

'Gospel-Aid' to fund scholarships for black students in Catholic schools

By Teresa A. Parsons

Back in the eighth grade, Cindy Powell wanted to attend a Catholic girls' high school along with her best friend. But for a number of reasons, her wishes didn't come true. Looking back, she doesn't regret her choice.

But years later, when her son reached high school age, she talked him into attending a Catholic high school.

"He hated it," she recalled. "It wasn't the social setting for him. He was unhappy and doing very poorly." The next year he returned to public school. Now he's an honor student.

Given her experiences, why should Powell spend her time raising scholarship money to send other black students to Catholic high schools? "Catholic school isn't right for everyone, but it's still a good cause," she replied.

In the name of that good cause, she and Delaine Hall, members of the Mother

Cabri Circle, are organizing a gospel music concert this weekend at Immaculate Conception Church. More than 20 musical groups and soloists have been invited to perform on Saturday, Sept. 21, at Immaculate Conception Church in Rochester. Most are well-known locally, including Immaculate Conception's and St. Bridget's gospel choirs, the Bible Way Healing Temple choir, Mount Olivet Baptist Church choir and the Edwin Hawkins Choir, Rochester Chapter. Rose and Jonathan Stokes and Avis and Cheryl Lewis, Immaculate Conception parishioners, Renee Brown, Annette Rowe, Sandra Smith and Sireny Gospel Singer are some of the featured soloists.

The concert is a new fundraising venture for the interfaith, interracial women's organization founded to help black students attend Catholic high schools. Nearly 40 years ago the Mother Cabri Circle began with a few women gathered for a barbecue in the backyard of Harriet Schuyler, founder of the group and a well-known community leader. Their aim was to raise tuition money to help one girl to attend Our Lady of Mercy High School.

Since then, the group has assisted hundreds of students — as many as 30 per year in the past — to attend virtually every Rochester-area Catholic high school.

This year the group, which has about 30 members in all, is sponsoring nine students

with money raised over the past year through baked-goods sales, dinners and appeals.

Mother Cabri scholarships pay only partial tuition and are awarded based on need. Children from single-parent families or whose parents are unemployed are given precedence. "We screen them pretty carefully," Powell noted.

Some members have never benefitted directly from the fund, but only from helping others. Nola DeRoten, Powell's mother and the group's president, has been involved for 25 years. "I always loved what they were doing," DeRoten said. "I can see where the money goes and what it does ... that's why I stay with it."

All will be welcome Saturday afternoon, but some special guests will be featured, including William Johnson, Urban League president, who will serve as master of ceremonies.

Introducing Johnson will be Michael Amory, who is studying dance and theater at Nazareth College. He recently graduated from Bishop Kearney High School, thanks in part to the Mother Cabri Circle.

The concert begins at 4 p.m. Saturday at Immaculate Conception Church, 187 Edinburgh St. Tickets are \$5 and will be sold at the door. Parking is free as are the homemade refreshments served in the school hall afterward. For more information on the concert, call Delaine Hall at (716)544-6796.



Jeff Gouding/Courier-Journal
Andrew Williams directs Immaculate Conception's choir in rehearsal for the benefit concert that will begin at 4 p.m. Saturday, September 28.

Needs assessment

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out to the alienated." The addition of a session on evaluation should improve needs assessment with each cycle by allowing the steering committee to "work out the bugs."

A first pilot cycle is set to begin on October 18, 1985, and conclude January 10, 1987. A second cycle will run from April 25, 1986, to June 6, 1987, and the third from September 12, 1986, to October 3, 1987.

Although a maximum of 20 parishes will take part in the pilot cycle, the remaining 54 will receive information to begin work on their mission statements. Bishop Matthew H. Clark's focus paper on needs assessment is also scheduled to be sent to participating parishes early this month.

The steering committee has meanwhile identified criteria for dividing the parishes between cycles. "We hope to have at least one parish from each region involved in each cycle, and a cross section of urban, suburban and rural parishes," Lester said. "Where parishes already work together, we want to honor the working relationship." Campus and Hispanic community representation in each cycle and impending changes in pastoral leadership also have to be considered, Lester added.

For more information about the revised process or needs assessment in general, contact Claude Lester at (716)328-3210, ext. 339.

Forums on Women

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vehemently expressed opposing opinions.

"I think women are more appreciated in the society than in the Church," said one of them. "You're treated much more on the level of the professional in society, whereas in the Church you're more the 'little woman' who's supposed to stay barefoot and pregnant."

The only man at the table expressed appreciation for women, whom he believed "do everything (in the Church), and very well. Men alone and especially priests alone would not be able to get the job done," he added. "It's because women offer their services across the entire spectrum of Church work ... I think (women are) more visible because they're allowed to do more across the board — although I think 'allowed' is a terrible word."

Women, he agreed with most of the female members of the group, should be candidates for the priesthood and the permanent diaconate. "Limiting the Almighty to whom He is allowed to call to do His work is arrogant," he asserted.

The woman to his right agreed. "I believe there are numerous women who are actively called by God to do that ministry, and I just have to believe that God is up in heaven shaking His head and saying, 'What have you done to my church?'"

Lack of participation in decision making, the ability of women to "hold families together," the feminine dimension of nurturing and caring, the lack of options and support systems for women, the cultural subversion of minority women, and the Church as a mirror of society were also discussed. "Yes, we have a society that's discriminating against and oppressing people," concluded the group's male participant. "But the Church shouldn't buy into what the society is doing. It's a problem we've had from Galileo to the Spanish Inquisition. I don't think the Church should be in the business of oppression."

By mid-afternoon, group members had been ushered back into the parish hall for the scheduled large-group reflection.

Representative remarks heard by the

commission, the bishop, and a mesmerized audience included the following:

— "I believe that women should be priests."

— "I feel discriminated against in the church because I'm gay."

— "We haven't paid enough attention to the consequences of denying certain aspects of human sexuality. The vow of celibacy (on the part of the male clergy) may lead to unconscious violent behavior towards women ... Some misogyny may be involved here."

— "I feel that the bishops shouldn't write a pastoral on women; it's a non-issue. I think it's divisive, and detracts from the unity of the Church."

— "I feel that we as Catholics have certain traditions we must obey. Mary did a quiet but essential job not being one of God's apostles. So much dissension accomplishes little."

— "Women have always been invisible in the Church, both before and after Vatican II. For so many young women, the Church is no longer relevant to their lives, because they feel they are not being taken seriously."

— "The Catholic hierarchy refuses to look at the lives of many women in the Church. I have yet to see the word 'lesbian' used in any Catholic document. I don't like being put in a margin, because my life is not lived in a margin. I don't want 'religion' to interfere with my spiritual life. I am going to live my life according to the way I was created by God. I was created a lesbian. I consider it a gift."

— "I'm a woman. God created me a woman, and I'm glad to be. I feel blessed to be in the Church. Woman, starting with the Blessed Mother, was called to sacrifice. Christian transcends man or woman. There should be less and less division rather than more and more, because the world needs Christ."

— (From a former Sister of Mercy, now studying at Colgate Divinity School): "I've been able to participate in ministries of other denominations. I'm still a member (of the Catholic Church), and a faith-filled member, but I feel that my gifts are appreciated elsewhere."

— "For any kind of church to have credibility, you have to have representation. Our church is not a representative body. There are no women involved in any kind of decision making. You're losing the future of the Church by lack of credibility."

— "I don't think from the time I became an active minister, I've ever been deprived of using my talents, or of responsibility. What I do resent is that I've had very little input into the decision-making process of the Church. In the past 13 years, I feel like I've lived in a spiritual desert."

Bishop Clark's promise in his closing remarks "to try to close the gap" ended the forum on a hopeful note. The fact that women in the Rochester diocese were not afraid to voice such controversial opinions in the presence of their bishop "says something about the climate of acceptance in this diocese, and the importance of the commission," concluded Dr. Toinette M. Eugene, assistant professor of education at Colgate Rochester Divinity School and one of five women on the national commission.

"The ability to speak freely says a great deal about the kind of respect Matthew Clark has garnered," she added.

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