their parish. Their only other alternative would be to move from the area completely, which, of course, many did.

Bishop Begin was not one to draw strict lines between his spiritual and religious responsibilities as pastor and those which he easily could have considered beyond his role. He involved himself in the affairs of the secular realm when these impacted the moral fiber of the community. He apparently gave full cooperation to the Hough Area Council which was a citizens' group working to rid the Hough area of crime. With them, he wrote to the city's Safety Director in 1951 to protest the establishment of a dance hall connected to Bill's Bar on East 79th Street because he felt it "would draw undesirable characters to this section of the City." In 1956 he wrote to the Ohio Department of Liquor Control to protest the petition of the Euclid Foods Company for a liquor permit. The store was directly across the street from the church and parish school. At another time, the manager of the Astor Theatre on Hough Avenue was reproached for showing a film "offensive to decency." The bishop threatened to name the theatre publicly if cooperation was refused, but was quick to add that "I shall be happy to hear from you, to cooperate with you if you are sincere in an effort to uplift this neighborhood."³⁴

The bishop had a counterpart in the Reverend John Bruere of Calvary Presbyterian Church directly across East 79th Street from St. Agnes Parish. The two churches stood like bulwarks on

³⁴Ibid.

that corner, so did their pastors. A newspaper article said of the two men, that they "became known throughout Hough as a team of sparkplugs, seeking redevelopment - both spiritual and environmental - in the downtown area."³⁵ Bishop Begin not only had frequent and friendly contacts with the Reverend Bruere but was actively engaged in cooperative projects with him in an age when ecumenism was still unrecognized by most Catholics and clergy. Father Albert Myers was an associate pastor at the time and recalled that the Reverend Bruere would frequently visit with the bishop and the priests for friendly chats in the rectory. Bishop Begin, in turn, spoke to Bruere's congregation on a couple of occasions.³⁶ Calvary Presbyterian Church was a large, predominantly white congregation also in the early 1950s and was experiencing the same changes as those occurring at St. Agnes. Similarly, their congregation was undertaking the same evangelization efforts in the neighborhood as was St. Agnes. Blontee Anderson remembered being visited at her home by that denomination as well as the Catholics.³⁷ It seems that the two men recognized how much they had in common.

³⁵Unidentified newspaper clipping, St. Agnes Parish Archives, St. Agnes-Our Lady of Fatima Parish, Cleveland, Ohio.

³⁶Interview with the Reverend Albert J. Myers, Rocky River, Ohio, 18 January 1991.

³⁷Interview with Blontee Anderson, Cleveland, Ohio, 17 December 1990.

According to Father Albert Myers, the change of population that occurred at St. Agnes was due primarily to the social forces with which parishioners had to contend. The white parishioners that he knew personally were not uncomfortable with their fellow African American parishioners; they were uncomfortable with what was happening to their neighborhoods. As break-ins, destruction of property, and physical fighting between the youths of both racial groups increased, families of both races could no longer cope with the danger of the neighborhood. In the end, poverty as well as race determined who remained in the parish in many cases. Father Myers reflected:

The parish itself - I think they felt a great attachment; they didn't want to leave the parish but the neighborhood conditions forced them to make some hard decisions. It was black flight as well as white flight. So the bottom line is, those who could get out, got out, black or white or hispanic. And those who couldn't, stayed.

However, he believed that many parishioners chose to stay longer than they might have, not just because of the Bishop's pressure to stay, but because they genuinely believed the message the Bishop was trying to convey: that all of them should be living and working together as one parish community. "Creating a community was his ideal, that people could work and live together side by side, black, white and hispanic. A parochial approach." Father Myers was quick to make a distinction between the visionary approach reflected in the bishop's pastoral philosophy and that of the missionary attitude of simply saving the souls of African

Americans. It was an attitude clearly ahead of its time.³⁸ Nonetheless, the deterioration of the neighborhood and the transfer of the bishop were too strong in their impact on any interracial values that were being preached at St. Agnes, and the neighborhoods continued to change.

Bold and forthright leadership was provided also by the pastor of St. Thomas Aquinas Parish. In June of 1956, the Reverend John A. Clark was appointed pastor of the parish. Father Robert Pahler, an associate pastor at the time, recalled that Clark immediately took the situation in hand and tried to prevent the parishioners from panic selling of their homes. He confronted the overt block-busting activities of unscrupulous real estate agents. Under Clark's leadership, the parish made every effort to provide social and spiritual organizations which could enable people to become acquainted and to keep the young off the streets where racial tensions inevitably erupted. Rockefeller Park was the regular site of interracial stand-offs between teenage youths. As in other parishes, the Legion of Mary and the St. Vincent de Paul Society were effective organizations in contacting parishioners. According to Father Pahler, racial fear often controlled the degree to which people would allow themselves to become acquainted with each other. However, the parish school

³⁸Interview with the Reverend Albert Myers, 18 January 1991.

became one of the most effective means for the children to become acquainted with those of other races.³⁹

When Father Edward Camille was assigned as associate pastor to the parish in 1958, the African Americans constituted about 25% of the parish, whose population had decreased to about 1200 families or less. Many of the African Americans had moved into the neighborhood from Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament or from St. Edward. Wealthier white parishioners had already moved eastward to the suburbs, and the older white parishioners who were left in the parish were often taken advantage of by real estate agents who convinced them to sell their homes for less than their real worth. As a result, whole streets changed ownership one after the other and businesses deserted the area by the time Father Camille left the parish in 1961. Many African American Catholic families had moved out to other areas. It is his opinion, that people fled initially in the late 1950s more for economic reasons than they did because of crime rates or racial hatred. Furthermore, it seemed to Camille at the time, that when the Sisters of Notre Dame moved from their provincial house and academy on Ansel Road across from the parish in the early 1960s, the last of the white Catholic families left the area. The Sisters moved because there had been incidents on the streets involving the safety of both the Sisters and the female students

³⁹Interview with the Reverend Robert Pahler, Greensburg, Ohio, 5 February 1991.

of the academy. Like St. Agnes, this parish also numbered many transient persons because of its geographical location near the hospitals in the surrounding area. Many were employed there for brief periods of time, and then would move from the neighborhood.⁴⁰

Father Camille agreed that all efforts to maintain a stable parish with an integrated congregation were made. "He [Clark] applied all the skills he could, and we [the associates] applied all the skills we knew." The priests personally visited over 3,000 families in the course of five years, beseeching people to remain in their homes. Father Camille described the pastor as an energetic and pastorally oriented priest who continually preached the same message to his parishioners. "Stay where you are, you never had it so good. This is your home. We'll learn how to live together." His efforts were exhaustive. He confronted the block-busting directly by meeting with homeowners and others too willing to give in to panic and fear. He and the associates attended community meetings, suggesting renewal programs for the neighborhoods. They openly preached against racial prejudice from the pulpit. Father Clark requested that one of the teaching Sisters be removed from the school because he felt her attitudes toward the African American students

⁴⁰Interview with the Reverend Edward Camille, Brecksville, Ohio, 29 January 1991.

were detrimental to the kind of acceptance he expected to prevail in the parish.⁴¹

John Blackburn remembered well the efforts of Father Clark and the associate pastors to create an integrated parish environment. He recalled the abuse Father Clark would take from some of the parishioners who would telephone him at night and call him a "nigger lover." Clark would be livid with anger. As a result, the African Americans who remained and formed the nucleus of a strong congregation felt a great deal of respect for the moral courage of their pastor.⁴² Father Camille was deeply influenced by the spirit of cooperation and integration that parishioners did achieve in those years. Strong efforts were made to maintain the school as an integrated learning environment where teachers had a special sensitivity to the student population.⁴³

Like Father Clark, Monsignor Thomas Murphy at St. Aloysius Parish pleaded with white parishioners not to flee the neighborhood. He encouraged young married couples to buy homes in the neighborhood in order to stabilize the situation, but many feared they would eventually be the only white family left. He preached his message from the pulpit and through individual con-

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Interview with the Reverend Mr. John Blackburn, Cleveland, Ohio, 29 October 1990. The Rev. Mr. Blackburn is a permanent deacon in the diocese of Cleveland.

⁴³Interview with the Reverend Edward Camille, 29 January 1991.

tacts. When parishioners came to withdraw from the parish, he would confront them with their racial prejudice, and they would have difficulty acknowledging the truth.⁴⁴

In October of 1960 the parish initiated "Operation Door-bell" in which 250 men of both racial groups in the parish began a census of 11,000 homes within parish boundaries. Working in pairs, they completed their visits in one week so that the contacts they made with either fallen-away Catholics or non-Catholics were followed the next week with an information forum and dialogue at the church. The forum was conducted by two Paulists Fathers in which questions about the faith were discussed. Social hours were held after the sessions to allow people to become acquainted with each other. About fifty women in the parish were backup visitors and provided accurate record-keeping for the census.⁴⁵

When the intrepid pastor of St. Cecilia Parish, Monsignor John Ruffing, died in 1955, he was succeeded by the Reverend John Tivenan who likewise assumed the on-going task of achieving an integrated parish. He, too, worked for this goal, and his leadership was acknowledged in the 1960s by the Catholic Interracial Council of Cleveland, when he was awarded its Justice Award for the peaceful integration of the parish. Father Tivenan was pastor

⁴⁴Interview with the Reverend Monsignor Thomas J. Murphy, North Madison, Ohio, 26 January 1991.

⁴⁵*Catholic Universe Bulletin*, 30 September 1960.

at St. Cecilia until 1965.⁴⁶ One woman recalled that when she first moved into the parish in the mid-1960s "it was so crowded you would have to stand in the back."⁴⁷

Despite these and other efforts that were made in the parishes, African American Catholics faced the challenge of establishing themselves in these changing congregations. They responded to the challenge in a variety of ways, but in each parish, they eventually succeeded in creating meaningful parish communities.

Many African American Catholics knew they were not particularly welcome in their new parish because of the racial attitudes of the white parishioners. To avoid "problems" as they often called such prejudice, they accommodated the situation in some way. One woman enrolled her son in St. Thomas Aquinas School around 1955, but the family maintained parish affiliation at St. Edward. She said they did so because St. Thomas had mainly white parishioners, and she did not want to have any "problems." Her son, a sixth grader at the time, described his experiences with the white children as difficult. They would call him names and

⁴⁶*St. Cecilia Catholic Church, Cleveland, Ohio: June 12, 1915-June 12, 1990, 75th Anniversary Book, St. Cecilia Parish Archives, Cleveland, Ohio.*

⁴⁷Anonymous interview, Cleveland, Ohio, 20 December 1990.

talk about him. "That's where the problems came in," she said. "The children would feel it."⁴⁸

Another woman and her family moved into the parish around 1939 from Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament. All eight of her children graduated from St. Thomas Aquinas School. She admits there were problems of acceptance in the school in those earlier years. She described it as "favoritism" rather than prejudice. Because her duties as a mother kept her busy at home, she did not have time to really get involved in the parish, but she did belong to the Legion of Mary. She said she got more involved after Father Thomas McKenney, former pastor at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Parish, became pastor at St. Thomas in late 1940. She had encountered prejudice early in her life and simply chose to act as she saw fit without worrying what other people felt about her. She is a member of the parish to this day and continues to live in the neighborhood.⁴⁹

Epiphany Parish only had "just a handful of us blacks" in 1956 when Barbara Robinson's family moved there from Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament. Her daughter was enrolled in Epiphany School also. She felt she "belonged" in the parish, but she was

⁴⁸Anonymous interview, East Cleveland, Ohio, 15 January 1991.

⁴⁹Anonymous interview, Cleveland, Ohio, 6 November 1990.

also willing to tolerate uncomfortable reactions from people for the sake of the child's education. "So you went along with a lot of things." Within a few years the family transferred to St. Cecilia Parish when the new pastor at Epiphany came across as having serious personal problems that prevented her from being able to accept the sincerity of his preaching.⁵⁰

Other African American Catholics wanted to avoid racial tension as well, however, they also wanted to participate in parish life because they knew it was their prerogative to do so. One such person was Blontee Anderson, who became a Catholic and joined St. Agnes Parish in 1953 when the parishioners were still predominantly white. She actively participated in the Parent Teacher Union and helped with monitoring the school lunchroom. She participated in the Ladies' Guild and her oldest daughter helped to serve the monthly fish fry dinners as a seventh and eighth grader in the parish school. Mrs. Anderson also attended the annual founder's day dinner at the parish which was always well attended. She admitted that there were some parishioners who gave her the impression that they were uncomfortable in her presence:

I never really had any trouble with anything 'cause I always treat people like I want to be treated. I was just friendly, and if I saw that they didn't want to be bothered, I would just say good morning. If I knew the name I would just say, 'Good Morning, Mrs. So and So,' but I didn't have any trouble. . . . But I felt that I had a right to go to dif-

⁵⁰Interview with Barbara Robinson, Bedford Heights, Ohio, 16 January 1991.

ferent meetings because my children were there [in the school].⁵¹

Other African American Catholics simply tolerated the racial prejudice they could not avoid. One woman who moved into St. Thomas Aquinas Parish in 1955 said that she, too, had difficulty feeling accepted when the parish was still predominantly white. She recalled participating in activities like the parish bazaar, but did not really feel accepted. On other social occasions only one or two African Americans would be asked to participate in the organizational work as if to suggest token representation. She often felt that the white parishioners ordered the African Americans around, wanting to tell them what to do:

You'd just rather not be bothered with that . . . There really wasn't a parish life for blacks, there was some, but you didn't feel like you wanted to participate. You'd go, but so far as the planning of events or giving any input, no input. Often you were considered not capable. You just didn't have a part. But still you went to Mass and got through it all. You accepted it. You didn't like it, but you did it if you wanted to go to that church.⁵²

Father Paul Marshall recalled that by the early 1960s Rockefeller Park was the scene for racial fights between teenagers, and one simply did not go there alone. At the time, Liberty Boulevard was the line of demarcation between the two racial groups living on either side of the park.⁵³ When his fam-

⁵¹Interview with Blontee Anderson, 17 December 1990.

⁵²Anonymous interview, Cleveland, Ohio, 29 October 1990.

⁵³Liberty Boulevard is currently named Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive.

ily moved three blocks in 1957, they switched from St. Philip Neri Parish into St. Thomas Aquinas. Although only eleven years old, he recalled that African Americans were much more involved at St. Thomas even though they may have constituted less than one third of the parish. Each year, however, there was a drastic change in the parish's racial composition, and he recalled the fear that made people run from the neighborhoods. His white classmate and fellow Safety Patrol guard, told young Paul that it was too bad that he wasn't white so that they could be friends! Paul Marshall was shocked by the attitude and confronted the boy directly. "It's too bad that you're that prejudiced that I would have to change my skin color for you to accept me." Father Marshall believes that it was those formative experiences of his youth that created his early desires to serve people in a vocation directed toward healing and reconciliation.⁵⁴

Some African American Catholics entered into the life of their parishes and became active participants in their organizations and activities. There were those who assumed responsibilities in various capacities and held leadership positions as well.

Joseph Newman came to St. Agnes Parish in the 1950s fresh out of the seminary of the Blessed Sacrament Fathers. Bishop Begin quickly gave him a convert class to teach and sent him to

⁵⁴Interview with the Reverend Paul Marshall, S.M., Cleveland, Ohio, 31 October 1990.

take courses at a catechetical school in Chicago, where he was the only lay person enrolled in a class of clergy and religious. He was also the first layman to act as a commentator for Mass using the pulpit in the sanctuary. This was well before any lay person was permitted in the sanctuary for any kind of role in Catholic services, except for those who were altar servers or acolytes. Newman remembered the bishop for his bold determination to give the laity a key role in the life of the parish well before this practice became common after Vatican II.⁵⁵

Dorothea Hite, a current parishioner of Our Lady of Fatima Parish, moved into the parish about 1960 from St. Anthony-St. Bridget Parish when her family's home on Perkins Avenue near East 30th Street was taken for the innerbelt freeway project.⁵⁶ She described her first Sunday at Our Lady of Fatima Parish and the warm welcome the pastor extended to her when she introduced herself. It reminded her of her home parish as a child in

⁵⁵Interview with the Reverend Mr. Joseph Newman, Cleveland, Ohio, 11 December 1990. The Rev. Mr. Newman is a permanent deacon in the diocese of Cleveland.

⁵⁶The downtown urban redevelopment plan also affected the parishes in the area. By 1960 the church and school buildings at St. Martin's, St. Anthony-St. Bridget were designated for demolition and the properties to be sold to the city. The schools were combined at St. Joseph's Parish whose properties were being renegotiated with the city. St. Joseph's became the territorial parish for that East 22nd Street-Woodland Avenue area. By 1963 the pastor there acknowledged that his parishioners in the Cedar-Central projects were incapable of financially sustaining the parish and asked that it could also retain its status as a German national parish. Former parishioners were continuing to donate to the parish's upkeep. Papers of St. Joseph Parish, ADC.

Kentucky. She knew she was home. At that time, the congregation was already becoming predominantly African American. Dorothea Hite and her husband remain to this day in the Hough area, having raised their ten children there. She said she felt comfortable there and grew increasingly more involved in her parish. She started substituting for the parish cook, eventually became the housekeeper, began doing clerical work, and today is a certified pastoral minister in the parish.⁵⁷

Parishioners were actively involved in the instruction of new converts at St. Thomas Aquinas Parish. Many of the African American parishioners were professional people including lawyers, bankers, and teachers, who gave their energies and talents to the life of the parish. Described by Father Camille as "hard-working and dedicated people," they assumed leadership in the parish and became involved in all aspects of parish organization.⁵⁸ These same individuals supported and fostered each other's personal lives as well. Arthur Heard recalled one of the first Sundays he attended St. Thomas Aquinas. He was in college at the time after returning from military service, and his wife was working as a seamstress. They were able to purchase a home in the parish in 1947. There were very few African Americans there at the time, and as Heard approached the front steps of the church he

⁵⁷Interview with Dorothea Hite, Cleveland, Ohio, 7 November 1990.

⁵⁸Ibid.

encountered Melchisedec Clarence Clark, better known as M. C. Clark. "Young man, come here." He wanted Heard to go to communion with the Holy Name Society that morning. Arthur Heard had been a Holy Name member at St. Anthony-St. Bridget. M. C. Clark was treasurer of the Holy Name Society at St. Thomas Aquinas and the only African American member at the time. M. C. Clark was the president of Dunbar Life Insurance Company, a black insurance organization, and was in the process of organizing a minority savings and loan association as well. That morning encounter led not only to involvement in the Holy Name Society for Arthur Heard, but ultimately a position with the new savings and loan.⁵⁹

The enthusiasm with which some African American Catholics involved themselves is represented in the leadership of one particular family who moved into St. Cecilia Parish in the mid-1950s from Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament where they had been actively involved as parishioners. The children were immediately enrolled in St. Cecilia School. The mother recalled her earliest attempts at involvement in St. Cecilia's:

I had been accustomed to being a part of anything I'm in - I'm either in it or I'm not. After we were there for about a month, I got a letter from the parish inviting us to the next PTU meeting [Parent Teacher Union] . . . So we got up there and there was one black lady sitting there and there was nothing but women. So my husband said, "I thought the husbands and fathers came too. I don't want to sit here with all these women." They were having choir rehearsal upstairs. We both had sung in the choir at OLBS and we knew all the Latin hymns. . . He found his way upstairs to that choir

⁵⁹Interview with Arthur B. Heard, Cleveland, Ohio, 18 December 1990.

loft and he started singing. Oh, they looked at him! He knew all the Latin! All the responses, everything. My husband, this black man, started singing this stuff. They looked at him, they asked him to come back, they asked him to join the choir. . . . He joined the choir. We had one car, so he would take me and the children to church on Sunday for the children's Mass because they sat with their classes. I and the children would come home by bus so that he could sing in the choir for the high Mass which followed. I would drag those children home by bus so that he could sing in that choir! It was that important.⁶⁰

This husband was not the only member of the family to get involved in the parish. The woman herself who went with the intention of attending the PTU meeting found herself being nominated for president of the group before the evening was over by the pastor, Father Tivenan, who was head of the nominating committee. She was eventually elected president of the organization. She recognized that the African American parishioners were not involving themselves in the school. Therefore, in her position as president of the PTU, she deliberately got them involved. This woman recalled:

I went to the principal and I got the name of the Negro children in each grade and I called those mothers. I said, "Come to the parent meeting and let's get into your child's education and let's talk." While I was president I made a lot of committees. We had one girl who was a dietician, had graduated from Tuskegee and worked at Richmond Hospital. I made her dietetic chairman. She would tell us what nutrients your child needed, the five food groups, how to make sandwiches inexpensively. Another woman and her husband were both doctors, I made her medical chairman. I made one girl legal chairman. We used our professional knowledge . . . I had a magazine and literature chairman. She was so nervous about her Maryland accent and she said, "Oh, I can't get up and

⁶⁰Anonymous interview, Shaker Heights, Ohio, 23 January 1991.

talk." I said, "Never mind the accent, it's what's in your head."

Up until her election as president, she attended the social affairs at the parish but "other than that there was no socializing with those people [white parishioners]." She said:

When I was elected president, you're talking about cooperation - I couldn't have asked for more. I think at that time it really broke a barrier. They could see I was for real. This is when I found that all white people didn't hate blacks because they truly and sincerely loved me. This is when I began to love white people.⁶¹

This woman's story is about more than leadership of an organization. For those Catholics of both races who were willing to work with each other, regardless of their initial feelings toward each other, paths for mutual appreciation were opened. It happened in other places as well.

Although the national parishes rarely encouraged the attendance of anyone outside their own ethnic group, there is evidence that such was not the case at St. Marian's Church at Petrarca and Fairhill Roads in the vicinity of St. Luke's Hospital. It had been established as an Italian national parish in 1905, a mission church of Holy Rosary Parish.⁶² When the parish observed its fiftieth anniversary in 1954, the *Call and Post* made a point of emphasizing that African Americans had attended the church from its origin, a significant tribute to the fact that

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²The Ohio Historical Records Survey Project, *Parishes of the Catholic Church, Diocese of Cleveland: History and Records* (Cleveland, Ohio: Cadillac Press, 1942), pp. 143-44.

racess could attend school and worship together. The article noted that when the school was organized in 1925, the parish became the "first local church to integrate Negro students the following year." In 1954, sixty of the 196 students in the school were African Americans. African American parishioners were more than by-standers in the parish structure. They were conducting instruction classes for future Catholics; they were officers in the Parent Teacher Union; one was a member of the three-person parish school board.⁶³

The Reverend Donald Balogh, an associate pastor at St. Agnes in the 1950s, reported that the first African Americans to join the parish were a little timid about joining parish activities and social events, but that changed as their numbers increased. By the mid-1950s "they were involved in everything that went on in the parish." New African American converts who were having their children baptized were encouraged by the priests to ask white parishioners to be the children's baptismal sponsors and many of them did so. Not only did they gather in church for the baptism, but many of the white sponsors would then have a little party in their own homes for the African American family. Father Balogh readily admitted that his involvement with the parishioners at St. Agnes helped him to overcome his own prejudices as the product of an all-white middle class environment. He credited Bishop Begin for challenging the parish to open

⁶³*Cleveland Call and Post*, 4 December 1954.

itself to everyone. "I'm not saying that everybody responded to that, but I will say that a significant number did. I'd say most of them did, and they did it beautifully. I'll tell you there were some great people there in that parish."⁶⁴

Other individual African Americans reported efforts to work toward racially integrated parish communities. Jimmie Lee Payton recalled the efforts she made to teach her five children, who attended St. Agnes School, to see people as individuals and not as racial groups. When her children attended the school in the late 1950s, she wanted them to be able to live and work with everyone. She remembered spanking her first-grade daughter one evening after the little girl repeated a classmate's racial slur against their white teacher to the teacher's face. The little one was disciplined by the teacher for using the expression and by her mother for repeating what she heard from someone else. "You get in enough trouble talking for yourself," she was told by her mother.⁶⁵

Mary James moved into St. Thomas Aquinas Parish from St. Edward's about 1955 and remained there for about six years. She felt welcomed there and was a member of the choir. She, too, recalled the welcoming approach that Father Robert Pahler extended to the African Americans. "He tried to get people involved in

⁶⁴Interview with the Reverend Donald J. Balogh, Parma, Ohio, 28 January 1991.

⁶⁵Interview with Jimmie Lee Payton, Cleveland, Ohio, 9 January 1991.

some type of ministry in the parish." As a young mother with two children she felt limited in the time she could devote to parish life, but even as a self-described "very quiet person at the time," she felt warmly welcomed into the parish by the parishioners as well.⁶⁶

African American Catholics could not prevent their white co-religionists from leaving their parishes. However, many of them used opportunities when they were presented, to create channels of understanding and acceptance, as did many white Catholics. Leadership that was offered by clergy and laity alike was a critical factor in the efforts to make African American Catholics a part of their new parishes. In the end, however, social forces continued to overpower even the most sincere efforts to achieve integrated parishes. With some exceptions, Cleveland's Catholic churches are still racially unbalanced, if not totally segregated. Segregated neighborhoods continue to be the dominant residential pattern in the Cleveland metropolitan area.

⁶⁶Interview with Mary James, Cleveland, Ohio, 18 December 1990.

Chapter 8

INSTITUTIONAL TENSIONS

As Cleveland's African American Catholic communities expanded throughout the 1950s into white parishes, the impact of their presence in the diocesan church became increasingly more evident. As they assumed positions of leadership in these parishes and actively participated in the many aspects of parish life, they claimed their place beside their white brothers and sisters. As seen in the preceding chapter, this was not always a painless experience for either racial group. This more direct encounter of the two groups brought to the surface the underlying tensions that had always been present to some degree, but were more easily avoided when African American Catholics were segregated in their own parishes. Now those tensions had to be recognized and addressed. In earlier decades, the two groups existed side by side with little need for interaction, except for reasons of charitable activity. In the 1950s, however, parallel relationships gave way, and personal involvement with each other was demanded.

Pastors were not the only ones to have to deal with surfacing tensions in their local churches. The bishop himself was forced to face the reality of a changing diocesan church in the 1950s. Perhaps the small numerical size of the African American

Catholic population deceived him into thinking the situation was a relatively minor one, but it was just the beginning of other forces that were growing inside and outside the Church that transformed it permanently.

No longer an immigrant community, white Catholics in the United States were beginning to take their place in American life beside their Protestant neighbors. It was a triumphal time for the American Church, and self-criticism was almost unthinkable. The few Catholics who were advocating racial justice were practically inaudible. This is an apt description of the Cleveland diocese as well. Bishop Hoban's attention, when focused at all on the African American Catholics, was still clouded by a missionary perspective that did not permit him to see them as leaders in the diocesan church. When a situation erupted that could have been effectively used to address racial attitudes in the diocese, it was bypassed. If he perceived the opportunity for what it was, he chose not to act. It is possible he did not even recognize it.

In spite of the lack of official leadership from Bishop Hoban, individual Catholics worked together to initiate efforts that would permit growing tensions to be addressed. Encouraged by the personal charism of Bishop Begin, they moved the diocese forward to face the new decade of the 1960s when the Second Vatican Council would compel the entire Church to face its relationship with the world around it, and when the civil rights movement would compel the entire country to face its relationship with African Americans.

In 1952 the African American weekly newspaper, the *Call and Post*, requested the Catholic diocese to use its influence in the city to work toward interracial justice by establishing a Catholic Interracial Council, as had been done in various other cities throughout the country. The article said:

These Catholic Interracial Councils work for interracial understanding and justice. They have been outstanding in their fight for effective FEPC [fair employment practices] legislation and against the opening of institutions which draw "color lines." These Councils also sponsor Communion breakfasts and public forums to bring about further community understanding. In the cities where they have been established, these Councils have prudently and effectively waged campaigns to guarantee all men all their human rights.

Cleveland, with its large Catholic membership, does not now have one of these Interracial Councils. Certainly there is need for one here, for Cleveland cannot afford to lag behind in this important development.¹

The diocesan response to the *Call and Post*'s suggestion was that such a council was unnecessary in Cleveland. No further explanation of this answer was cited in the article.² It was not uncommon among Northern bishops to feel that interracial justice was being achieved in their dioceses if diocesan schools, parishes and other institutions were not segregated, as they commonly were in the South. Of course, there was no such policy in Cleveland. There were two African American parishes, but African Americans were free either to attend them or to attend their territorial

¹*Cleveland Call and Post*, 30 August 1952. The Catholic diocese would not see a Catholic Interracial Council until 1962, however its precursor was the St. Augustine Guild, to be discussed later in the chapter.

²*Ibid.*, 21 February 1953.

parish. Furthermore, the municipal administration of the city itself had established a Community Relations Board in 1945 which had some major accomplishments in this area. In any case, the diocesan church did not take what might be called an "activist" stand on racial issues at any time during the period of this study. Whatever was done in this regard occurred because of the initiative of individual people, whether clergy or laity.

As the neighborhoods in Cleveland went through their dramatic population shifts in the 1950s, the *Universe Bulletin* ran several articles featuring the attempts being made by local Catholics to save their neighborhoods, as in Hough, or to live in harmony with their African American neighbors. When an African American family moved into the Harvard-Lee Road area and had their home attacked by whites, the diocesan weekly reported the event on the front page in a lengthy article. Monsignor Ruffing of St. Cecilia, in whose parish the home was located, was quoted as saying that "It is a serious sin to deny a colored family an opportunity to live in decent quarters." A four-part series begun in December of 1956 tried to dispel the fears that were being multiplied in St. Thomas Aquinas' neighborhoods between both racial groups. Such reporting was spotty at best and certainly inadequate for the magnitude of the situation.³

³*Catholic Universe Bulletin*, 3 October 1952; 13 November 1953; 14, 21, 28 December 1956; 4 January 1957.

Father Paul Marshall was young and impressionable during the 1950s when the country itself began to acknowledge racial injustice. His 1990 remarks reflect the reaction some African American Catholics had to the response of their Church when they needed it most:

I think the Church was very late in getting into the integration gate. I don't remember anything ever being said from the pulpit. Maybe the priests had the sense that theirs was a sacramental role, not a social one. I think that a whole lot more could have been said and done. You did not see Catholic leadership in terms of the civil rights movement later in the 60s, at least locally. We had none of our own. There was no black leadership at all, and eventually this is what just turned off a whole lot of people who were baptized Catholic. When you realize the prejudices of the priests and the Sisters, it just turned people off. There were some real difficulties.⁴

Had there been African American priests and religious personnel in the diocese, perhaps the perspective from which the diocesan officials viewed African American Catholics might have been more inclusive.

The most blatant injustice in the city itself was the housing problem of African Americans. Here, the diocese made some attempts to address the issue, but not publicly or openly to the city at large. Various diocesan organizations, such as the Diocesan Institute of Catholic Family Life, the Diocesan Council of the National Council of Catholic Women, the Diocesan Parent-Teacher League, heard presentations regarding the housing situa-

⁴Interview with the Reverend Paul Marshall, S.M., Cleveland, Ohio, 31 October 1990.

tion throughout the late 1940s and into the 1950s.⁵ Such groups were strictly in-house, and the nature of such presentations is unclear from the sources. The delegates to these diocesan groups represented the entire diocese, but the actual number of delegates was fairly small in comparison to the population of Catholics. Furthermore, there is no evidence to suggest that they took any subsequent action on the housing problem.

Two particular individuals emerged during this period who represented diocesan level positions. The first was Monsignor Robert B. Navin whose master's thesis, "An Analysis of a Slum," was done at The Catholic University of America in 1934 on Cleveland's Central area. He remained active in this civic concern for several decades. As president of St. John College he was frequently called upon for public lectures on the subject. During his career, he also was a member of the Community Relations Board, the NAACP, the Mayor's Advisory Committee on Housing, the American Council to Improve Our Neighborhoods, and chairman of the Better Housing Association of Cleveland. His commitment and contributions were unquestionable, but it did not provide him the kind of exposure that was needed to challenge the consciences of the thou-

⁵*Catholic Universe Bulletin*, 17 May 1946; 16, 25 November 1951; 26 September 1952.

sands of white Cleveland Catholics who continued fleeing their neighborhoods.⁶

The second person to emerge with some diocesan-wide influence was Auxiliary Bishop Floyd L. Begin. Within a few years of his arrival at St. Agnes Parish he was publicly involved as vice chairman of the Hough Area Council. The Council was formed in 1945 by the Cleveland Welfare Federation as an attempt to fight deterioration of the Hough area. Both the Bishop and his neighbor, the Reverend John Bruere of Calvary Presbyterian Church, joined with the residents of the area to mobilize activities like re-zoning and repair work in order to reclaim their neighborhoods.⁷ The Bishop's own words reflect his attitude toward this involvement as an expression of his "belief in the Mystical Body of Christ:"

I never noticed how far apart people were even when they live on top of one another until I became a pastor. Thousands of people living together, riding the same street cars and busses didn't know one another and didn't care if they ever did become acquainted. I've been trying to get them acquainted in St. Agnes Parish. They are going to spend eternity together in heaven, so why not get acquainted here as a preview of heaven?

I thought the spirit of neighborliness should be the answer to the threatened blight of the area. . . . It's good Catholicism, good Americanism and just good common sense to

⁶*Catholic Universe Bulletin*, 23 November 1951; 26 September 1952; 26 November 1954; *Cleveland Call and Post* 12 September 1959; 24 September 1960.

⁷*Ibid.*, 3 October 1952

work together as good neighbors to make your community and city the best in the world.⁸

Bishop Begin's racial ideas preceded his arrival at St. Agnes. Father Albert Myers, his associate pastor, believed that the Bishop took the parish because of the racial question. "He was interested in the racial question long before it was fashionable to be interested."⁹ Furthermore, the Bishop did not agree with the idea of the national parish. He believed that they caused division by making distinctions between people. In his mind, everyone should have been treated equally.¹⁰ The Bishop said on one occasion:

Christ did not become man to save only the whites; He came to save the whole human race . . . The same methods and the same rules are for all men. . . There is no question about the unity and solidarity of the human race. There is only one race. Anyone who would exclude anyone from the human race has already lost his Faith if not his mind. . . Christ came to be the food of all men. If we do anything to prevent any man, colored or white, from receiving Holy Communion, God help us for that injustice.¹¹

The Bishop attributed his own racial attitudes to his experience in Rome, where he had lived and studied with men of all races from sixty-five nations, among whom he numbered some of his

⁸Ibid., 23 November 1951.

⁹Interview with the Reverend Albert Myers, Rocky River, Ohio, 18 January 1991.

¹⁰Interview with the Reverend Daniel L. Begin, Cleveland, Ohio, 7 January 1991.

¹¹*Catholic Universe Bulletin*, 28 October 1960.

best friends.¹² The Bishop's personal correspondence as pastor of St. Agnes literally contains a stack of letters he wrote on behalf of African Americans concerning employment opportunities, character references, and challenges to real estate agents and diocesan institutions.¹³ There is no telling what his influence might have done for the diocese had he been the Ordinary. As an auxiliary bishop, he was consistently aware of his subordinate position to Bishop Hoban.

Bishop Begin's commitment to racial justice embroiled him in the most public and explosive incident of racial injustice in the diocese in the mid-1950s. Just as African American Catholics had initiated efforts to establish their own parishes, they initiated the attempt to gain membership in the Cleveland Knights of Columbus.¹⁴ Their action triggered a series of events that lasted from 1951 through 1956 when the first African American actually was admitted to one of the Cleveland chapters. The affair, which also drew national attention, was covered by the *Universe Bulletin* but this coverage in no way compared with that

¹²Ibid.

¹³St. Agnes Parish Archives transferred to ADC.

¹⁴The Knights of Columbus is a Catholic male fraternal and insurance organization in the United States. It is organized into local "councils" each of which has a priest chaplain. Sixty percent of the membership of a council must be insurance holders and the remaining members are considered associates. There are degrees of membership, the highest of which is a Fourth Degree Knight. They are noted for their distinctive attire including plumed hats, swords and capes. They appear for special liturgical ceremonies as escorts of the bishop.

of the *Call and Post*. The latter publication intensified its reporting to a weekly coverage in 1954 in the months of February and March, an action that brought it face-to-face with Floyd L. Begin.¹⁵

In December of 1951 Bishop Begin wrote to Michael J. Kendra, the Grand Knight of Cleveland Council No. 733 of the Knights of Columbus, requesting that he take action on what the Bishop considered to be a legitimate complaint that three Cleveland African Americans were being denied membership. Prophetically he said, "I think you might make history as Grand Knight of Cleveland Council if you will face this issue and solve it; you have nothing to lose, but everything to gain." The Bishop himself had been a member of the Knights since 1920, held Fourth Degree membership, and had been elected state chaplain in 1936. The Bishop gave his personal recommendation concerning two of the applicants; he did not know the third. On February 4, 1952 he wrote a similar letter because the issue was to be settled the following day:

I would say that the greatest setback the Church could possibly have in Cleveland would be a rejection of the applicants on the basis of color. . . . Furthermore, if these applicants are not admitted because of their color, I shall have to take such measures as I deem necessary to counteract the bad influence of an adverse decision. I shall be obliged

¹⁵See *Cleveland Call and Post*, 30 January-17 April 1954. This was the period of the most intense coverage, but there were reports as early as 25 April and 2 May 1953.

to defend the Catholic Church against the Knights of Columbus.¹⁶

The Bishop's remarks were precipitated by the attempt of M. C. Clarke, president of Dunbar Life Insurance Company and member of St. Thomas Aquinas Parish, Frank E. Petite of St. Thomas Aquinas and founding member of Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Parish, and William J. Ware, plumber and trade union organizer and also of St. Thomas Aquinas, to seek membership in one of the local councils of the Knights. There were no African American Knights in Cleveland, although there were in other places in Ohio and in the country as a whole. Mr. Clarke had been encouraged to apply once previously by Monsignor William O'Donnell, chaplain of the Gilmour Council, and had been rejected. Thus the men were not optimistic that their applications would be accepted though they had been encouraged to apply. They had paid admission fees of \$10.00 and additional \$4.00 charges after meeting with an admissions board. They all received the impression that they were acceptable as possible members. This occurred on May 8, 1952, and they had not received a response.

On September 20, 1952, these three men with Harry Alexander of St. Marian and the *Call and Post*, Johnny W. Hamlett of St. Thomas Aquinas, and Robert Decatur, a lawyer from St. Agatha, requested a meeting with the Right Reverend Monsignor John J. Krol, the Chancellor of the diocese. They said, in part:

¹⁶Knights of Columbus Papers, ADC.

We, a group of Roman Catholics of Negro ancestry, residing here in Cleveland, sensing the need for full participation in the lay affairs of our Holy Mother, the Church, have grouped together to insure full and complete participation in all things Catholic for members of our group who profess the Roman Catholic religion, especially for those who desire to actively participate.

We fully realize that in many of the secular activities of the Church, we have been excluded in the past both because our desires were not known and because of un-Catholic misbeliefs concerning us.¹⁷

Monsignor Krol answered them on October 20th and agreed to meet with them, but offered a reminder that the authority of his office did not necessarily extend to all organizations who "enjoyed varying degrees of autonomy within the broad framework of Church laws." His jurisdiction, he said, covered parish and pastoral activities.

The meeting took place on December 3rd. William Ware and Johnny Hamlett were not present. Although they had not yet received any correspondence regarding their applications, the men felt it was clearly an issue of race and wanted the matter settled and their monies refunded. They were disheartened that a Church-sanctioned group could be so in violation of Church teaching regarding racial equality. Clarke particularly resented the fact that he had regularly been solicited to advertise in Knights of Columbus publications and to contribute to programs they sponsored. The men had already spoken with Father John Humensky, the Cleveland Council chaplain, Monsignor McGlynn of St. Thomas

¹⁷Ibid.

Aquinas, and Bishop Begin, hoping that their influence might hasten the process, but these meetings were without results.

Monsignor Krol's evaluation of their meeting indicates his personal perception of the men who, he agreed, had a legitimate complaint and deserved a refund of their monies. Krol, it seems, wanted quickly to skirt the issue with the least amount of friction with the Knights. He repeatedly emphasized their right to accept members on their own terms:

The gentlemen were unable to accept the explanation that the K. of C. is a social, fraternal organization which operates according to its own by-laws and constitutions; that it, as well as any other lay organization which limits its membership to Catholics, can set up its own requirement for admission. Nor were they satisfied with the explanation that they can achieve full participation in Catholic life through their parish [emphasis added] and that this Office is interested and will take any appropriate action to eliminate any traces or suspicions of discriminatory action in the parish.

It was rather obvious that the gentlemen came in to prove a point rather than to discuss it. When I repeated that the matter of the K. of C. was not a subject controlled by this Office, they brought up other points . . .

The conference ended after much talking on a pleasant note, but it was rather obvious that they are not willing to accept any reasonable explanation unless it coincides with their own views. It may seem advisable to confront the Cleveland Council of the K. of C. with this problem and force them to make a decision. They should have, at least, refunded the money taken from these men.

Monsignor Krol's other remarks in his memo of the meeting indicate that he was on the defensive with the men and resented any suggestion on their part that outside parties might get involved, such as the *Call and Post* or even the Apostolic Delegate. It does not appear that the men came in to threaten such involvement, but to

request that their concerns be attended to by those in the diocese with the legitimate authority to act on their behalf.¹⁸

On February 13, 1953, Frank Petite wrote to the Grand Knight of the Cleveland Council asking that his money be returned with a reasonable explanation or that his admission to membership be accepted. He asked that this be done within thirty days. He sent carbon copies to Bishop Hoban and the Apostolic Delegate in Washington, D.C.¹⁹ The fees were subsequently returned on March 19th after the local membership committee of the Cleveland Council had "studied the situation," in their own words. Apparently enough negative votes from the membership had been obtained to carry the rejection. Bishop Hoban refused to intervene in the situation.²⁰

Subsequent to the rejection, a group of African American and white Catholic men consulted with state officials and others of the Knights of Columbus and proposed to establish an interracial council of the Knights in the Hough area. No all-African American council was permitted according to national policy. This proposal created disagreement in its own right. Harry Alexander and others strongly felt, as did the *Call and Post* which said so in print, that this was "a compromise with segregation and discrimination." Others, including Clarke and Petite, felt that it

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰*Cleveland Call and Post*, 25 April, 2 May 1953.

would initiate integration in the "full framework of Catholic activity in Cleveland." The newspaper ran an editorial which respectfully acknowledged the work of the Church on behalf of African Americans and lamented the fact that the bishop of Cleveland was not willing to speak out against the decisions of the Knights of Columbus. It offered by comparison the decision of Archbishop Rummel of New Orleans to end segregation in the churches in his diocese. It acknowledged the mixed message the Church was giving to African Americans when local decisions are not consistent with Church pronouncements. It further acknowledged that the Protestant churches were equally lacking in courageous action on behalf of racial justice. The newspaper could not have stated the case more honestly.²¹ This situation was one more case where diocesan officials could have provided real action for justice and had refused to do so.

The one public figure who never hedged on his disapproval of the decision by the Cleveland Council of Knights of Columbus was Bishop Floyd Begin. To him their actions appeared to be that of a group organized for socializing rather than the upbuilding of the Church. He agreed to the formation of an interracial council only because he felt it was the most expedient way to overcome the prejudices of some of the Cleveland Knights. His ultimate preference was the integration of already existing councils.²² The

²¹Ibid., 2 May 1953.

²²Ibid., 27 February 1954.

debate in the end was useless. The national organization rejected the application of the proposed interracial council on February 12, 1954. The bishop used the occasion of a Fourth Degree initiation dinner at the Hollenden Hotel on February 21st with 1,200 persons in attendance to literally "blast" the racially unjust behavior of the Knights both locally and nationally. He reportedly received a standing ovation. He told the *Universe Bulletin* in an interview the next day:

The only reason they're keeping them out is their color. Anybody who denies that is a pussyfooting liar. . . .As Americans they're wrong, as Catholics they're wrong and as Knights they're wrong. The K of C should either identify itself with the Catholic Church and the lay apostolate or cease to call itself a Catholic organization and use instead the term "fraternal organization for Catholics."²³

The bishop chose the public event because he was being publicly honored at the dinner and he felt that he had to make his position clear. He said the whole controversy was causing grave scandal to African American Catholics. Further, it was his intention to join the interracial council should it eventually receive a charter.²⁴ The public denunciation by the bishop was supported by the national Jesuit weekly, *America*, which called for consistent non-discriminatory action on the part of the Knights of Columbus nationwide.²⁵

²³*Catholic Universe Bulletin*, 26 February 1954.

²⁴*Ibid.*

²⁵*Cleveland Call and Post*, 5 March 1954.

The decision of the national officers of the Knights of Columbus to reject the proposed interracial council as well as the previous rejection of membership applications in Cleveland was appealed to the Apostolic Delegate by Dr. Frank M. Rogers, one of the white members of the proposed council, in March, 1954. Bishop Hoban also corresponded with the Apostolic Delegate, Archbishop Amleto Cicognani, summarizing the entire affair and the status of African American Catholics in Cleveland. In the end, according to the national Supreme Knight Luke E. Hart, councils of the Knights of Columbus are free to admit to membership those whom they choose and whom they feel will continue to create the fraternal atmosphere of the organization. There was indeed an established rule that council charters would not be granted to groups forming solely on racial lines. The proposed interracial council for Cleveland, though it had ninety-four African Americans and forty-nine white potential members, was still considered a "racial" council and its charter was rejected. The Apostolic Delegate concluded that beyond this clarification there was nothing more that he had the power to do.²⁶

What is most intriguing about Bishop Hoban's correspondence with the Apostolic Delegate is the subtle attitude with which his description of the facts of the case are expressed. In effect, he rationalized Bishop Begin's forthright public denouncement of any type of racial discrimination on the part of

²⁶Knights of Columbus Papers, ADC.

Cleveland Knights by saying that it was necessary for him to do this because Begin's ministry was with African Americans. Apparently bold moral courage was considered an insufficient reason by Hoban. Further, he described the Cleveland officers of the Knights as helpless in their inability to prevent members from casting votes on racial lines since the voting system permits five votes to determine an applicant's fate. He described those who had prematurely assured the three African American applicants of their acceptance as "imprudent." He referred to the publicity given the situation by the *Call and Post* as an attempt to raise its circulation. Finally, he acknowledged that though many Cleveland Knights were opposed to racial discrimination, many also felt they had "a right to determine the limits of their social contacts. They were afraid that an influx of Negro members would tend to discourage the social activities of the Council" as had happened in other Catholic organizations. Hoban did admit, however, that he believed the national officers' rejection of the interracial council was arbitrary and unresearched.²⁷

Bishop Hoban never expressed these opinions publicly or to the Knights of Columbus. He chose to take the most expedient course of action and the one that alienated the least number of

²⁷Ibid. The *Universe Bulletin* ran an editorial on July 2, 1954, in which it reported the success of a Knights council in Brooklyn, New York, after it admitted African American members. The paper upheld the situation as an example of Catholic Americans working together without racial distinctions. The article ended weakly with "Such are the facts. They are nice to contemplate, aren't they?"

his flock. The Knights of Columbus was a major sponsor of a variety of programs in the diocese and was a highly respected organization among Catholics. These considerations might explain Bishop Hoban's reluctance to denounce its action in this situation.

Ultimately, the *Call and Post* and Bishop Begin agreed on the overall moral evaluation of the affair. It is unknown how Begin felt about Hoban's public silence. Ironically, however, Begin was absolutely infuriated that he was forced to agree with the *Call and Post*. Apparently there were not a few people like Bishop Hoban, including other diocesan officials and African American and other Catholics, who intensely disapproved of what they considered the sensationalistic journalism of the newspaper. They felt it reinforced negative stereotypes of African Americans relative to crime and other socially negative characteristics. However its editor, William O. Walker, used this straightforward approach to make people recognize the magnitude of the problems he so desperately wanted the African American community to deal with responsibly.²⁸ Nevertheless, Bishop Begin was one of those who disapproved. His dislike of the newspaper put him on the

²⁸For a brief overview of scholarship on black journalism see Kenneth L. Kusmer, "The Black Urban Experience in American History," in *The State of Afro-American History: Past, Present, and Future*, ed. Darlene Clark Hine (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), pp. 115-117.

defensive regarding its criticism of the local hierarchy.²⁹

This whole affair remained a giant question mark on the Catholic conscience for two more years. In April of 1956 Eugene Richardson of St. Marian Parish was admitted to the Cleveland Council. A year later he was still the only African American member in Cleveland.³⁰ Clearly this entire affair heightened the awareness of African American Catholics as to their minority status in the Church. The three original men who had applied for membership were, indeed, prominent members of their civic and parish communities. Yet they still did not "measure up" in someone's eyes. Whether it was sports, acolytes, choir, academics, or the Knights of Columbus, African American Catholics had to "prove themselves" twice as much as any white Catholic when the issue at hand concerned an integrated situation. Those African Americans who continued to work toward the full integration of all aspects of Catholic life displayed a kind of "heroism" and a commitment to Catholic doctrine that went far beyond the commitment and dedication of the white Catholics who supported them. Even after the

²⁹Ibid., 27 February 1954. This paper continued to report examples of K of C action around the country which enabled the integration of African Americans into its ranks. This reporting was not a matter of "baiting" the Catholic community. Presumably Walker was being consistent with his philosophy that African Americans had to act on their own behalf in their fight for racial justice. Such reporting was more in the line of encouragement. See, for example, 20 March, 17 April, 8 May, 23 October 1954.

³⁰Knights of Columbus Papers, ADC; *Cleveland Call and Post*, 28 April 1956; 20 April 1957.

initial barriers had come down, African American Catholics still had to continue to prove themselves.

The defeat of racial justice by the Knights of Columbus proved to be only temporary for the men involved in forming an interracial council. After their final rejection in February, 1954, these men decided they had a bigger job than ever if interracial harmony was ever to become a working reality. Consequently by April of that year, they and others met at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Parish to form their own organization for the development and training of Catholic lay leadership. Other expressed purposes of the group included the promotion of interracial harmony, the promotion of Catholic action, and the dissemination of information about the Church among non-Catholics. The group consisted of whites and blacks alike.³¹ They called themselves the Cavaliers of St. Michael because of the strength and courage of their patron saint.³²

Two African American Catholics among these men received public recognition for their efforts on behalf of interracial justice. In 1949 M. C. Clark had been awarded the James J. Hoey Award by the Catholic Interracial Council in New York, where he

³¹When the Cavaliers of St. Michael met at St. Marian's Church in 1955, Father Rosario from that parish had become the chaplain for the group. Men who served as officers and trustees in 1955 included Eugene R. Richardson, Norman A. Fuerst, George Moore, Harry Alexander, Nicholas A. Bucur, Berwyn J. Fry, Clyde Lawhon, Judge Edward Feighan, Dr. Frank Rodgers, Carl Martersteck, and M. C. Clarke.

³²Ibid., 10 April 1954; 15 October 1955.

went to receive the recognition for his work in Cleveland. Clarke became a Catholic at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Parish in 1924 because the teaching of the Church regarding the equality of all people attracted him.³³ His own personal philosophy and goal in life was to bring about

complete unreserved voluntary cooperation among men and women of all races in all areas of human contact - along with uncompromising, clear-cut justice according to rights and privileges basic to the ideal equality of man before God and under the law.³⁴

M. C. Clarke carried out this philosophy in the civic, business, and religious domains of his life. After he graduated from the University of Cincinnati he became an examiner in the State Insurance Department in Columbus and remained in the insurance business the rest of his life. In 1945 he founded the Dunbar Life Insurance Company in Cleveland for African Americans. He built it up to be one of the leading black companies in the state. In 1952 he opened the Quincy Savings and Loan Company. His efforts to enable African Americans to achieve economic stability and growth were tireless. He had received two honorary doctoral degrees in recognition of his dedication to the uplifting of society. He was the first African American member of the Cleveland Chamber of Commerce. As a member of St. Thomas Aquinas Parish he had been secretary of its Holy Name Society and a Knight of St. John. When he died at age sixty-six in 1956, Monsignor

³³*Catholic Universe Bulletin*, 5 August 1949

³⁴*Cleveland Call and Post*, 12 May 1956.

Francis McGlynn, pastor at St. Thomas Aquinas, said that he had been a man of untiring faith and a true believer. Over 200 people attended his funeral.³⁵ Commenting upon racial justice at one point, M. C. Clarke said:

It is a slow process. It takes patience. I often think that if the old folks would leave children alone, race prejudice would vanish in one generation. It is not natural. Children are not naturally anti-Negro, anti-Jewish, or anti-Catholic. They accept their playmates for what they are. Prejudice is something that must be learned. It is a terrible thing for parents to teach their children.³⁶

Such was the man twice rejected by the Knights of Columbus.

The other man who received public recognition for his commitment to interracial harmony was George Anthony Moore. Like M. C. Clarke before him, Moore received the James J. Hoey Award from the Catholic Interracial Council in New York in 1960. The activities and commitments which gave him the channels within which to work for justice included his position as a reporter for the *Cleveland Press*, and at WEWS television, where he served successively as newsroom head and public service director from 1947. In 1959 he was appointed associate director of the National Conference of Christians and Jews for the Northern Ohio Region. In this latter position he was able to help plan and execute educational programs. He had done volunteer work for the Conference for five years before his appointment to its staff. His other

³⁵*Catholic Universe Bulletin*, 5 August 1949; *Cleveland Call and Post*, 17 February 1951; 19 May 1956.

³⁶*Catholic Universe Bulletin*, 11 May 1956.

involvements included the Settlement House Federation, the Children's Aid Society, and memberships in the City Club, the St. Augustine Guild, the First Friday Club, Catholic Thought Group, Catholic Big Brothers, Caritas, and the Plus Club or black Chamber of Commerce. He received honors from the Urban League, the American Legion, and the Greater Cleveland Boy Scout Council.³⁷

Another decisive effort on behalf of racial justice was initiated by Joseph Newman in 1959 when he founded Caritas (Latin for "charity"). Initially the group met twice monthly at St. Thomas Aquinas Parish for discussion and input sessions on effective interracial living. However, in 1960 the program expanded to include non-members in a social action project to enhance racial relationships in the diocese. White and black families met on Sunday afternoons in each other's homes. The dialogue, facilitated by a Caritas member, was an attempt to enable the participants to destroy stereotypes of the other racial group and to build bridges of understanding and friendship. They also addressed the problems of changing neighborhoods, although it was not intended to be a problem-solving event, but an educational one. It was Joseph Newman's philosophy that stereotypes and misconceptions could only be changed through person-to-person contact. He had received the initial idea from his experiences with Friendship House in Chicago, a type of Catholic settlement house.

³⁷*Catholic Universe Bulletin*, 30 September 1960; *Cleveland Call and Post*, 24 January 1959, 8 October 1960.

Later, his program had achieved such success that when he was transferred to the Cleveland Community Relations Board from the housing division, the Relations Board adopted his program for the city itself. Many of the families that were brought together through Caritas remained life-long friends. These social encounters had other fruitful outcomes as well. A scholarship was established for African American high school girls, and a white businessman from a large corporation began to work with his personnel department to employ African Americans. Ultimately hundreds of people became involved in the home visit program including diocesan clergy and women and men from religious orders, among them an African American Franciscan seminarian named James Lyke, the future Auxiliary Bishop of Cleveland and Archbishop of Atlanta, Georgia. Joseph Newman called himself a "rebel" because he had initiated Caritas on his own without asking for anyone's approval. "We didn't have any official standing; we don't always have to have an official recognition to do God's work of charity."³⁸

Slowly but surely individual leadership was creating organized efforts for interracial justice. In the late 1950s also the St. Augustine Guild was formed as an interracial study group that met monthly. Its president in 1960 was Robert Decatur, and Harry Alexander was secretary. The group also engaged in parish

³⁸Interview with the Reverend Mr. Joseph Newman, Cleveland, Ohio, 11 December 1990; *Catholic Universe Bulletin*, 4 November, 2 December 1960.

and community services among groups or individuals for the purpose of fostering interracial relations. The group's meetings were always open to the public. The members were studying Pope John XXIII's social encyclical, *Mater et Magistra*, in 1961-62 and complemented this with a variety of speakers from the civic, religious, and academic communities. The Guild members themselves gave presentations at parish, and educational and community meetings throughout the diocese. Father Vincent Haas was the spiritual director for the Guild and officially represented the diocese at the National Catholic Conference for Interracial Justice in Detroit in 1961.³⁹ By September of 1962, the St. Augustine Guild became the Catholic Interracial Council of Cleveland. The significance of the change was more than nominal; it was a change in status as well. Finally the Cleveland diocese had an official organization in the diocesan structure for interracial justice.⁴⁰ It was long in coming. The persistent and untiring efforts of many determined and dedicated lay persons were responsible for this achievement.⁴¹ In his letter of approval for the transition to Father Haas, Bishop Hoban said:

³⁹See the concluding chapter for background on Father Haas' involvement with African American Catholics.

⁴⁰St. Augustine Guild Papers, ADC.

⁴¹At the time of the transition, the executive board of the St. Augustine Guild became the executive board of the Interracial Council. Its members were Harry Alexander, Wendell Bishop, Robert F. Conway, Robert Decatur, Sally Loftus, George Moore, Joseph Newman, Rosemary Smith, John Szilagyi, Ralph Wright, Leonard Zaller, and Father Vincent Haas.

It is my hope that this Council will be equally vigilant and prudent, inspired both by the charity of Christ and love for the Church in your efforts towards the most important and challenging goals: racial justice and racial charity in our community.⁴²

The cautionary tone and request for prudence remain the hallmarks of a bishop being led by his people.

Finally, if there was one event in the lives of African American Catholics that symbolized the ultimate meaning of the Christian commitment to love one another as brothers and sisters, it was the death of Sister Mary Thomas Aquinas, S.B.S., in October of 1957. She had plunged into the swirling waters of the Chagrin River to rescue ten-year-old Anita Black, who had fallen into the river during a St. Edward School picnic in the Chagrin Reservation of the Cleveland Metropolitan Parks. Both died in the attempted rescue. Over one thousand persons attended the double funeral celebrated by Bishop Begin at St. Agnes Church. The Bishop called the Sister's sacrifice "the answer to the segregationists." Little Anita was not yet baptized, but her desire for it was known in the school, and she was given a Catholic burial with the young, white teacher.⁴³ Perhaps this event, more than any other, stirred the hearts, if not the consciences, of Catholics throughout the city.

⁴²Catholic Interracial Council Papers, ADC.

⁴³*Catholic Universe Bulletin*, 19 October 1957; *Cleveland Call and Post*, 26 October 1957.

Chapter 9

AFRICAN AMERICAN CATHOLIC PRESENCE IN THE DIOCESE

By 1961 the African American Catholic community in the diocese of Cleveland claimed a population as diverse as any imaginable. It was clearly not a monolithic population racially, culturally, socially, economically, educationally, or spiritually. Establishing or retaining a Catholic identity was an on-going process for both converts and "cradle Catholics" alike who faced the daily challenge of being a minority within a minority. For some the issue of black identity in a predominantly white Church was handled with relative ease initially, but surfaced with virulence in the post-1960s. For others, the issue of identity confronted them upon their first contacts with the Church's European culture. This study would not be complete without consideration of the spirituality of African American Catholics and the subsequent identity that grew out of their experience. It is this identity and spirituality which are their unique contribution to the Church and an enduring presence in the diocese of Cleveland. This enduring presence is perhaps symbolized best by the destiny of Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Parish.

Because of the Eurocentric culture of the Roman Catholic Church, African Americans had no choice but to assume that culture as Catholics. In fact, until the effects of the decrees of the

Second Vatican Council began to penetrate the lives of the faithful after 1965, that culture was unquestioned by Catholics in general.¹ For European Catholic immigrants the challenge was to become "American," but their ethnicity and religious expression were often so closely identified that they were really one reality. They were seldom separated in the lived experience of immigrant Catholics. African Americans, on the other hand, had to blend or make compatible their ethnicity and their religious expression. The two were not identical for many African Americans, and they were certainly not identical in the perception of white Catholics.

Father J-Glenn Murray, liturgist and previously the associate director of the Cleveland Diocesan Office of Pastoral Liturgy, is convinced that every African American knows that he or she is culturally different from white Catholics; however, many African Americans have systematically rejected their racial and cultural identity, some to the point of self-hatred. He himself went through this experience and taught himself to identify with everything European and western. "I did not want to be black so I

¹The American Catholic Bishops published their document, *Plenty Good Room: The Spirit and Truth of African American Catholic Worship*, in 1990 in which they attempt to describe this worship. It is still under consideration by liturgists and those responsible for pastoral care so that undue emphasis is not given to one particular style or expression which is not a universal experience of African American Catholics. Interview with the Reverend J-Glenn Murray, S.J., Cleveland, Ohio, 5 February 1991.

wouldn't deal with anything black." Yet daily reminders of racism never let him forget his race:

No matter what I do, the fact is the skin color I cannot change and that makes a difference. So I'm not sure how I perceive reality differently than a white person, I have no idea. All I know is that every African American in this country does. I think some of us hated ourselves and so hated anything that spoke our heritage, and so we rejected it. Others responded just the opposite. We are different, so they revelled in the differences, revelled in the speech, revelled in the food, revelled in the culture. But the common denominator is we are different, and we are treated differently.

When people say they never thought about being black, was it because they were totally concerned about being white or European? I can't imagine, how could you not? How could you get up in the morning before the 1960s and know that you couldn't eat in certain places, go certain places, have certain jobs, and not think about being black? How do you escape that?²

Father Murray's point illustrates the internal process that consciously or unconsciously had to be faced by those who wanted to identify with the Catholic Church. This was not merely an issue of racism. In some ways it was deeper than that. Catholic culture demanded a re-shaping of one's thought processes and ways of learning, one's sense of mystery, one's aesthetic response, and one's creation of ritual.³ This is not to imply that Catholicism was incompatible with African American experience. It is to say that European and African ways of being in the world are dif-

²Ibid.

³National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Plenty Good Room: The Spirit and Truth of African American Catholic Worship* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, Inc., 1990), pp.47-56.

ferent, and when the European style was the only acceptable style, then African Americans had to accommodate to it in some manner. For those who were born into a Catholic family, the process was somewhat simplified. The identity was already in place because parents and ancestors had somehow made "black" and "Catholic" compatible. For others, however, the identification with Catholic culture was not so easily accomplished. For some it was painful and disturbing and cut to the core of their personhood.

Among those who were interviewed for this study, several individuals had so identified with the European Catholic tradition as the Catholic tradition that the incorporation of an African American style in contemporary Catholic worship was a source of great discomfort. These individuals frequently reported their discomfort in words such as "If I wanted to be a Baptist, I would have been a Baptist" or other similar expressions.⁴ This identification of African Americanism with a Protestant denomination is indicative of the fact that some Protestant denominations were racially divided and therefore some churches were completely African American and had incorporated an African American style of

⁴See, for example, interviews with Lelia Berry, Cleveland, Ohio, 14 December 1990; Ocilla Gayters, Cleveland, Ohio, 4 December 1990; Margaret Santiago, Cleveland, Ohio, 15 November 1990; Lemuel Walcott, Cleveland, Ohio, 9 November 1990; Anonymous interview, Cleveland Heights, Ohio, 19 January 1991.

religious expression.⁵ These individuals were among those who genuinely embraced all aspects of Catholic culture in the years preceding the 1960s.

I think everything should be in its place. Like if you want to listen to some gospel music, then you listen to that but you come to the Catholic Church to go by their rules which is rather old school . . . I still like the old hard Mass, there could be a little Latin in there sometimes. Even if you don't really understand all of it, it's just a feeling that you get when you hear a Mass sung that way. You get that elevated feeling and the quiet and you just can think and be there.⁶

For those who were born into Catholicism, their identification was also complete. If it was not, they were hesitant to seek out other religious expressions because Catholics were taught not to attend the services of other denominations. One woman expressed her identification with Catholicism in these words:

I kind of thought I was special because I was black and Catholic. I thought being Catholic was a special kind of thing. It wasn't the "black religion" because most people thought the black religion was Baptist or something like that. Well, I wasn't that; I was special, I was Catholic. Because of the way I am, I'm a reserved person, the Catholic religion fit my personality. I felt the Mass and all forms of the Catholic rituals, traditions were in very good taste. I never visited any other kind of church because at that time you weren't supposed to.⁷

⁵There is implied here more than external expressions such as songs, movement, and prayer styles. These external forms were the expression of innate responses to worship that were inherited from an African past despite the attempts made to destroy African heritage by white oppression. National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Plenty Good Room: The Spirit and Truth of African American Catholic Worship* (Washington, D.C.: The United States Catholic Conference, Inc., 1990), p. 31.

⁶Interview with Lelia Berry, 14 December 1990.

⁷Anonymous interview, Cleveland, Ohio, 8 January 1991.

Barbara Robinson, a Catholic from birth and long-time parishioner of Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Parish, reported the shock she experienced when her parish attended a bazaar at the white parish of Our Lady of Good Counsel on Cleveland's west side:

The first time I realized that I was a black Catholic was when I was married and had children, and our church attended a carnival at Our Lady of Good Counsel. We were snubbed! As if to say, "What are you doing here?" It was as if someone had hit me in the head with a hammer. I never felt that we were different or whatever. We were Catholics!⁸

There is more to Robinson's remark than the discovery of prejudice. She certainly must have experienced that by the time she reached adulthood. What she did not expect was that her identification with Catholicism was not reciprocated on the part of other Catholics. For her there was no need to distinguish between race and religion.

Similar identification was expressed by Patricia Polk who admitted that the importance of being a black Catholic emerged only in the more recent years of her adult life as she has become directly involved in the pastoral ministry of her parish. She sees now how significant was the absence of African American Catholic history and culture in her childhood formation as a Catholic. However, at the time, her religious world was complete:

I'm pleased with my childhood, but I never ever thought of being black or black culture. Maybe that's the problem - we

⁸Interview with Barbara Robinson, Bedford Heights, Ohio, 16 January 1991.

just were never taught any of that and we assumed that our world was complete. I just accepted who I was.⁹

Louis Gleason, a life-long Catholic, reported that he, too, was well into his adult years before he ever learned that northern Africa was rooted in Catholicism. "In my exposure to Catholicism it was always a western European religion. There was never anything that I remember where the African Americans were affirmed as to who they were [as Catholics]." It was his opinion that many African American Catholics hurdled this neglect by equating their Catholicism with a higher degree of social status than they would have had as Protestants. He admitted that he had to confront his African American identity as a college student when he was challenged to accept his multicultural ancestry. It was some years later that he took pride in his racial identity.¹⁰

Mary James reported that it was the efforts of Martin Luther King, Jr., to achieve equal rights for African Americans and the black consciousness movement in the late 1960s that awakened her to come to terms with her identity as an African American. She acknowledged that she still is discovering the meaning of black Catholic identity. When she converted to Catholicism in the early 1950s this never entered her mind:

Let's face it, I was westernized, and I accepted the Catholic Church as it was. I wasn't consciously aware of bringing my

⁹Interview with Patricia G. Polk, Cleveland, Ohio, 19 December 1990.

¹⁰Interview with Louis A. Gleason, Cleveland, Ohio, 30 October 1990.

own culture into the Church because I thought this would be the way it would be forever. I never expected the change that came about.¹¹

For others there was a clear awareness of the different national or ethnic parishes which precipitated a natural curiosity about the kind of Catholicism being practiced in other places. Lelia Berry recalled that as a teenager she and several other girls attended services in other parishes that were not African American. "We did that just to do it because we knew about the Catholic faith and we wanted to go and see if it was the same. We got looked at, but we knew we were within our rights to go. We'd have our rosaries or whatever we had and we'd act accordingly."¹² This episode is more telling than might appear from its obvious teenage impishness. If, indeed, African American Catholics were being instructed in the universality of Roman Catholicism, as they surely were, then the obvious distinctions of ethnicity that were created by national parishes were somehow a source of confusion. This must have been true, at least unconsciously, for African Americans whose cultural identity was never acknowledged as a legitimate source of religious expression.

Barbara Price provided an insightful observation on her own experience. Though she grew up in and attended her neighborhood parish of St. Edward's, she recognizes now that full identity

¹¹Interview with Mary James, Cleveland, Ohio, 18 December 1990.

¹²Interview with Lelia Berry, 14 December 1990.

with the church was not possible for those parishioners until they were able to be a self-supporting parish. "Until you take total ownership, then it is not your parish." African Americans at St. Edward's did not have that ability in the late 1940s and 1950s because of their social, economic, and educational conditions, according to Price. They remained indebted to the generosity of white Catholics, a demeaning posture. Thus, African American Catholic identity was tied not only to cultural realities but to economic and social ones as well, even for those who were able to embrace the reality of Catholic culture wholeheartedly as Barbara Price did.¹³

For other African American Catholics, however, the acceptance of a Catholic identity was more painful. For some, like LeMoyne Nesbitt, Catholic practices and discipline became a source of teasing by his non-Catholic black friends, and black Catholic friends were not necessarily in the immediate neighborhood. Though he was born into Catholicism, his religion became problematic for him as a teenager seeking acceptance from his peers. "Whites didn't want us, blacks didn't really want us; we were different."¹⁴

Another woman who converted as an adult to her husband's Catholicism so that she could be actively involved in the educa-

¹³Interview with Barbara Price, Cleveland, Ohio, 28 January 1991.

¹⁴Interview with LeMoyne Nesbitt, Cleveland, Ohio, 5 December 1990.

tion of her children recalled the sense of loss she experienced when she had to give up the more participatory style of worship she had known in her Baptist church. She was relegated to the status of an observer at Catholic worship, listening to a language that she could not understand. "I learned to keep quiet and sit there, but I wasn't meditating." She did not feel completely at ease with her Catholic faith until after the changes in worship introduced by the Second Vatican Council.¹⁵

Charles Johnson felt himself drawn to the liturgical style of Catholicism as an adult, but found that his conversion carried with it a social price. He encountered confusion and even rejection by relatives, but also experienced a certain haughtiness from more affluent, long-standing African American Catholics. He felt the term "cradle Catholics" was used against converts at times as a way of making religious distinctions within the church itself. Yet, once Catholic, many converts projected the very same attitude toward their non-Catholic brothers and sisters because now they felt they had achieved a superior social status.

Reverend Mr. Johnson admitted that he found himself shifting from behavior and speech patterns identifiable with the white community at his parish church to a style more appropriate to black culture when among other African Americans. Yet he also admitted he never ventured beyond his own parish to attend serv-

¹⁵Anonymous interview, Shaker Heights, Ohio, 23 January 1991.

ices in other predominantly white parishes for fear he would be embarrassed by being the only African American in church:

What happened is your culture changed. You came out of your culture into the white culture because that is what Catholics were supposed to be. . . . So to become Catholic, you were isolating yourself from the black community. It's like you were abandoning them. So we hid our identity. We were afraid of it. . . . To be a Catholic was to be a nice peaceful person. The priest would say, "Oh, he is the most wonderful person, he's so nice, he does this and he does that." And you're saying, "I'm not nice. I'm mad as heck." ¹⁶

His remarks reveal the pain with which he had to struggle in order to achieve his own sense of selfhood as a Catholic. The pain was particularly intense when he had to witness his own children being subjected to racial prejudice by persons within the Church, after he had struggled so hard to teach them to be committed to that Church.

An equally painful search for his own identity as a Catholic was described by Joseph Richardson. The Richardson family had been strict and devout Catholics as long as he could remember. "I would have died for the Catholic Church." However, the combination of the changes in the Church after the Second Vatican Council and the black consciousness movement in the 1960s forced Richardson to look at his Catholicism as an African American. It was a wrenching experience for him to realize he had been denied his culture and his reality as a black man. He went to his pastor at St. Aloysius, the Reverend John Storey, in the

¹⁶Interview with the Reverend Mr. Charles Johnson, Cleveland, Ohio, 17 December 1990.

late 1960s and told him he had to leave the Church. His sense of betrayal was too much to absorb. He reported walking from a barber shop on East 105th Street, after an intense discussion with a Black Muslim, all the way to Public Square just so he could sort out his thoughts:

The first thing that emerged was the fact that I was a black man who had never expressed his sensibilities as a black man but always as a white man, so now, who the heck was I? I would walk, I tell you, I walked and prayed that God would not take my sanity because what he [the barber] was saying to me began to make sense. For the first time I could think as an individual and not be afraid of my conclusion. Do you know, that was something? That was something! After fifty years, that was something! And the more I would think about it, sometimes I'd throw it off my mind. Then it would come back again. That's when I went to Father Storey and he said, "Brother Joe, you have to do what you have to do."

He struggled especially with the derogatory language that was used against him by white Catholics in earlier years:

We were taught to rise above it when you were called "nigger" or "sambo" - the names that were usually the pet words of the average white person to make you feel subservient, to make you feel as if you were no one. And you can't get away from the fact that it worked. It worked. So when the veil was suddenly torn from your eyes and you could see your equality, you could see your dignity, you could see all those things that God had given us innately, you became very angry.

Eventually Richardson found the internal strength to return to the Church. As he said, "It's that whole spiritual thing inside of us that has allowed us to continue; outside of that, we'd be gone."¹⁷

Many African American Catholics complemented their Catholic culture with African American culture in some way. Some

¹⁷Interview with Joseph Richardson, Cleveland, Ohio, 10 November 1990.

did it intentionally, while others simply responded to their immediate surroundings. Often they found themselves seeking out other religious traditions that embodied more of their African American expression. Charles Johnson recalled yearning for his black Protestant tradition after abandoning it at his conversion to Catholicism. "Every now and then we'd sneak and go to the Baptist church so we could clap our hands and stamp our feet and never let them know it. But you yearn for that joyous feeling that you got in church."¹⁸

Barbara Price expressed a similar appreciation for her grandmother's tradition:

I can remember Sundays when I would be with my grandmother who was Baptist, and we would go to church with her. As the years went along we stopped going with her because we didn't feel that it was right to be a part of that type of worship because it wasn't done that way in the Catholic Church. But then a part of me said "I like that." And I liked the spirituals and I liked the music. I liked some of the wholesomeness of some of their rituals. Sometimes I would think, "Why don't they do this in the Catholic Church?" They don't express themselves. They don't put their feelings out there for the people to see or to pray with them and so forth like the Baptists do. So I grew up in two different religious cultures. I spent quite a bit of time with my grandmother when my mother worked. I felt really good when they started allowing some of the black culture to be a part of the Catholic service. That way I didn't have to listen to it

¹⁸Interview with the Rev. Mr. Charles Johnson, 17 December 1990. It is important to note that Catholics were strictly forbidden to participate or attend the services of other religious denominations with the exception and permission for funerals or weddings where social obligations demanded it. Thus many Catholics expressed this as "not being permitted to step foot in another kind of church than a Catholic one."

before I came to church on Sunday and block it out once I got here, it was still a part of me.¹⁹

Lemuel Walcott accounted for the compatibility of his Catholicism with his race from the double influence of his parents and their friends who were proud of their race and the priests and Sisters at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Parish. "I was being influenced by both sources and it is the only reason why my Catholicism and blackness didn't clash." He occasionally spent several weeks at a time with a family friend who was a non-Catholic African American. She would dutifully wake the young Lemuel for Sunday Mass at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament. When he returned from Mass she was ready to leave for the 11:00 service at Liberty Hill Baptist Church on East 55th Street. He accompanied her because she didn't want to leave him in the house alone. He sat in church fully aware that "nobody was going to have me but the Catholics," yet all the while absorbing Baptist religious expressions. His own mother had been invited to join the famed "Wings Over Jordan" choir but was unable to do so because of her small children. He was well aware of the songs she loved to sing. She herself, though Catholic from birth, would slip into the "sanctified church" across the street from St. Edward Church because she liked the preaching, the singing, the hand-clapping that she did not experience at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament. She felt that it lifted her spirituality. The

¹⁹Interview with Barbara Price, 28 January 1991.

Walcotts had no difficulty knowing where their loyalties belonged, but they also knew their neighbors and friends who were good people and who had equally meaningful ways to worship. Walcott believes he grew up in the best of both worlds and did not have to choose between his racial culture and his religious culture.²⁰

Other African American Catholics experienced other black religious traditions because of their relatives as well. One woman's grandmother was not Catholic and her mother would not permit the children to go to church with their grandmother. However, she did permit them to attend Sunday afternoon concerts with her at her church because "it was not a church service and it was in the afternoon."²¹ Patricia Polk also went with a family friend to a non-Catholic church.

I would enjoy that singing so much. It was not part of who I was. I know now that it was gospel. I'd come back and I would go to confession and I knew I was committing a sin and Father would scold me for it. But I would go, I really loved that. I just know that I liked the people moving around. I loved the songs. . . . I didn't remember hearing those songs in the Catholic Church, but that was OK because that was a different world.²²

Perhaps for some, like young Patricia, the only way to acknowledge one's attraction for black religious expression was to identify it as "a different world." This terminology is more than metaphor.

²⁰Interview with Lemuel Walcott, Cleveland, Ohio, 9 November 1990.

²¹Anonymous interview, Cleveland Heights, 19 January 1991.

²²Interview with Patricia Polk, Cleveland, Ohio, 19 December 1990.

It is indicative of the cultural dichotomy that African American Catholics had to negotiate for themselves.

An equally frequent blending of cultures occurred in the home environment for African American Catholics. Sister Rosella Holloman remembered that she never felt the distance from the Scriptures that other Catholics experienced because their pre-Vatican II background did not place heavy emphasis on the reading of the Bible. She knew she brought that with her from her Protestant background and from home where she saw her father reading his Bible on a daily basis.²³ Similarly, Patricia Polk's father who was not Catholic would read Bible stories to his children on Sunday evening. Then they would talk very informally about the stories that were read or that he told. This was done side by side with other evenings of the week when the family would pray the rosary together.²⁴

Philomena McClellan remembered the hymns she learned as a youngster attending Lutheran and Baptist churches before becoming Catholic. Her mother continued to sing her favorite spirituals as she did her work around the house. The music was never gone from the family even when Mr. Ware and his daughters became Catholic.²⁵

²³Interview with Sister Rosella Holloman, C.S.A., Cleveland, Ohio, 23 November 1990.

²⁴Interview with Patricia Polk, 19 December 1990.

²⁵Interview with Philomena McClellan, Cleveland, Ohio, 24 January 1991.

Father Paul Marshall learned to blend religious cultures from the time he was little. His father and his father's family were members of a strict Pentecostal denomination which forbade drinking, smoking and other behaviors. His father had been part of a gospel choir while in high school and had even toured the country with that group. Father Marshall recalled:

I can remember from the time when I was very young, he and my cousin would get together on a Sunday afternoon at the piano we had in our house and they would sing hymns. We children would tell them that those weren't real hymns because they weren't the good German hymns we were learning in our Catholic Church! So what we were getting at home was an appreciation of black culture. . . . My mother had gone to Tuskegee Institute and she insisted that we learn the Negro national anthem, "Lift Every Voice." My father would sometimes just sit by himself on Sunday morning and sing the spirituals. They made sure we learned those. We got a good dose from the family of what would be a black religious experience.²⁶

Families like the Marshalls, the Wares, and the Hollomans were able to achieve a level of compatibility between cultures that prevented the wrenching experience other African American Catholics endured in later years.

Whatever their experience in terms of establishing an identity as African American Catholics, there emerged an undeniable pattern in the expression of their religious commitment which can be understood as a unique kind of spirituality. However, the external manifestations of this spirituality were not necessarily any different from that of other Catholics. The devotional life

²⁶Interview with the Reverend Paul Marshall, S.M., Cleveland, Ohio, 31 October 1990.

of African American Catholics was the devotional life nurtured everywhere in the Church, particularly devotion to Mary, the Mother of God.

The recitation of the rosary was initiated in Patricia Polk's family several times a week by anyone in the family. During May she and her brothers and sisters would have a May altar in their home even though space was limited. Ann Cowan always considered Mary as her spiritual mother from the time of her conversion. Her consecration to Mary as a member of the Sodality became a life-long commitment. LeMoynes Nesbitt denied that he is particularly religious, but acknowledged that he has always had special attraction to the Blessed Mother. Other women reported that they also prayed the rosary aloud with their children, at least when the youngsters were small. Another woman "just loved" the novena to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.²⁷ One man wrote of his devotion to Mary in a letter to Bishop Begin:

I have been very sincere in my prayers and have had a lot of heart to heart talks with the Blessed Virgin, many of my problems, I have laid in Her lap and they just work out. At night I say a decade for you and the church members and one for the Blessed Virgin.²⁸

An equally favored devotion was that to the Sacred Heart of Jesus which often was accompanied by the display of a statue of

²⁷Interviews with Patricia Polk, 19 December 1990; Ann Cowan, Cleveland, Ohio, 13 November 1990; LeMoynes Nesbitt, 5 December 1990; Anonymous interviews, Cleveland, Ohio, 29 October, 6 November 1990; Shaker Heights, Ohio, 21 January 1991.

²⁸St. Agnes Parish Archives, transferred to ADC.

the Sacred Heart and a burning vigil light. This enthronement was common in many homes. One woman was pleased to admit that she never missed the novena to the Sacred Heart in the eleven years she was a parishioner at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament.²⁹ Other favorite saints whose devotion involved the display of statues and the recitation of prayers included St. Anthony, St. Jude, and the Infant of Prague.³⁰ An Akron mother celebrated the feast of the Epiphany and Christ the King, May crownings, St. Patrick's Day, and the season of Advent with some kind of special festivity in the home with her children.³¹ Mary St. Clair remembered the gathering of three separate families in her grandmother's four-family house during Lent to pray the Stations of the Cross. They had a cross which displayed the fourteen stations and the children were called upon to recite individual stations for the family.³² One woman appreciated the prayers at the family meal on Sundays and several times during the week. She and others also recalled that their families always attended church as a family even if there was a non-Catholic parent. Ann Cowan's family

²⁹Interviews with Ocilla Gayters, Cleveland, Ohio, 4 December 1990; anonymous interviews, Cleveland, Ohio, 6 November 1990; Shaker Heights, Ohio, 21 January 1991.

³⁰Interviews with Patricia Polk, 19 December 1990; Ocilla Gayters, 4 December 1990; Dorothea Hite, Cleveland, Ohio, 7 November 1990.

³¹Anonymous interview, Akron, Ohio, 21 December 1990.

³²Interview with Mary St. Clair, Cleveland, Ohio, 10 December 1990.

had family prayer together every Sunday, and particularly on New Year's Eve, they would pray the new year in. She and her sister still maintain this ritual with their family.³³

Other Catholics reported that they were especially drawn to the ritual celebrations that involved processions and the wearing of special attire like Forty Hours Devotion, First Communions, Confirmations, and parish May Crownings.³⁴ Other families were drawn to the liturgical life of the Church and attended daily Mass and appreciated the spiritual help they experienced in the frequent reception of the sacraments.³⁵

However, African American spirituality went far beyond devotionalism. It was more than ritual and prayers and statues. For some, like Lemuel Walcott, it started with a fundamental acceptance of himself as a black person. "If I came here a black man it was because God intended it. I have to be in touch with me first." For Mary James it meant taking God into every facet of daily life, a lesson she learned from her mother's example. For Charles Johnson, returning to church to worship was the source of strength he needed to draw upon for the week ahead. He observed

³³Anonymous interview, Cleveland, Ohio, 8 January 1991; Interviews with Rev. Paul Marshall, 31 October 1990; Mary St. Clair, 10 December 1990; Ann Cowan, 13 November 1990.

³⁴Interviews with Blontee Anderson, Cleveland, Ohio, 17 December 1990; Lelia Berry, 14 December 1990; Sr. Rosella Holoman, 23 November 1990.

³⁵Interviews with Rev. Mr. John Blackburn, Cleveland, Ohio, 29 October 1990; LeMoyné Nesbitt, 5 December 1990; Mary St. Clair, 10 December 1990.

that many white Catholics did just the opposite. They seemed to feel that they had to bring something to God after a week's work rather than receive something from God as nourishment and strength.³⁶ For Jimmie Lee Payton, spirituality was intrinsic to her response to the doctor's pronouncement that she would never conceive a child because of her physical make-up. She said:

He was so sure that I wouldn't have any children. I went home and got my Bible out and I found every place in there where a woman was barren: Rebecca, Sarah, Elizabeth, one by one. I could not accept the fact that I would not be a mother and I told God that. I said, "You took my mother before I was old enough to know what it was to have a mother. Surely a just God is never going to tell me I will never know what it is to be a mother. Don't tell me you've lost your powers. You did it for Rebecca, you can do it for me. You did it for Sarah, you can do it for me. I'm not the submissive Christian that we're taught to be - thy will be done. I want children and I'm praying for children and they tell me you're going to give me what I ask for in faith. Now I want children."³⁷

Mrs. Payton conceived and gave birth to five children.

For men like Joseph Newman, LeMoyne Nesbitt, and Arthur Heard spirituality was what they did outside of church. Each of these men related experiences in their jobs where they could have been less than Christian, conforming to the values of the society around them. That they chose to do otherwise was their sense of the meaning of spirituality. For them it was a matter of seeing

³⁶Interviews with Lemuel Walcott, 9 November 1990; Mary James, 18 December 1990; Charles Johnson, 17 December 1990.

³⁷Interview with Jimmie Lee Payton, Cleveland, Ohio, 9 January 1991.

their brothers and sisters in the manner the Lord asks in the Gospel.³⁸

Nonetheless, African American Catholic spirituality was as interior as it was exterior. Often it was a spirituality born out of suffering due to racism or poverty. It was a spirituality distinctively African American. George Moore verbalized his own ability to overcome the experience of racism as God's special gift to black people. "Black people just didn't go away with any bitterness about things. Most people would be bitter, we just weren't that way. That is always a saving grace. The Lord has given us help so that we wouldn't lose our minds sometimes."³⁹

An eighty-four-year-old woman still pondered the enigma of racism:

What difference [racial] is there between us? We're soul and body. They [white Catholics] didn't want to sit beside you, but yet they could go up there and receive the body and blood of Jesus in Holy Communion. I still wonder. How did they think they could go and receive the body and blood if you live the life of Jesus? How can they have that in their hearts? I can't be their judge, but you can't help but wonder. . . . If you stop to dwell on it, then the devil's very busy. . . . I feel like God will take care of them. It's good to pray for those that hate you, those that persecute you.⁴⁰

³⁸Interviews with Rev. Mr. Joseph Newman, 11 December 1990; LeMoyne Nesbitt, 5 December 1990; Arthur Heard, 18 December 1990.

³⁹Interview with George Anthony Moore, Cleveland Heights, Ohio, 15 January 1991.

⁴⁰Anonymous interview, Cleveland, Ohio, 6 November 1990.

When Barbara Robinson experienced the racial prejudice of one of the priests in her parish she went to church elsewhere for a while. She recalled:

Then I decided, I'm not going anywhere. Those of us who have stayed with the Church are very strong. We weren't liked by our own black people. We weren't really accepted by the white community, but we stuck. For many ethnic Catholics there were never any hindrances to their religion like we had to go through. It was easy for them to accept their religion.⁴¹

Similarly, Barbara Price experienced rejection by white parishioners:

So it hurt when you came to church and felt you were unwelcome, but like Father Lochtefeld told me, "That's why you're strong enough to bear it, and if you want to be a working part of that parish, a good part of the church, you'll see it through."

She drew additional strength from her great-grandmother's example at prayer:

I prayed like my grandmother used to pray. It's not like a prayer, it's more like a conversation. If you're talking to Him and He's listening to you, sooner or later He'll give you an answer. I can remember my great-grandmother telling me, "He doesn't always give you the answer you're looking for." That, too, is part of our culture, that because you don't get what you want, you can't stop praying.⁴²

Another woman also drew upon her grandmother's prayer in her own life when she was struggling with the meaning of Catholicism. "We had a hard life in North Carolina and when we didn't have wood, my grandmother would look up and say, "Father, I

⁴¹Interview with Barbara Robinson, 16 January 1991.

⁴²Interview with Barbara Price, 28 January 1991.

stretch my hands to thee!" It wasn't "Et cum spiritu tuo." That meant nothing. But I knew how to talk to God in my own terms."⁴³

As Ann Cowan reflected on her life as a Catholic she said:

I just feel, when I look back on my life, that this is the place that God wanted for me and our family and it has been hard. Everything was not easy and there are some things in the Church that you sometimes wonder about, but, on the other hand, God has been so good. He always finds an answer and I don't think He's ever let me down on any day. It's been a struggle and I haven't always been the happiest person. I've learned to trust Him and have faith and that's the thing I think that brought me through all this. I thank God for what He's done for me because only the Lord knows what would have happened if I hadn't had the faith of His divine grace with me all the time.⁴⁴

Charles Johnson reflected on what it meant for him to be a Catholic:

What it means is that you're going to live your life very humanly. Being able to love, being able to experience frustrations and even sometimes to deal with hatred. It is always a process of growth to turn that hatred into understanding. All that to me is growth. I learned that at church. I learned it through suffering.⁴⁵

At age seventy-nine, Blontee Anderson who had recently experienced the amputation of her leg, summed up her life this way:

And I told one friend who said, "You know, Anderson, I can't help but feel sorry for you." And I let her talk and I said, "You know, my mother always told us never let a person feel

⁴³Anonymous interview, Shaker Heights, Ohio, 23 January 1991.

⁴⁴Interview with Ann Cowan, 13 November 1990.

⁴⁵Interview with the Rev. Mr. Charles Johnson, 17 December 1990.

sorry for you. Maybe you could feel sorry for yourself, but snap out of it." So that's the motto I have. God doesn't put any more on you than you can bear.⁴⁶

Finally, Lemuel Walcott expressed his sense of spirituality in the following words:

I think that's what black spirituality is all about. We can be open to the Spirit in ways that many others cannot be because we've been doing it so long -- where there was nothing, no one, or anything we could call upon except the Spirit just to get us over and make it to the next hour. Black people have gone through that kind of experience.⁴⁷

Such descriptions of faith and fidelity to the Catholic experience were born out of many traditions and cultural experiences, yet to a significant extent they were nurtured at the two African American parishes of Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament and St. Edward. One might question whether separate parishes for African Americans was good for them and for the diocese as a whole. The conclusion of this study is that it was. It was also the conclusion of those who contributed to this research. Given the social and economic realities of African American life during this forty-year period, no other option would have nurtured their Catholicity. Integration into white parishes would have succeeded only with drastically different demographic conditions which simply did not exist in the city of Cleveland. Furthermore, courageous and even dramatic institutional leadership on the part of the hierarchy would have been necessary to challenge the social

⁴⁶Interview with Blontee Anderson, 17 December 1990.

⁴⁷Interview with Lemuel Walcott, 9 November 1990.

realities that prevailed. Such leadership did not exist in the diocese. Certainly such integration should have been the goal from the start because it was in keeping with the very doctrine of the Church itself. However, it was impossible "in those days" given the human and historical realities that prevailed in Cleveland.

When African American Catholics were asked if the presence of the black parishes was helpful to the overall African American Catholic experience the following replies were typical of the responses. George Moore: "A help, no question about it. Even now [1990] there is no great rush for blacks to come into the other white churches. Blacks wanted to feel comfortable with their own people." Barbara Robinson felt that her years at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament and her attempts to become a part of a white Catholic community were two totally different experiences of Catholicism. "We adopted and we adapted in ways that no ethnic Catholic ever had to do [in trying to join a territorial parish]." Father J-Glenn Murray observed that African American parishes were started because black people were not allowed to be a part of the churches of white Catholics. Like many other black experiences they took something negative and made it positive. When African Americans attempted integration into white parishes, many were denied real acceptance and they eventually left the Church.⁴⁸

⁴⁸Interviews with George Anthony Moore, 15 January 1991; Barbara Robinson, 16 January 1991; The Rev. J-Glenn Murray, 5 February 1991.

Whether it was for the personal comfort of being with one's own people, or whether it was a reaction to racism, the ultimate result for the diocese of Cleveland was that the African American parishes nurtured a strong African American Catholic community.

Beyond this, African American Catholics learned how to negotiate living in two worlds, each of which placed them in a minority position. Yet, with some exception, most did not experience estrangement from either world and, in fact, learned to benefit from both worlds. This skill is itself an expression of what has come to be identified as African American spirituality. In the African American experience, religion "encompasses the whole mystery of life." It is not compartmentalized into select times and places but pervades all aspects of life. Religion, then, is life for African Americans rather than something they do while they live. This quality of African American spirituality has been identified as wholistic and contemplative.⁴⁹ This ability to draw life from two different worlds arose from an inner spirit that sensed the sacred in ways that went beyond "religion." The spirituality of African American Catholics must necessarily be considered part of the data that explains their history in the Catholic Church.

The enduring presence of African American Catholicism in the diocese of Cleveland is best symbolized with the same image

⁴⁹National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Plenty Good Room*, pp. 31, 48-49.

that was used at the beginning of this study: Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Parish. In January of 1961, after consultation with the clergymen involved, the decision was made to merge Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Parish with its neighbor, St. Adalbert Parish. The Bohemian parish at 2345 East 83rd Street had dwindled to eleven families in the area and six school-age children. About fifty families were registered in the parish from other parts of the city. The revenue of the parish had decreased to about \$5000 per year. Everyone in the parish knew that something had to be done. However, the 650-seat church building, rectory and convent were in fine physical condition. The school building, built in 1892, had been closed for fifteen years due to lack of enrollment.⁵⁰

Meanwhile the physical condition of the frame buildings at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament, church, school and rectory, were so greatly deteriorated that they no longer met the city's health and fire standards. The 280-seat church needed four Masses on Sunday to accommodate its congregation of approximately 1250 parishioners. There were over 300 children enrolled in the parish school at 2350 East 79th Street.

The merger called for the movement of the entire parish of Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament to the St. Adalbert facilities with the exception of the school. Plans were in place to raze the old St. Adalbert School and replace it with a new eight-

⁵⁰Papers of OLBS, ADC.

classroom structure. Additional playground property was also to be purchased. The East 79th Street properties were to be disposed of through sale as soon as the new school building was ready. The actual merger occurred on February 6, 1961.

Certainly this was welcome news for the on-going life of Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Parish. However, there was one additional aspect of the merger: the name of the parish. Bishop Hoban expressed the following in his official letter to the Society of the Precious Blood priests:

You will be pleased, also, to know that this plan has the unanimous approval of the Bohemian pastors of the Diocese. As a tribute to the sacrifices of the Bohemian immigrants who helped develop the parish, St. Adalbert will be the principal patron of the parish and Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament will be the secondary title.⁵¹

It was a bittersweet moment, if not a shattering one, for the African American parishioners. Recall that at its inception, the parish was called St. Monica by the founding parishioners. The name it was given was the choice of the Smith family who had donated the monies for the church property. Once again, its identity was lost out of deference to white Catholics.

On the one hand, this loss of an identity that had been the work of African American Catholics for four decades was a tragic one, yet somehow typical of the African American Catholic experience as a people. On the other hand, this moment was a prophetic one. It was again a merging of cultures and identities,

⁵¹Ibid.

a task and an achievement that no other group of Catholics in the diocese had been asked to accomplish in the way that African American Catholics had been required to do. This was, and is, their legacy to the diocese of Cleveland.

Chapter 10

ST. PETER CLAVER PARISH

This study concludes with a brief look at St. Peter Claver Parish in Akron, also in the Cleveland diocese. It offers a notable contrast that suggests just how powerful the social forces were that controlled the African American Catholic experience in the city of Cleveland. Because housing patterns did not segregate Akron's African Americans into ghettos, the parish experiences of Catholics were considerably more integrated than they were in Cleveland. Furthermore, because of the determined effort and interracial philosophy of Father Vincent Haas, the African American parish in Akron became a temporary and transitional one.

In 1930 African Americans constituted 4.3% of the total population of the city of Akron.¹ In 1940 they had increased to 5%, and by 1950 the percentage reached 8.7% of the total population. In 1960 the population of Akron was 513,569 and 41,136 people were African Americans, or 8.0% of the total population. As in Cleveland, most African Americans filled the less skilled occupational groups such as operatives, service employees and

¹See Chapter Two for a comparison with Cleveland's population.

laborers, according to the 1960 census.² Unlike Cleveland, Akron's African Americans lived in almost all sections of the city by 1954 and were not confined to large ghetto neighborhoods as they were in Cleveland.³ This fact in itself was one of the most critical factors in the role that St. Peter Claver Parish played in the lives of African American Catholics.

In 1938 a group of white Catholic women who were members of the Third Order of St. Dominic rented a house on North Howard Street in Akron in order to provide social ministry to the poor.⁴ They offered both spiritual and temporal services including catechetical instruction, library facilities, recreational programs, sewing classes, clothing and food collections for adults and children.⁵ Many, but not all, of their clients were African Americans. Their lay director or prioress, Agnes M. Fricker,

²U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940, Population*, Vol. II, *Characteristics of the Population*, Part V: *Reports by States*, Ohio; U.S. Bureau of Census, *United States Census of Population: 1950*, Vol. II, *Characteristics of the Population*, Part 35, Ohio (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1952); U.S. Bureau of the Census, *United States Census of the Population: 1960*, Vol I, *Characteristics of the Population*, Part 37, Ohio (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1963).

³*Cleveland Call and Post*, 21 August 1954.

⁴A "Third Order" is a lay counterpart to the ordained clergy and the vowed religious members of a religious order, such as the Dominicans, Franciscans, etc. However, all religious orders do not have these lay counterparts.

⁵*Catholic Universe Bulletin*, 16 December 1938.

stated the purpose of Aquinas House in a letter to Bishop Joseph Schrembs in 1939:

Our sincere and humble purpose in all this is to combat the inroads of Communism with the weapons of Christianity by performing the Spiritual and Corporal works of mercy, among the neglected colored and Italian children, and even adults of the slums of North Akron, in the vicinity of Howard St.⁶

Eventually they ran summer school programs similar to those at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament and St. Edward Parishes in Cleveland. Study groups for Catholics and non-Catholics often met at Aquinas House for their sessions. One such group was the St. Peter Claver Forum which was begun in 1935 by the Reverend J. A. Lembach, an associate pastor at St. Bernard Parish in Akron. This group consisted originally of African American women, all of whom were converts of the parish. In time, the group became a vehicle for African American Catholics to become acquainted as well as to continue the study of Catholicism. Another study group under the direction of the Reverend Vincent Haas of St. Martha Parish also met at Aquinas House. By 1943, Agnes Fricker called Aquinas House "the largest Colored center of Akron. We have competition from our non-Catholic organizations such as the Colored Baptist Church, the Christian Missionary Alliance and the Jehovah Witnesses, etc." They received help and cooperation from several neighboring priests, including Fathers Haas and Lembach. However, they were seriously in need of better facilities.⁷ By 1945 they

⁶Papers of St. Mary Parish, Akron, Ohio, ADC.

⁷Ibid.

no longer had the facility on Howard Street and the group continued to petition Bishop Hoban for new quarters from February through August. They were not the only group petitioning the bishop. Members of the St. Peter Claver Forum had been requesting a parish of their own for several years. By 1945 this latter group was meeting regularly at the Catholic Service League facilities near the University of Akron.⁸

In April of 1945 Bishop Hoban appointed a committee of priests under the direction of Monsignor Joseph S. O'Keefe of St. Mary Parish to consider the establishment of a church for African American Catholics. It was the conclusion of the committee that "no permanent results amongst the colored people will be gained unless and until a regularly constituted Mission be established amongst them." Property was ultimately purchased within the boundaries of St. Mary Parish at 106 W. Bartges Street, in the downtown area of Akron opposite the Goodrich plant. The parish of St. Peter Claver was formally established on November 1, 1945. The church property served as the location for the continued work of Aquinas House as well, since there were three frame single-family houses on the property. The brick building, which was to

⁸*Cleveland Call and Post*, 17 November 1945. In 1945 the St. Peter Claver Forum included the following African American Catholics among others: Mrs. M. Dickson, Mrs. Georgia Lowe, Mr. and Mrs. John Clark, Mrs. J. Thomas, Mr. and Mrs. Rogers, Mr. and Mrs. Lynford Durett, Mrs. A. Flipps, Mrs. Louise Baker, Mrs. Mary Brown, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Durett, Mr. and Mrs. James Hadnot, Mrs. V. Lewis, Mrs. E. Smith, Mrs. Reese, Mr. and Mrs. Ivory, and Mrs. M. Edison.

serve as the church after some remodeling, had formerly been a barbershop and had a six-room apartment above the store which became the priest's residence. The boundaries of this African American parish covered the entire area of Summit County.⁹

One of the original members of the parish remembered these events clearly. She herself had come to Akron from St. Charles, Louisiana, in 1944 after having recently been married. She and her husband were both Catholics, although many of Akron's African American Catholics at that time were from Alabama, Mississippi and Georgia, and were either recent converts or married to Catholics who brought them into the Church. In February of 1945 a priest she met at St. Vincent Parish on a visit there for confession told her about the St. Peter Claver Forum meeting at the Catholic Service League. She was pleased to learn about it because she had not yet met any African American Catholics, who were scattered among different parishes. The priest drove her to their next meeting where she met people of her parents' age and, indeed, they were from all over the city. She recalled:

I met those people that night at that meeting. They wanted a church. I couldn't see what a handful of people wanted a church for. They all belonged to different parishes. . . . I couldn't see why they wanted to leave the comfort of a nice church to go there [meaning the eventual storefront; the chronology is out of sequence].¹⁰

⁹Papers of St. Peter Claver Parish, Akron, Ohio, ADC.

¹⁰Anonymous interview, Akron, Ohio, 21 December 1990.

She eventually learned that the people intended that the parish be a transition congregation for those African Americans arriving from the South who were quite unaccustomed to mingling with white congregations. It was to enable them to make acquaintances with other Catholics like themselves while they adjusted to northern social patterns.¹¹ However, she reported that they were also encouraged not to terminate the relationships they already had with their present parishes. St. Peter Claver was not to have a parish school and the children were to continue at whatever Catholic school in which they were enrolled. The congregation only met at St. Peter Claver for Sunday Mass and for baptisms. She interpreted this arrangement as a way of not "losing" those newly arrived Southerners who might discontinue church membership due to their social discomfort. She herself continued to be registered at St. Mary Parish and referred to St. Peter Claver as "the chapel."¹² The official historical report of the parish records that its intended purpose was twofold: "to teach the negroes of Akron the Faith and to build a better understanding between the colored and whites in Akron."¹³

¹¹C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya conclude that the majority of black churches from World War I to the mid-1950s acted as "cultural brokers" for rural migrants. C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), p. 121.

¹²Anonymous interview, Akron, Ohio, 21 December 1990.

¹³Papers of St. Peter Claver Parish, ADC.

Not surprisingly, the pastorate of the new parish was given to the Society of the Precious Blood, which served the two Cleveland African American parishes. The pastor appointed was the Reverend Anthony Kraff, who had been ordained in 1937 and was thirty-two years old. His tenure as pastor lasted ten months and gave cause for the parishioners to once again initiate leadership on their own behalf. Eight families of the parish wrote to the provincial superior of the Precious Blood Fathers in August of 1946 requesting the immediate removal of their pastor. They wrote with heavy hearts after three months of deliberation and consultation with the diocesan dean of the Akron area, Father Edward Conry:

It is the studied opinion of the signers hereto that Father Anthony Kraff is not fitted by temperment [sic] or experience to correlate the activities of a minority group as represented by the Saint Peter Claver group in the City of Akron.

The priest had failed to establish instruction classes for adults and children, and had not followed up on contacts with potential converts when sent to the rectory. His attitude had created a divisiveness in the parish, and he had refused to cooperate with the missionary efforts of Aquinas House. The group also sent a copy of the letter to Bishop Hoban. When the provincial wrote his response to the bishop, he stated that the main signer of the letter, William E. Fowler, was not only an instigator of trouble, but that he represented only a minority of the parishioners because he was really manipulating the situation

for his own political advantage with his race. The provincial, the Reverend Joseph Marling, felt he had sufficiently investigated the situation and encouraged the bishop to send his own representative to do the same. The bishop did so. The Chancellor of the diocese, Monsignor Vincent B. Balmat, conducted the investigation and found it to be exactly as William Fowler had stated it. Father Conry was in the process of contacting diocesan officials about the situation when he learned of the parishioners' letter and chose to let their initiative begin the process. Monsignor Balmat reported:

Mr. Fowler and his group impressed Father Conry as being very devoted to the best interest of the parish and very reluctant to complain about Father Kraft [sic].

Father Conry says that he does not believe that Father Kraft is capable of bringing unity back into the parish. He disagrees with Father Marling in the statement that Mr. Fowler is seeking a position of leadership among the colored of Akron; he feels that Mr. Fowler is a very fine, sincere and highly respected man and represents the majority sentiment in the parish. He says that Father Kraft does not have the confidence of the other priests in Akron. He is not considered to be sufficiently mature nor does he seem to have adequate experience to administer properly the affairs of the parish.¹⁴

Though Bishop Hoban acknowledged that Father Kraff was a good priest and that there were no charges of a personal nature leveled at him, he felt the good of the parish demanded a change. He chose to fill the position with a diocesan priest, the Reverend Vincent Haas.¹⁵ Father Haas was no stranger to the Akron situa-

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid.

tion and apparently initiated activities that would further interracial relationships. The former parishioner remembered:

When Father Haas came, he didn't keep that parish, that little chapel all black. He had three or four whites work with him real hard. The St. Peter Claver club that they had when I came, turned into the St. Peter Claver Interracial Council. This interracial group worked with Father and it only disbanded within the last eight or nine years. We would meet at different parishes.¹⁶

Father Haas not only encouraged the newly arriving African American Catholics to remain faithful to their Church, but he also actively urged them not to separate themselves from the white parishes. He discouraged the formation of the Knights of Peter Claver in Akron because it separated the African American men into their own organization. He was adamant in his commitment to the integration of Catholics. He urged the Catholic parents in his parish to send their children to the parish schools nearest their own homes. Obviously the long-term effect was to diminish his own parish's population because the parents would get involved in their local parishes through the children's activities and reception of the sacraments, such as First Communion and Confirmation. This is exactly what he wanted to happen.¹⁷

In 1952, in an official report to the diocese, Father Haas reported that he had fourteen Catholic families in the parish and a total of ninety-seven parishioners. He added, "More than this number attend other Parishes." The physical boundaries of

¹⁶Anonymous interview, Akron, Ohio, 21 December 1990.

¹⁷Ibid.

the parish were problematic in their own right. However, it does not seem that this was a source of frustration to the pastor who wanted his parishioners integrated with white congregations. He wrote:

It is most difficult to reach the Church from such distances. A school (segregated) would be out of the question both from a financial and physical point of view. The Negroes find the solution to their attending Church together with their children's instructions answered by the Parish Church in their various neighborhoods. Hence they are moving into local parishes and forgetting St. Peter Claver.

In response to a question whether there were any difficulties with other parishes because of concomitant jurisdiction, he answered:

If there should be any difficulty in this matter it would be the graceful acceptance of the Negro into full parish life and activity by the various Parishes. This problem does not exist to date.¹⁸

Father Haas also was assigned as a full-time chaplain at St. Thomas Hospital in Akron in 1948, and consequently moved his residence to the hospital while maintaining his pastoral duties at the parish. Referring to his hospital duties, he said they "forced me to reduce the Liturgical life of the Parish to the level of a Mission." The parish had only one Mass on Sunday at 9:00 o'clock. Social activities were held in the parish halls of other diocesan churches as well as non-church halls. Parishioners' funerals were held by Father Haas in whatever parish church that person attended due to the small physical size of St. Peter Claver. Other types of spiritual activities such as

¹⁸Papers of St. Peter Claver Parish, Akron, Ohio, ADC.

novenas, missions, and other familiar devotions were attended at the local parishes of the people.¹⁹

The priest did maintain the St. Peter Claver Interracial Forum, however. Sixty-five members met twice a month for the purpose of attracting converts to the faith and creating interracial harmony. They also tried to promote social activities for African American Catholics and to help them "adjust their faith to the long-standing faith of the white group." Because the Forum sponsored these social events throughout the city, non-Catholics had the opportunity to meet the members as well. Like his counterparts in Cleveland, Father Haas was committed to evangelization of African Americans. He, too, felt that reaching school-age youngsters was the best means of spreading and safeguarding the faith. It was his recommendation that each parish in Akron reach out to the African Americans within their boundaries by appointing one priest to that responsibility. Not only would the priest be an encouragement for new Catholics, but he could also be a liaison in promoting interracial relationships. He suggested:

The Negroes need to be incorporated into the rich traditions of the Church. If segregated they have a tendency to remain Protestant. Once they have experienced the "fullness" of our Faith they will respond as any other Catholic does to Grace. They need to experience the "Mother-lieness" of the Church - "these are Christ's little ones."²⁰

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid.

There is no evidence in the sources to indicate whether Father Haas' suggestion was ever actualized.

When Father John LaFarge, S.J., editor of *America* magazine, a Jesuit weekly publication, and a national spokesman for interracial justice, spoke in Canton in August 1953, Father Haas brought Akronites to the event. There were groups from Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Parish in attendance also. The event was the sixth annual Interracial Day of Recollection at Santa Clara Monastery of Perpetual Adoration in Canton. There were representative groups from Pennsylvania, Kentucky and Michigan there as well. Father LaFarge was also of the strong opinion that segregated organizations should not be created within the Catholic community regardless of the best of intentions for their establishment.²¹ Activities like this continued to reinforce Father Haas' philosophy regarding African American ministry.²²

In 1957 the total Catholic population at St. Peter Claver numbered 110, with approximately 500 other African American Catholics regularly attending other parish churches. Father Haas wrote:

More and more the Negroes are becoming part of the other parishes in Akron. Here they are instructed, baptized, make their First Holy Communion and Confirmation. The pastors in Akron have been most generous and cooperative.

²¹*Cleveland Call and Post*, 22 August 1953.

²²This event may have had some influence on the Cleveland African American Catholics who were present. This was the same time period when the Knights of Columbus dilemma was being handled.

The Catholic Negroes in the Akron Area belong to all the Catholic organizations in their parish Churches. Some hold office in the Holy Name Societies; Third and Fourth Degree Knights of Columbus, Vincent de Paul, Legion of Mary, Altar Societies, NCCW [National Council of Catholic Women], CYO, summer camps, altar boys, choirs.

The St. Peter Claver Interracial Forum (95 members) are from all over Akron, Negro and White. They have helped greatly in the conversion of the Negro and getting the children into Catholic School. They provide social activity for the Negroes that would otherwise be impossible.²³

In March of 1958 Father Haas was transferred from St. Peter Claver Parish to St. Francis Parish in Cleveland. His successor there, the Reverend Adalbert Gassert, reported that by December of that same year there were only 47 parishioners remaining and seven families.²⁴ St. Peter Claver Parish was suppressed in 1958.

For those Catholics, like Father Haas, who worked for the integration of African American Catholics into the parishes of the city, St. Peter Claver Parish was hardly a failure. Its demise was the result of years of organized leadership that extended beyond parish boundaries. The leadership of Father Haas and the Akron laity of both races was motivated by a philosophy that went beyond the missionary attitude to a vision of integrated parish life. However, the demographic situation of the city itself was a strong contributing factor to the ultimate success of this vision.

²³St. Peter Claver Parish, *Status Animarum Report*, 1957, ADC.

²⁴Ibid.

The vision of a common church life for African American and white Catholics is yet to be realized in the diocese of Cleveland. Catholics are still being encouraged to stretch beyond their neighborhoods and parishes to meet Catholics of another race. In a recent parish bulletin of a white suburban parish in the metropolitan area of the city of Cleveland, the following excerpt from the pastor's letter appeared:

Lent is about baptism and the unity we have in Christ through the mutual sharing of His life with one another. True Christianity rails against walls and division, yet so often we allow - even encourage - this sad separation among us. Because someone is from a different neighborhood or of a different nationality or race, we avoid them as "different." Doing so, we not only deprive ourselves of a whole new cultural experience, we fracture and destroy the Body of the Lord.

So, once a year, during the holy lenten season, when all of us are trying to align ourselves more closely to the way of Jesus, we share Eucharist with another congregation [Catholic]. . . I urge you to give it the highest priority.²⁵

The parishioners were being encouraged by their pastor to attend Sunday liturgy at a predominantly African American parish a few miles away. In turn, the African American parishioners were going to share a Sunday liturgy at the white parish. It is thirty-one years since the time period of this study. Two Catholic pastors are still contending with the same social forces of racial attitudes and segregated neighborhoods that their predecessors faced. The African American Catholic experience in the diocese of Cleveland continues to challenge those forces.

²⁵Parish bulletin, St. Martin of Tours Parish, Maple Heights, Ohio, 8 March 1992.

CONCLUSION

At the heart of this historical survey of Cleveland's African American Catholic community is a cultural question. How did African American Catholics understand and express their racial and religious identity in a diocese heavily identified with European immigrant Catholics? Secondly, how did they resolve a religious identity in a Church that did not in essence acknowledge the cultural realities of their racial group prior to the 1960s? The evidence gathered in this research indicates that African American Catholics both claimed and shaped their own racial and religious identity in accord with their own religious convictions despite any social or institutional barriers. They negotiated the difficult and often painful task of being a double minority in their racial and religious spheres.

The answer to the first question is to be found in the creation of two African American Catholic parishes and the experiences which unfolded in those environments. African American Catholics clearly knew that they held a rightful claim to membership in the territorial parishes of the diocese rooted in their baptismal identity. Recognizing that full social and psychological acceptance and integration was not likely to occur there, they requested a parish of their own in 1922. The establishment of Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Parish marked the beginning of

permanent African American Catholic communities in the diocese of Cleveland. Two decades later, the second African American parish of St. Edward marked the fruitful growth that had occurred among African American Catholics. These two parishes provided the environment in which the parishioners deepened their commitment to the faith and drew others of their race to Catholicism. The very existence of these two parishes testified to the fact that the pressures against integration remained intact within the Catholic community.

African American parishes were identified as "mission churches" by the clergy and hierarchy of the diocese. They resembled the national parishes in their ability to provide a common religious and social environment for Catholics new to the city or new to the faith. They resembled the territorial parishes in that they were not identified with a particular European ethnic expression of Catholicism. In reality, however, many territorial parishes reflected the religious culture of the predominant ethnic group in the parish or the ethnic background of the clergy. In the African American parishes, too, the religious culture of the clergy personnel prevailed. In addition, these parishes had a third characteristic. Their primary focus was to promote the evangelization of non-Catholic African Americans. This characteristic was imposed on the parish by the very definition of "mission church." Although there were always African Americans in these parishes who had been Catholic for several generations, they, too,

shared in this parish identity. Because they accepted the call of the Church to spread the gospel, they actively engaged in this responsibility. By so doing, they were simultaneously creating strong and vibrant parish communities and developing the necessary lay leadership to maintain those communities.

As the population of African Americans in Cleveland increased through the migration of many Southern blacks to the city, these parish communities also increased in number through newly arriving Catholics and new converts. Consequently, when African American Catholics began moving into predominantly white parishes and neighborhoods, institutional tensions became increasingly evident in the parishes and organizations within the diocese. These tensions reflected the impact of the social conditions and attitudes which characterized the city of Cleveland itself. Racial discrimination in housing, education and employment had been building from the earliest decades of the twentieth century. Overall, white Catholics and Church personnel reflected those attitudes in their choices relative to African Americans. Despite the religious teachings of the Catholic tradition, African American Catholics encountered their white brothers and sisters abandoning parishes and neighborhoods during the 1940s and 1950s. In the end, both races of Catholics found themselves in separate and isolated social and religious worlds. Integrated parish communities did not endure despite bold and courageous moral leadership on the part of some individual clergymen and lay men and

women. Such moral leadership on the part of the bishop of the diocese was lacking throughout this entire forty-year period. Nonetheless, African American Catholics maintained their existing parishes and worked to establish themselves in those parishes underdoing dramatic demographic changes.

The answer to the second question at the heart of this study is much more elusive and the evidence which suggests an answer cannot be found in population charts or demographic patterns. African Americans who were Catholics prior to the 1960s clearly encountered a white European religion and white European-style parishes in the diocese of Cleveland. Their cultural realities as African Americans were simply not considered essential to the religious life of the parish prior to the Second Vatican Council. Consequently, African American Catholics worshipped, prayed and celebrated the feasts of the Church in the same external manner and style as European Catholics. There is evidence that African American cultural styles, tastes and preferences did exist to some degree in the social events of parish life. However, religious identity and expression had to be created out of predominantly European devotions, prayers, and even saints.

At one level, African American Catholics created parallel racial and religious cultural worlds. Because the Church itself prevented African Americans from any incorporation of their own cultural styles in the religious life of the parish, the Catholic world remained a distinct and separate reality apart from the

cultural reality of African American life.¹ Some African American Catholics managed to create a blend of those two worlds in their personal lives and in their homes as they lived out their religious commitments. Some accepted the reality of two different religious and racial worlds and lived with that reality without jeopardizing either one. All of them managed to draw the best from both worlds to greater or lesser degrees.

However, at another level, and a more elusive one to be sure, there was to be found a profound harmony of racial and religious worlds which this study identifies as African American spirituality. It is precisely this spirituality which enabled African Americans to remain committed to their Catholic religion despite cultural isolation and racial discrimination.

African American spirituality draws upon African roots which manifest themselves in the way African Americans approach reality itself. It is a kind of worldview that approaches all of life as one complete religious world which cannot be divided up by external religious rituals into separate worlds.² It is this

¹Due to the limitations of time, resources, and the extensiveness of the topic itself, the cultural realities of African American life have not been a focus of this study. See the bibliography for a sampling of the expanding literature on this subject.

²For discussion of this approach, see Sr. Thea Bowman, F.S.P.A. (ed), *Families: Black and Catholic, Catholic and Black* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, Inc., 1985); Robert W. Hovda (ed), *This Far By Faith: American Black Worship and Its African Roots* (Washington, D.C.: The Liturgical Conference, Inc. and The National Office for Black Catholics, 1977); Joseph L. Howze et al, *What We Have Seen and Heard: A Pastoral Letter on Evangelization from the Black Bishops of the United States* (Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1984); *Lead Me,*

quality and approach which is found through direct and personal encounter with African Americans that answers the second question at the heart of this study. Because this quality of African American life is available primarily through personal encounter, the white Catholic community has denied itself this rich contribution to Catholic spirituality by isolating itself from the black Catholic community. It is not a quality that can be acquired by reading about African American spirituality. Perhaps it cannot even be acquired by non-African Americans, but certainly it can enrich the spiritual and religious lives of those who appreciate its existence as a distinct reality. Such appreciation is lost to a segregated diocese.

As their brothers and sisters have done in so many other places and circumstances in their history, African American Catholics in Cleveland created meaningful and vibrant parish communities within their own spheres and in the face of increasing isolation from white Catholics in the years between 1922 and 1961. They did so because they recognized and claimed their rightful place in the Catholic community based on their baptismal identity. They did so in ways that were distinctive of African American Catholics "in those days."

Guide Me: The African American Catholic Hymnal (Chicago: G.I.A. Publications, Inc., 1987); Thaddeus J. Posey, O.F.M.Cap. (ed), *Theology: A Portrait in Black*, Proceedings of the Black Catholic Theological Symposium, No. 1 (National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus, 1980); *U.S. Catholic Historian*, 8:1-2 (1989).

APPENDIX A

THE REVEREND MELCHIOR LOCHTEFELD, C.PP.S.

The Reverend Melchior Lochtefeld, a priest of the Society of the Precious Blood, was appointed pastor of Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Parish in June of 1937. He had previously been assigned to Our Lady of Good Counsel Parish, also staffed by the Society of the Precious Blood, on Cleveland's west side for six years following his ordination. He was thirty-two years old when he became pastor at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Parish. Both age and years of ordination hardly qualified him to be a pastor by diocesan standards. Nevertheless, this appointment began twenty years of service to the African American Catholics of Cleveland. Lochtefeld explained to his new parishioners that he had a special interest in the African American people from his boyhood in Mercer County, Ohio, an area where former slaves had come to farm the soil as a means of sustaining themselves.¹ In August of 1943 Father Lochtefeld was appointed pastor of St. Edward Parish which officially became the second African American parish in the diocese at that time. He remained pastor there until 1957 when he was assigned outside the diocese by his reli-

¹*Catholic Universe Bulletin*, 2 July 1937.

gious congregation. He died July 27, 1984, at St. Charles Seminary in Carthage, Ohio.

Father Lochtefeld's ministry as a pastor in the African American parishes fits, at least partially, what Cyprian Davis calls "a distinctive pastoral phenomenon in the first half of the twentieth century: the white priest-pastor in the black community." He describes these pastors as resourceful, sacrificing, hard-working, tenacious, often unsupported, unyielding in their commitment to their people, and having to live themselves in two worlds. He concludes by saying, "Had they done otherwise, black Catholics would have been even more neglected."² That these qualities described Melchior Lochtefeld was verified by numerous individuals who knew him personally, as well as those who knew of him by reputation.

It is difficult to separate Lochtefeld the man from Lochtefeld the pastor. His personality seems to have shaped his pastoral style while the demands of his ministry seem to have heightened what was already a forceful German temperament. Most people agreed that he was very strong willed, forceful to the point of being domineering, according to some, but tremendously kind. He was not afraid to confront and to name a situation for what it was. He was known to stop right in the middle of his sermon and call someone to task for coming late for Mass, yet no

²Cyprian Davis, *The History of Black Catholics in the United States* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1990), p. 228.

one who had a legitimate need was ever turned away. Florence Jolly recalled the food baskets that were delivered to people's homes, and the jobs that he helped secure for his people in some of the diocesan institutions. He was accustomed to hard work, and did not hesitate to do maintenance and repair jobs that needed doing.³ Brother Norbert Hoying, who was assigned to the parish with Father Lochtefeld, recalled:

He'd put on his old work clothes and get out the old shovel and pick and start digging. I remember some of the places where we had a sewer clogged up or tile broken; we had a basement under the convent and he did a lot of work under there. He fixed things up so that it was used for a lunch room.⁴

Lemuel Walcott learned plumbing and electrical skills from Father Lochtefeld while he and his brother worked around the church. Another young man learned how to paint walls side by side with the pastor who was wearing overalls and a big hat.⁵

Both William Gleason and his son, Louis, recalled the priest stopping at Gleason's Musical Bar around mid-day for a chat and a drink with the fellows who were there. "He was a regular fellow," said the elder Gleason. He would walk from St. Edward's at East 69th and Woodland Avenue to Gleason's at East 55th Street

³Interview with Sr. Rosella Holloman, C.S.A., Cleveland, Ohio, 23 November 1990; Lemuel Walcott, 9 November 1990; Florence Jolly, East Cleveland, Ohio, 10 January 1991; Ann Cowan, Cleveland, Ohio, 13 November 1990.

⁴Interview with Br. Norbert Hoying, C.P.P.S., Bellevue, Ohio, 14 January 1991.

⁵Interview with Lemuel Walcott, 9 November 1990; Anonymous interview, East Cleveland, Ohio, 15 January 1991.

and on to the projects further west. He traveled the neighborhoods regularly, meeting people and talking with them.⁶ It was precisely this style that mingled the pastor and the man; much of his personal style was pastorally motivated. Lessons were being taught, values inculcated, homes visited, converts invited, charity extended, and relationships created while Lochtefeld was simply being himself.

A number of persons felt he was ahead of his time in his pastoral approach. He offered the people of the neighborhood and the parish the material goods and services that they needed, such as making the parish gym available to the neighborhood youngsters to play basketball. Then he would invite them to become better acquainted with the Catholic Church. There was no dividing line between physical and spiritual neediness. One woman remembered the spiritual and financial help he gave her when she was trying to raise four children, while coping with an alcoholic husband. Barbara Robinson recalled him giving the seventh and eighth graders sex education classes while at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament grade school in the 1940s. Barbara Price remembered Father "baptizing" her puppy one Saturday morning when she took him to Mass with herself when she was about seven years old. Mary St. Clair's son was cured of his stuttering when Lochtefeld was training him to be an altar boy and he had to learn to pronounce

⁶Interview with William Gleason, Cleveland, Ohio, 28 January 1991; Louis A. Gleason, Cleveland, Ohio, 30 October 1990; Ann Cowan, 13 November 1990.

Latin. Patricia Polk and Mary James remarked that his strict and stern style called people to really live their faith. The dominance and forcefulness of his personality were rarely interpreted as patronizing by those who knew him well because they understood that his dedication was sincere. His twenty years of ministry in the black community verified that authenticity in their opinion.⁷ Of all his pastoral approaches, Lochtefeld is best remembered by parishioners and clergy alike for his commitment to evangelization, and the number of converts who were brought into the Catholic Church by his efforts.⁸

As an extension of his pastoral commitment to African American Catholics, Melchior Lochtefeld became one of the founding members of the Midwest Clergy Conference on Negro Welfare in September of 1938, only a year after he began his own ministry in the black community. The group was founded in Cincinnati at Holy Trinity Parish for the purpose of finding ways and means of evangelizing African Americans. Archbishop John T. McNicholas had been encouraging ministry to African Americans among his diocesan

⁷Interview with Lemuel Walcott, 9 November 1990; Barbara Robinson, Bedford Heights, Ohio, 16 January 1991; Barbara Price, 28 January 1991; Patricia G. Polk, Cleveland, Ohio, 19 December 1990; Mary St. Clair, Cleveland, Ohio, 10 December 1990; Mary James, Cleveland, Ohio, 18 December 1990.

⁸Interview with Mary St. Clair, 10 December 1990; LeMoyne Nesbitt, Cleveland, Ohio, 5 December 1990; Sr. Rosella Holloman, 23 November 1990; Ann Cowan, 13 November 1990; Anonymous interview, South Euclid, Ohio, 22 January 1991; Reverend Robert Pahler, Greensburg, Ohio, 5 February 1991; Rev. Monsignor Thomas J. Murphy, North Madison, Ohio, 26 January 1991.

clergy who suggested the establishment of this organization and extended it to priests from neighboring states working in this ministry. Lochtefeld was elected secretary-treasurer of the new group. The group met bi-annually and the meetings were hosted by the various members of the group who numbered several dozen according to photographs.⁹ He hosted the group at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Parish in October of 1942, at which time financial, educational and employment needs of blacks were topics of discussion. In December of 1947 Lochtefeld became president of the group. Retention of new converts to the Church and a commendation to Archbishop Joseph Ritter of St. Louis for his stand on equal educational opportunities for African Americans in parochial schools were among the topics of the conference that year.¹⁰ The group offered support, pastoral skills, and educational opportunities for those men who were such "pastoral phenomena" as Davis described them.

⁹OLBS Parish Archives, Housed at St. Adalbert Parish, Cleveland, Ohio.

¹⁰*Catholic Universe Bulletin*, 7 October 1938; 20 January 1939; 30 October 1942; 19 December 1947.

APPENDIX B

THE MOST REVEREND FLOYD L. BEGIN

Floyd Lawrence Begin was consecrated bishop on May 1, 1947, and was appointed an auxiliary bishop to Bishop Edward F. Hoban. He had grown up and attended parochial schools in Cleveland at St. Columbkille, St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Philip Neri Parishes. He graduated from Cathedral Latin High School, and was sent to the North American College in Rome to study after entering the seminary. He later earned three doctorates in philosophy, theology and canon law respectively. He served in several diocesan administrative positions before being appointed a bishop at the age of forty-five.

Ten years later, as pastor of St. Agnes Parish, he expressed his firm conviction that the laity were the key to a priest's success in bringing new members to the Church, because the laity had the strongest contacts with those seeking truth. He put that philosophy to work at St. Agnes through the involvement of sixty or more parishioners in the Legion of Mary, who regularly visited their non-Catholic neighbors and invited them to come to St. Agnes. Though the parishioners were a highly transient congregation, five times as many parishioners moved in eleven years as those who stayed by 1960, the Bishop refused to give in to dis-

couragement.¹ He was so convinced of the importance of sustaining St. Agnes as a parish, that he refused Bishop Hoban's offer to appoint him to a more prestigious parish in 1961. He said in reply, "I hardly believe St. Philomena's offers me more than does St. Agnes - in fact, I would say that is true of every other Parish in the Diocese. I am comfortable and happy here at St. Agnes and willing to stay indefinitely."²

Bishop Begin's nephew, the Reverend Daniel Begin, attributed his uncle's success with his longevity in the parish. Because African Americans often experienced a frequent turnover of workers in their community, including clergymen, the bishop's presence as a pastor for fifteen years gave a credibility to his ministry, according to Father Begin, himself a pastor in a predominantly African American parish. Father Begin reported meeting African Americans even now who remember the bishop inviting them into the rectory for coffee, if they were waiting at the bus stop on a cold morning. "He was kind of like the right man in the right place at St. Agnes. And that was truly his home. He wasn't interested at all in being a bishop if he couldn't pastor. That was where he liked to pastor."³ Bishop Begin left St. Agnes

¹*Catholic Universe Bulletin*, 28 March, 2 May 1947; 26 April 1957; 15 April 1960.

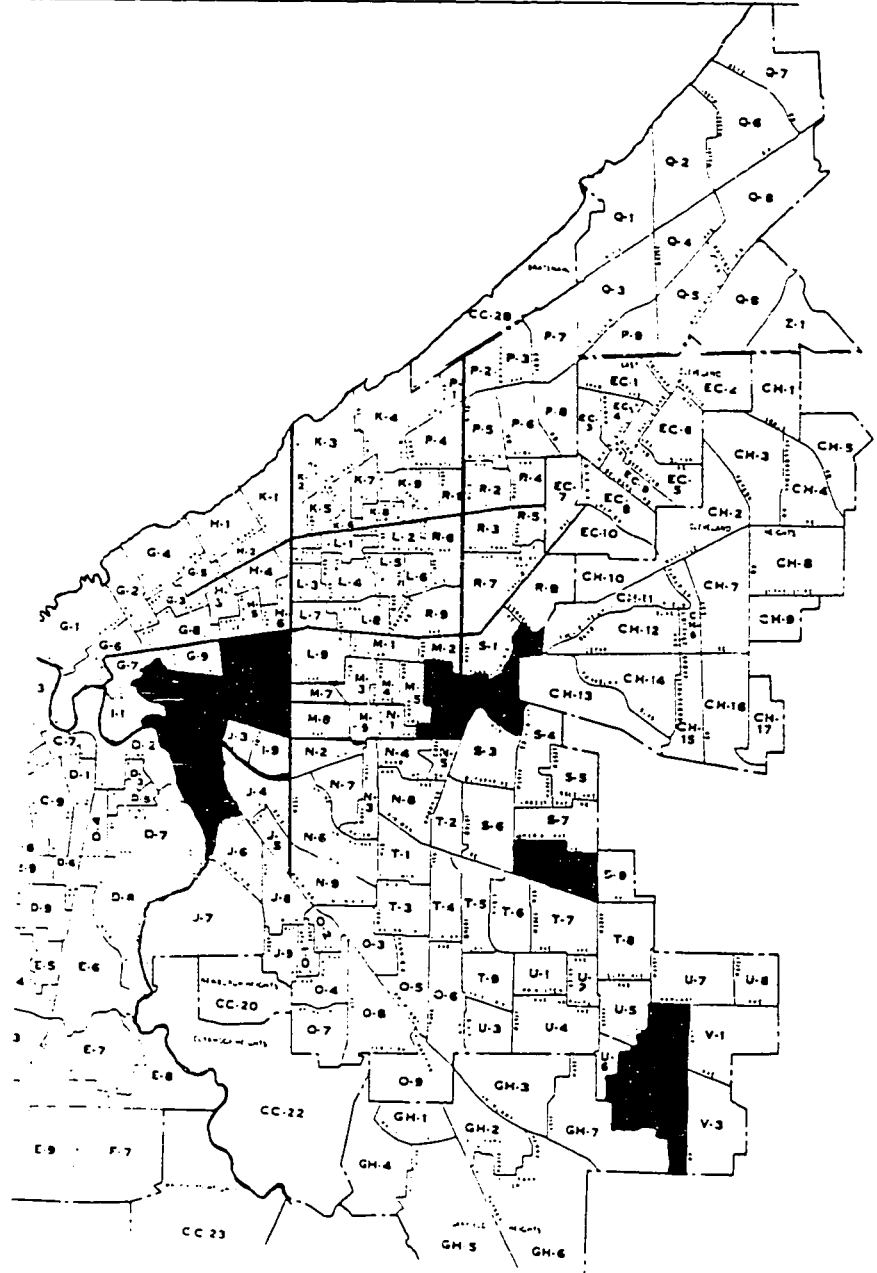
²St. Agnes Parish Archives transferred to ADC.

³Interview with the Reverend Daniel Begin, St. Cecilia Parish, Cleveland, Ohio, 7 January 1991.

Parish in 1962 when he was appointed bishop of the diocese of Oakland, California. He died on April 26, 1977.

APPENDIX C

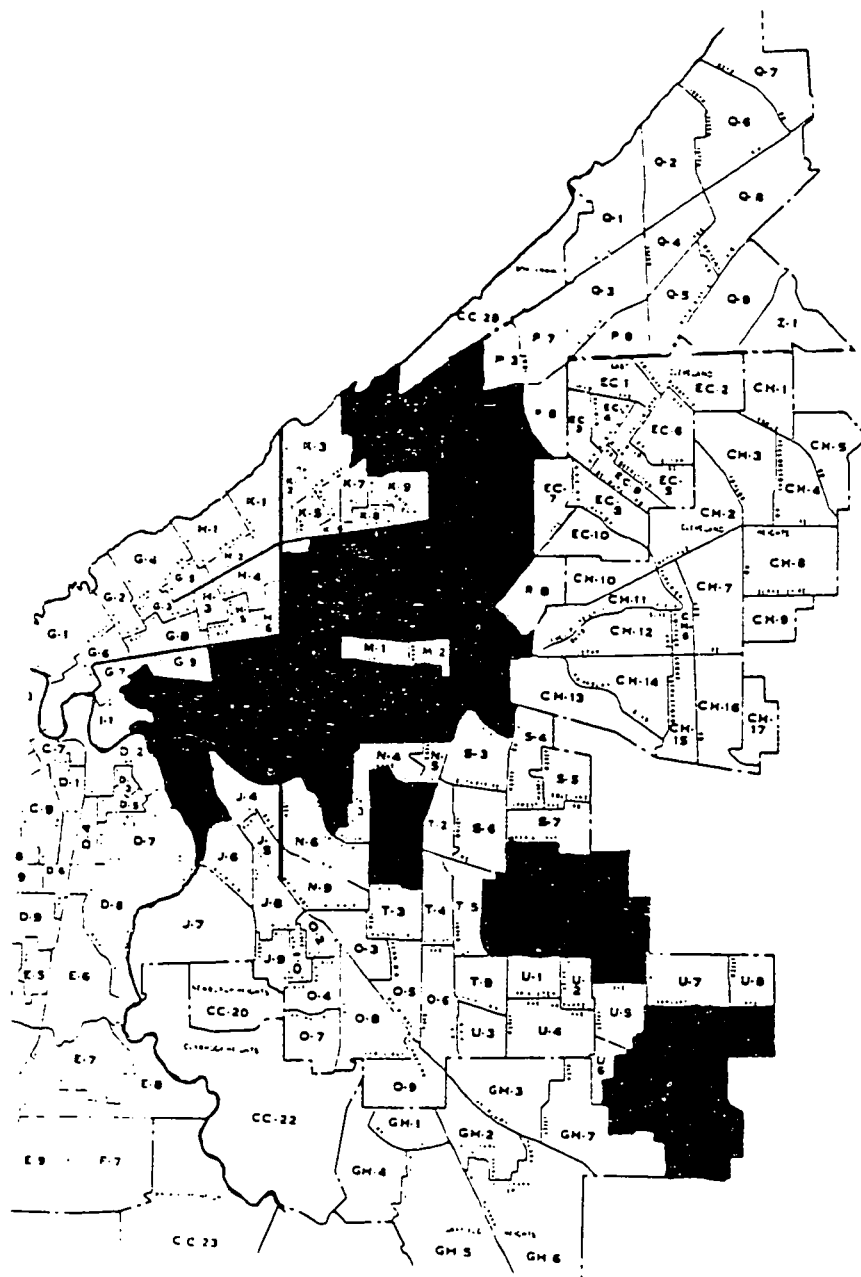
CENSUS TRACTS HAVING 20% OR MORE NON-WHITE POPULATION, 1920



Sources: City of Cleveland, Community Relations Board, Non-White Residential Patterns: 1910-1959; US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, U.S. Census of Population and Housing: 1960, Final Report PHC(1)-28, Cleveland, Ohio, Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area.

APPENDIX D


CENSUS TRACTS HAVING 20% OR MORE NON-WHITE POPULATION, 1960




Sources: City of Cleveland, Community Relations Board, Non-White Residential Patterns: 1910-1959; US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, U.S. Census of Population and Housing: 1960, Final Report PHC(1)-28, Cleveland, Ohio, Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area.

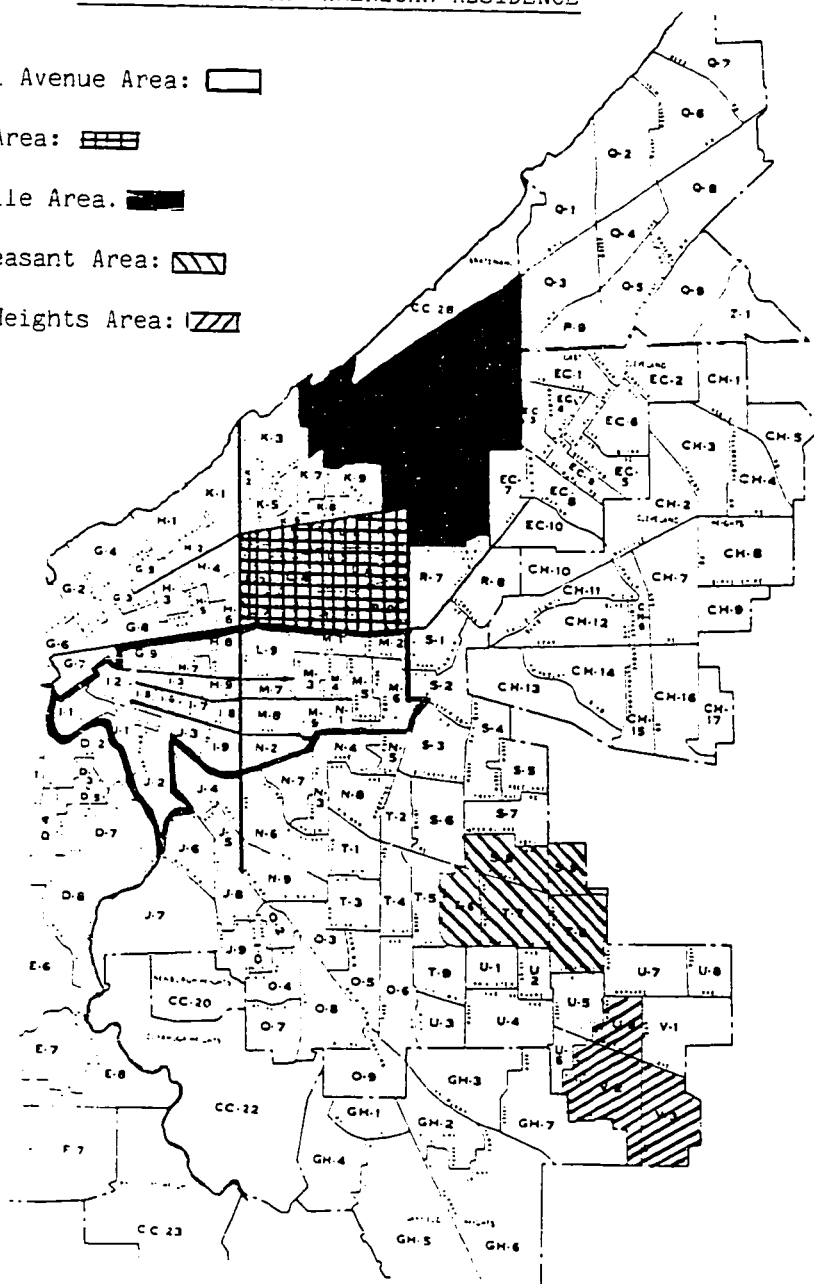

AREAS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN RESIDENCE

Central Avenue Area: ☐

Hough Area: 

Glenville Area. ~~REDACTED~~

Mt. Pleasant Area: 

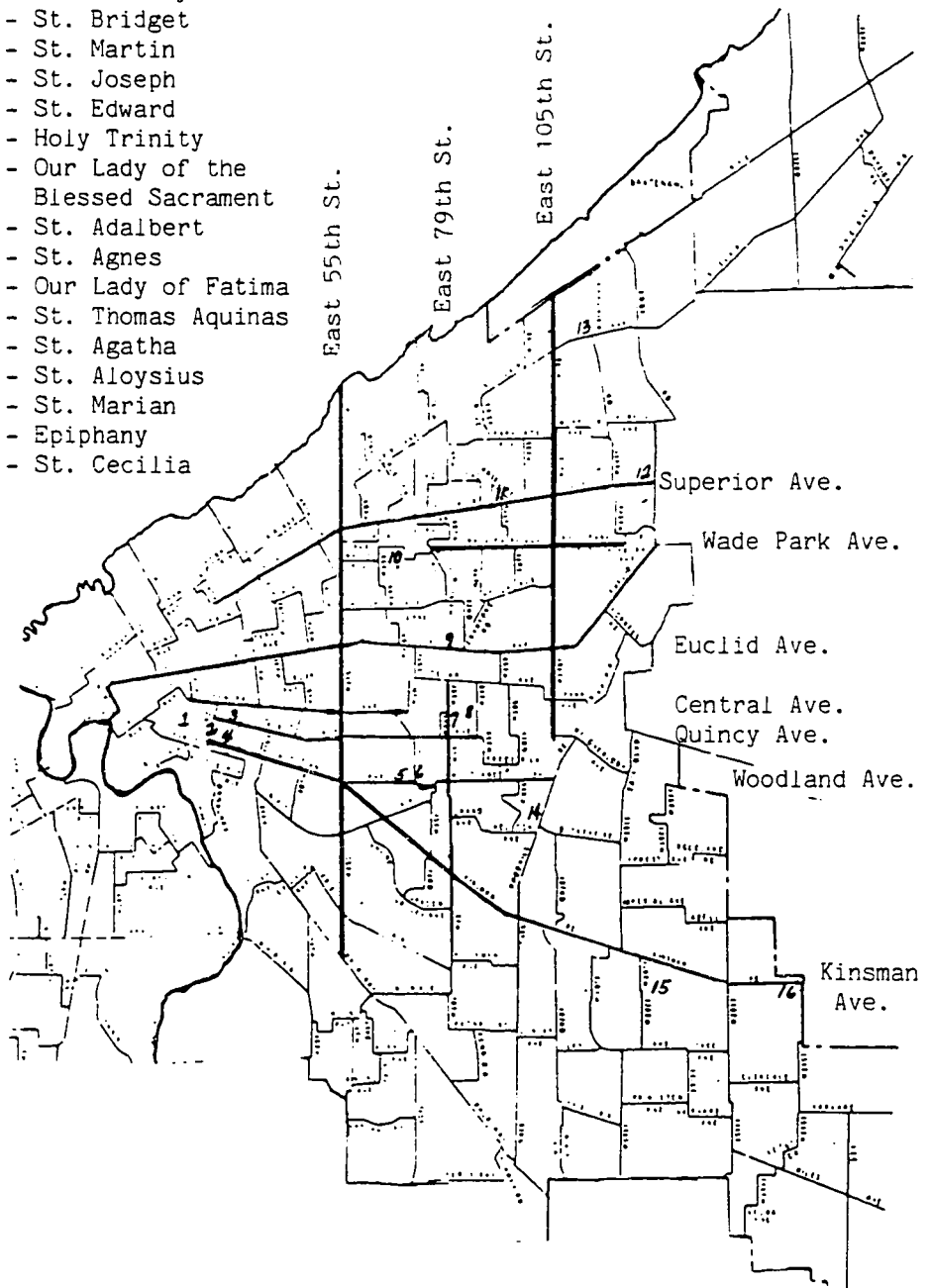
Miles Heights Area: 

Sources: City of Cleveland, Community Relations Board, Non-White Residential Patterns: 1910-1959; US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, U.S. Census of Population and Housing: 1960, Final Report PHC(1)-28, Cleveland, Ohio, Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area.

APPENDIX F

Key to Parishes:

- 1 - St. Anthony
- 2 - St. Bridget
- 3 - St. Martin
- 4 - St. Joseph
- 5 - St. Edward
- 6 - Holy Trinity
- 7 - Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament
- 8 - St. Adalbert
- 9 - St. Agnes
- 10 - Our Lady of Fatima
- 11 - St. Thomas Aquinas
- 12 - St. Agatha
- 13 - St. Aloysius
- 14 - St. Marian
- 15 - Epiphany
- 16 - St. Cecilia



Source of Map Outline: US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, U.S. Census of Population and Housing: 1960, Final Report PHC(1)-28, Cleveland, Ohio, Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area.

APPENDIX G
SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY

The lived reality of Cleveland African American Catholics is the primary focus of this research. In order to capture this reality, this study relies heavily on oral historical accounts obtained through direct personal interviews with forty-five African American Catholics. In addition, eleven others completed written surveys. They provided their individual interpretations of this historical period, 1922-1961, as it was lived in their homes, neighborhoods and parishes. Their lives span the earliest years of this study when many of the persons interviewed were either children or young adults, to the beginning of the 1960s when the youngest persons interviewed were completing their secondary education. All lived in Cleveland or Akron sometime during this time period, and twenty-eight persons are native Clevelanders who lived in the city their entire lives. Those who were not born in Cleveland represent the following states: Alabama, Georgia, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Arkansas, Texas, Florida, Louisiana, Kentucky, West Virginia, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Indiana, and central and southern Ohio.

Twenty-nine of the subjects are Catholic from birth or "cradle Catholics" as they are frequently called in the African American Catholic community. Those who are converts were received

into the Church prior to 1960 although not necessarily in Cleveland. Likewise, those who are Catholic from birth were not necessarily born or raised in Cleveland. In every case, the subjects were part of the African American Catholic community in Cleveland or Akron for at least five years and were able to provide some substantial reflection on their experiences here between 1922 to 1961. All are currently active Catholics, some of whom presently hold leadership positions in their parishes or in the diocese.

Parish staffs at St. Adalbert, Holy Trinity-St. Edward, St. Agnes-Our Lady of Fatima, St. Aloysius-St. Agatha, St. Cecilia, and St. Henry Parishes provided personal recommendations of those African American Catholics who were present in Cleveland for the time period under study. These initial persons who were contacted created a networking process in which other African American Catholics were recommended for interviews. All of them agreed to a minimum hour-long oral history interview, however, some interviews lasted almost two hours. There were five people who declined the interview and did not offer a reason.

The oral interviews were conducted through open-ended guide questions, although the people were encouraged to share whatever they felt might be valuable to the research. The questions were focused on their personal religious and family history, their residence and neighborhoods, their involvements in parish life, their experiences with the clergy and women religious who

staffed their parishes, their relationships with fellow African American Catholics and non-Catholics, their education in Catholic schools (where applicable), and their interpretations of these experiences relative to African American culture and identity. These interviews yielded not only a bountiful selection of personal stories not documented in public records, but rich interpretive material.

Those who participated in the written survey were contacted through Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament and St. Edward Schools alumni/alumnae mailing lists obtained at St. Adalbert Parish. Approximately one hundred surveys were mailed and eleven were returned completed; fourteen were returned because the persons were no longer living at the address provided. The survey questions paralleled those of the oral interviews in content, but the format was simplified to a brief yes or no response with the added opportunity for additional information if the respondent wished to supply it.

As with all forms of primary source materials, oral histories, too, have their limitations which are well documented in the literature: faulty and selective recall, biases, distortions and exaggerations, and retrospective interpretation. Nevertheless, this approach provides a glimpse into the lives of African American Catholics by recognizing the value of their personal experiences and by capturing the richness of their own words, beliefs, attitudes and values. Hopefully this study has acknowl-

edged and advanced the value of the individual's ability to provide an authentic interpretation of his/her own lived experience.

QUESTIONS USED FOR THE ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

Preliminary Instructions: The following questions have been designed to give you as broad a range of topics as possible in order for you to describe your experience as an African American Catholic in Cleveland prior to 1961. While the questions are general in nature it is hoped that you will be as specific as possible in your answers. All of the questions may not relate to your own personal experience, while other topics may have been overlooked that you feel are essential to your life experience. Please do not hesitate to adjust your remarks as needed. What is most important is that you relate your experiences and the meaning they held for you in a way that is most authentic to your life story. If you have any photos, articles or other memorabilia of your life as a Catholic which might be helpful to share during the interview, please feel free to use them.

1. When were you born?
2. Where were you born? How long did you live there?
3. In what other cities/states did you live? During what years?
4. When did you move to Cleveland?
5. In how many places have you resided while living in the Cleveland area? Where were these places? Describe what your neighborhood was like.
6. What is your educational background?
7. How have you (and your spouse) been employed over the years, particularly prior to 1961?
8. Where were your parents born? Where did they grow up?
9. In what kind of work were your parents employed?
10. Were your parents Catholic? From birth? If not, what led them to embrace Catholicism?

11. What is/was the religious affiliation of your spouse? Your children? If Catholic, was this from birth or through conversion to the faith? What led to this conversion?

12. How long have you been a Catholic?

(The following questions, #13-18, pertain to those who converted to Catholicism.)

13. What led you to become a Catholic? How old were you at the time of your conversion?

14. Is there something specific which stands out in your memory concerning your conversion to Catholicism? Tell about it.

15. Who/what was instrumental in your becoming Catholic? Where did your conversion take place (city, parish)?

16. How did your friends/relatives respond to your decision to become a Catholic?

17. How did belonging to the Catholic Church compare to other churches you may have experienced? What were these churches? What were the biggest similarities, differences?

18. What did you gain by becoming Catholic? What did you have to give up? What was the biggest adjustment for you?

19. What were some outstanding events that you remember from your parish life or your life as a Catholic in general?

20. What parish/parishes have you belonged to while living in Cleveland? During what years?

21. What was the racial composition of the parishes you belonged to prior to 1961?

22. How did the racial composition of the congregation affect the life of the parish? (for example, activities, organizations, religious devotions, etc.)

23. Describe the parish activities and organizations that you remember. Who was involved? Who wasn't? Did you participate? Why/why not?

24. Describe the devotional life of the parish. Were there novenas, retreats, mission revivals, etc.? Do certain feastdays or holydays stand out in your memory? Did you have any favorite devotions or religious feastdays?
25. Describe the social life of the parish (dances, card parties, bazaars, etc.). Did these events constitute a major part of your personal social life? Why/why not?
26. What were the priests and sisters like in your parish? Who were they? Describe any outstanding encounters or memories of them.
27. Did you feel the lack of African American clergy and sisters affected your life as a Catholic?
28. Did you experience any opportunities in your parish for the expression of your African American culture (for example, music, statues, celebrations, etc.)?
29. How would you describe the quality of your parish life as you experienced it over the years?
30. Describe any religious practices that were carried on in your home besides those that took place in church.
31. Have you participated in any other religious group, organization, or activity that may not be directly connected to your parish? (for example, Knights of Peter Claver, etc.)
32. Did you have any friends who were also Catholic? If not, was this difficult for you? If so, did you all belong to the same parish?
33. Were there any African American priests, brothers or sisters that you knew prior to 1961? Who were they? Did knowing them have an impact on your experience as a Catholic?
34. Did you attend a Catholic elementary or high school? Which ones? During what years?
35. What was your experience in Catholic school like for you? How did it compare to other schools you attended?
36. What was the racial composition of the Catholic schools you attended? Did it have an affect on the kind of education or the quality of life in the school?

37. Describe some of your outstanding memories from your Catholic school experience.
38. Were you personally encouraged to develop your talents and potential as a student in Catholic school? How did this affect your sense of self as an adult?
39. Did you ever consider becoming a priest, brother or sister? Were you ever encouraged to think about a religious vocation?
40. Was religion important to you as a child? In what way?
41. How would you describe the role of religion in your life as an adult?
42. Is there anything that would have made your life as a Catholic richer or more complete in the years prior to 1961?
43. Did you ever feel that being a Catholic denied you full expression of your African American culture or heritage?
44. Do you have any other thoughts you would like to share from your experiences as an African American Catholic?

QUESTIONS USED FOR THE WRITTEN SURVEY

Preliminary Instructions: It is very important that you answer these questions as they applied to you prior to 1961. Most questions require only a simple one word answer. However, if you care to add comments, please do so.

1. Date of birth:
2. Place of birth:
3. Cities and states where you have lived:
4. When did you move to Cleveland?
5. Streets where you have resided while living in Cleveland:
6. What is your educational background?
7. What schools have you attended?
8. In what occupations have you been employed?

9. Where were your parents born?
10. Was your father Catholic? From birth or was he a convert to Catholicism?
11. Was your mother Catholic? From birth or was she a convert to Catholicism?
12. If married, is your spouse Catholic? From birth or through conversion?
13. Are you Catholic from birth or through conversion?
14. If you are a convert, when were you baptized?
15. In what parish were you baptized (please give city and state of this parish)?
16. If you are a convert, with what other religious denominations have you been associated?
17. Briefly explain what led to your conversion.
18. What parishes have you belonged to while living in Cleveland? During what years?
19. Do you feel that the racial composition of the parishes you belonged to affected your sense of "belonging" in that parish?
20. In what parish societies or organizations have you held membership? (For example, Holy Name Society, Ladies Sodality, altar boys, etc.)
21. Were you an active participant in the social life of your parish? (For example, did you regularly attend card parties, bazaars, dances, etc.?)
22. Did you feel the lack of African American clergy and sisters affected your life as a Catholic in negative ways? If yes, did you see this as a denial of a role in the Church's leadership positions?
23. Did you feel the absence of African American culture in the worship of the Church affected your life as a Catholic in negative ways? If yes, did you see this as a deprivation of your ethnicity?
24. Did you experience any opportunities in your parish life for the expression of your African American culture?

(For example, in music, statues, celebrations, devotions, etc.?)

25. Did you have any friends who were also Catholic? If yes, did you tend to belong to the same parish? Were these friends both African American and Caucasian?
26. Did you have close social ties/friendships with non-Catholic African Americans? If yes, was your religion ever an issue in your relationship with them?
27. Did you have any association with any African American priests or sisters prior to 1961? Did knowing them have a positive impact on you as a Catholic?
28. Did you ever consider becoming a priest, brother, or sister?
29. Did your experience in Catholic school encourage you to develop your talents and abilities to the fullest?
30. Did you ever feel that being a Catholic denied you full expression of your African American culture or heritage?
31. Are there any other topics I should be aware of that I did not address in this survey? If yes, please briefly explain them.
32. Do you have any other personal experiences that you would like to share with me regarding this research. If yes, please briefly explain them.
33. Would you like to expand any of your answers or add comments? Please do so.
34. Would you be willing to have a personal interview with me if I should need further information?

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