

Black Lay Caucus Focuses on Worship

By PAT PETRASKE

A Mass "with soul" is becoming a popular celebration in both white and black communities as the Black Lay Catholic Caucus focuses on a liturgy which it believes contains few elements of black worship.

Describing the Mass as a "white cultural celebration," Viola Brown, chairman, explained that the caucus was formed to make the black presence felt in the Church.

"Vatican II called for a return to the vernacular. Blacks have been turned off by the Church which doesn't speak their language," she said.

Miss Brown continued that black Masses are very "emotional." "The Mass has the same basic form, but through the readings, music, and homily we give as much to the black people as possible. You can feel the spirit; the Catholic Church is sterile compared to that," she said.

With the Ki-Swahili term "harambee" meaning a "joining together" as its theme, several of the caucus members joined in the celebration of two black unity Masses for the inmates of the Monroe County Jail. John Holmes, former state chairman of the Black Lay Catholic Caucus and principal organizer of the Rochester chapter, told the primarily young black men the theme was "brother helping brother; we are a united black people striving for our country." The second reading, from "Soul on Ice" by Eldridge Cleaver, recounted some of the author's reflections after his return to prison.

The general reaction to the special Mass, which was begun in the Immaculate Conception Church, has been favorable. "It provoked some thinking among parishioners. Probably there are some traditionalists who can't relate to the clapping or the music," said Miss Brown, an employment counselor at FIGHT, the black community organization of which the caucus is a member.

Reaction from Bishop Joseph Hogan has been "very supportive," Miss Brown said. She added that the bishop was one of the first bishops to endorse the National Office of Black Catholics, (NOBC) "at a time when there was little support for it." He also promoted in this diocese the NOBC fund drive originally limited to black parishes. The diocese funds a staff position for the caucus through the Office of Human Development. The position formerly held by Lorraine Pottter is now vacant.

The two-year-old caucus with

Mrs. Berrigan Pleads Guilty

Glen Burnie, Md. (RNS) — Anti-war activist Elizabeth McAlister, the wife of Philip Berrigan, and Sister Judith Le Femina, a Baltimore Catholic nun, pleaded guilty to charges of shoplifting in district court here.

Both women were fined \$100 and given 10-day suspended jail sentences.

Mrs. Berrigan was arrested with Sister Judith outside a Sears, Roebuck store in a Glen Burnie shopping center on Aug. 17. They were charged with stealing an electric drill, a package of sandpaper and a package of picture hangers. The items were worth just over \$21.

Neither woman testified. Judge George Taylor lectured them briefly and passed sentence. Berrigan, a former Josephite priest, did not appear in court.

its "hard core" group of 20 workers is also zeroing in on two other areas of concern, the black senior citizen and youth development. "The black senior citizen is a forgotten person," Miss Brown said, and noted that while they are "worse off financially" than white senior

citizens, "they are better off because they tend to stay at home with their families."

In spite of problems with the Church, Miss Brown believes few blacks are leaving it. "It is a strange relationship; people were raised in the Church and so

it has become a thing of tradition. Other blacks remain because in order for their kids to attend a school they must belong to the Church. I guess they can find some things to relate to," she said.

The basic problem is that black

people are not being attracted to the Church, which the chairman claims is identified as "culturally white."

"The inner city is 70 per cent black but the Catholic Churches are getting only zero to 30 per cent participation," she stated.

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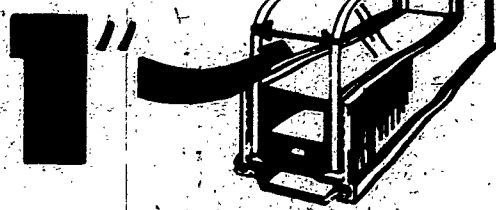
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