



GOOD WORKS

Worldwide Mission of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur

COLLABORATION with the Archdiocese of Baltimore, MD (USA)

Sister Gwynette Proctor is a Sister of Notre Dame de Namur who serves as Director of the Office of Black Catholic Ministries in the Archdiocese of Baltimore. Her ministry focuses on evangelization, leadership development and cultural competence training and education. She offers in-service workshops in teaching tolerance for teachers and administrators in schools and parishes. Sr. Gwynette works with Archdiocesan agencies to create more diversity in these communities in the greater Baltimore area.



*In 1984, Sr. Gwynette saw a pressing need in the city of Baltimore. She envisioned and founded a program to reach out to young Black lives, in collaboration with the Catholic Archdiocese in Baltimore. **Harambee** Catholic Youth Organization is a network of 16 Black parishes which work together and share resources for spiritual, cultural and leadership development of youth. Sr. Gwynette describes the need, purpose and goals of this program.*

HARAMBEE . . .

“Let’s all work together.”

By Sr. Gwynette Proctor, SNDdeN

In Baltimore, Maryland USA, young people strive to create a path out of extreme poverty and hopelessness. The odds against success are enormous as thousands of young people either graduate from or drop out of dysfunctional public school systems each year. Lacking the necessary skills, knowledge and motivation to press for success, they wander aimlessly and/or find menial jobs that do not pay a living wage. At some point, an all-consuming despair and hopelessness takes root. They become adults who have no voice. Out of sight and forgotten, they are pushed to the edges of our communities and they continue to live and expect to die believing “no one cares.”

At a gathering of 100 representatives from the Black Catholic Parishes in 1984, the Harambee Catholic Youth Organization began its outreach. The group realized that the multiple challenges facing our young people could not be adequately addressed by one parish alone. The gathering decided that together, they could have a greater influence on and increased resources to support our young. *Harambee*, which in Swahili means “*Let’s All Work Together*,” is a network of 16 Black Catholic Parishes and offers programs that center on three aspects of outreach to and with Black Catholic youth: **Spiritual Enrichment, Cultural Enrichment, and Leadership Development.**

Spiritual enrichment and Christian formation are the foundations that inspire our children, youth and adults to trust in a good God that can and will carry them through difficult times. One hundred youth gather for prayer services and Days of Reflection. Another 70 young adults from ten different parishes participate in “Into the Woods with Christ,” the annual retreat on a camping trip to Swallow Falls State Park.

Harambee has also a choir, led by youth and composed of over 50 African American youth. It hosts a regional Youth Revival for 150 young people from neighboring states who lift their voices in prayer and song in praise of our good God acting in and through them.

Cultural enrichment keeps our youth connected to the achievements and legacy of the ancestors. Every culture has a language and a perspective that gives insight into the human condition. African and African American culture helps Black youth to “know who they are and whose they are.” Exploring African roots begins with an awareness of the divine and stories of a people who survived beyond slave ships, shackles and racism.



Each year the group engages in the “Harambee Freedom Ride.” This cultural emersion trip provides young participants with time away from their homes to be one with God, their peers and the historical, cultural and spiritual monuments and memories of African American leaders of our Church and throughout the country. At the conclusion of this experience, Bishop John Ricard leads a commissioning service at the Mother of Africa Chapel in Washington, D.C.

Leadership Development focuses on expanding and enhancing leadership skills among African American youth. This outreach in the program facilitates opportunities for youth to develop leadership, organizational, communication and peer ministry skills for service in the Church, school and community. Young people gain the spiritual and cultural strength to heal the scars of racism, combat the many negative societal challenges and strive to break the cycles of poverty that plague our communities of color in the city of Baltimore.

Harambee is one of several programs offered by the Office of Black Catholic Ministries which strives to “*win the lost, build believers and equip disciples through the Catholic tradition.*”

