



Babette G. Augustin/Staff photographer

Auxiliary Bishop Moses B. Anderson of Detroit spent the morning of Feb. 2 praying, singing and talking with inmates inside Rochester's two jails. Above, Bishop Anderson prays with inmates at the Monroe Correctional Facility in Henrietta.

Bishop promotes awareness of black culture

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — When Mary Frances Collins was a teenager in the late 1950s, she once watched three large black men coming down a hall at St. Michael's College in Winooski, Vt., while singing in mellifluous voices "What a difference a day makes."

The fact that two of the men were Rosey Grier and Rosie Brown Jr. — members of the New York Giants football team — made the moment even more memorable for Collins, whose father, John Donoghue, was the college's public relations director at the time. She recalled that Grier and Brown were at St. Michael's because the Giants conducted summer training camp on the campus.

Yet it wasn't Grier or Brown that Collins came to see Sunday, Feb. 3, at Immaculate Conception Church — it was the third member of the singing trio, now known as Auxiliary Bishop Moses B. Anderson of Detroit. And once again, she heard him

sing.

"I've been dubbed as a singing bishop," Bishop Anderson told the congregation gathered for a Black History Month celebration at Immaculate Conception Parish, which serves many African-American Catholics. And he joked that it was fitting for him to be a bishop in Detroit, known for its "Motown" pop-music sound.

As he preached, the bishop periodically sang to the congregation, opening with a spiritual whose lyrics ran, in part: "Walk together people/Don't you get weary/Walk together people/Don't you get weary."

Encounters with people like Collins' parents are among the factors that have kept the 62-year-old bishop from growing weary through years of work on behalf of the church and civil rights. At a reception following the 11 a.m. Mass, he noted that the Donoghues had "kept him sane," when he was at St. Michael's.

"My parents were good friends of his," remarked Collins, a parishioner at Church

of the Resurrection in Fairport. She recalled that it was hard to not notice the jovial Moses Anderson, who graduated from the college in 1954 and returned as a theology lecturer in 1959.

"I remember being at faculty teas," Collins said "and always knowing that he would have a good story."

The bishop's life is itself an interesting story. Born in Selma, Ala., in 1928 and baptized a Baptist, he converted to Catholicism after he and a friend joined a boys' club run by the Edmundite Fathers.

"We used to have bull sessions," he told the Burlington Free Press in 1988. "The more I found out about the Roman Catholic Church, the more it supported my own faith. My conversion was not giving up all I had known as a Protestant. It was taking on more."

He eventually began studying for the priesthood in New Orleans in the late 1940s, and enrolled in seminary upon graduation from St. Michael's in 1954. Since his ordination in 1958, he has work-

ed on behalf of the civil-rights movement in North Carolina in the 1960s; as professor and vice president for student affairs at St. Michael's from the mid-60s to 1971; and served as pastor and visiting priest at parishes in Vermont and Michigan.

During the 1970s, he worked for 10 years at Xavier University in New Orleans where he had first studied to be a priest. Then in the 1980s, he served as a pastor in the South before being named to his current position by Pope John Paul II in December of 1987. As auxiliary bishop, he now oversees the west region of the Archdiocese of Detroit.

"Not too many people have seen a black bishop," he remarked after the Mass. Indeed, Bishop Anderson's homily emphasized that African-Americans need to see and hear role models other than those put forth by the media. He bemoaned the media's focus on black entertainers and athletes, while ignoring the accomplishments of African-Americans in such fields as science and aerospace and medical technology.

"We don't reflect on our contributions, and we let the media and those who write the book to walk off with all our stuff," he said, asserting that before the turn of the century, 500 major patents had been issued to African-Americans for such items as traffic lights, sewing machines and shoes.

He also called on the worshipers to remember that when slave traders plucked Africans from their homelands to become slaves in this country, the traders sought only "the best of the best, the most talented of the talented." Hence, he told parishioners, as descendants of those enslaved, "the blood of kings and queens and the most talented people of Africa surge in your veins."

The blood of royalty surges literally in Bishop Anderson's veins. The prelate is an honorary chief of the Ashanti tribe in Ghana, and refers to himself as a "Ghanaian-American."

Throughout his homily, Bishop Anderson quoted extensively from plays, poems and prose written by such black authors as Langston Hughes. The quotations served to strengthen his theme that "it's all right for me to be African-American," a phrase he urged the congregation to repeat after him.

He also asked the worshipers to research the origins of black hymnal music and

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