

WORLD & NATION

Black Catholic men unify around march goals

By Mark Pattison
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON (CNS) — To be among the hundreds of thousands of black men who rallied on the National Mall for the Million Man March was reason enough for many black Catholic men to travel to Washington to participate.

It seemed to matter little if streets and subways were crowded, or if the sound system sounded muddled even up close, or if T-shirts, posters and pamphlets addressed contrary, if not competing, philosophies. They were there, together, and it's where they felt, to their very essence, that they had to be.

Organizers expected 1 million men on the Mall and by 10 a.m. claimed it had been reached. The U.S. Park Police, who provide official crowd estimates, put the crowd at 400,000.

"Unity, we need the unity," said Morgan Carter, 39, of Saginaw, Mich., who held a sign that read "Black Catholic Men Summit," added, "We need to come together as black people."

Carter explained, "I want the black men to stand up.... Give us the chance to do whatever the white man can do."

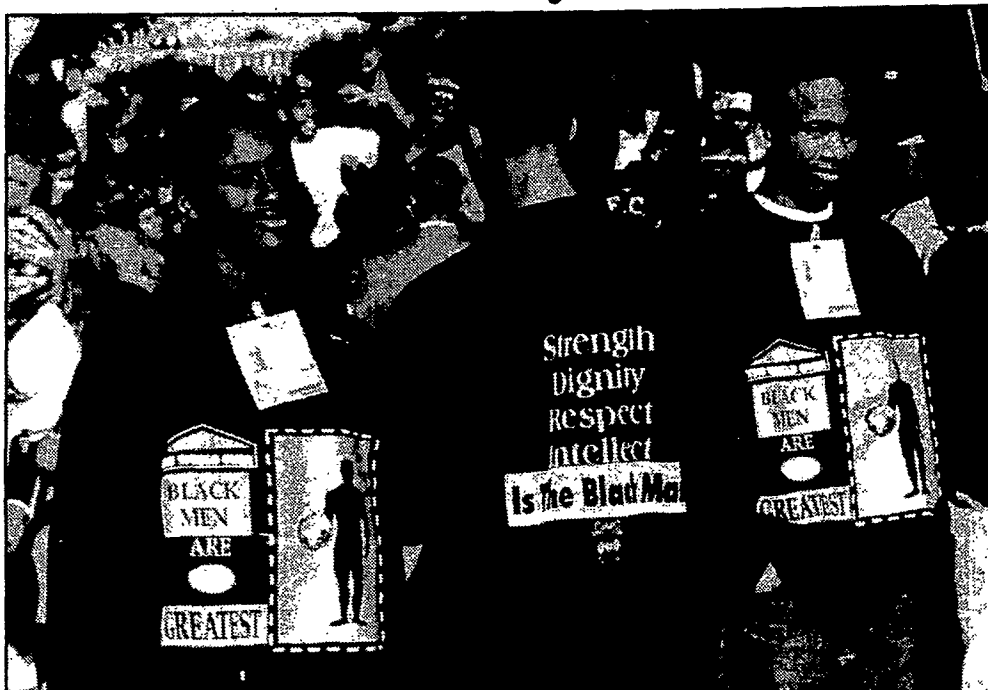
After all, he added, "we are one body and we are one faith."

Usually on a Monday, Carter would be tending his shop.

"I closed my business today," he said. "I wanted to be here."

Carter attended a "Million Man March Mass" earlier that morning at St. Joseph Church on Capitol Hill, a brief walk from where he was standing on the Mall.

Jack Tilson, director of music at St. Peter and Paul Parish in Decatur, Ga., and director of the Archbishop Lyke



Reuters/RNS

Three participants of the 'Million Man March' wear T-shirts produced for the Oct. 16 march. The rally, which drew hundreds of thousands to the Mall in Washington, D.C., was intended as a day for black men to unite and pledge self-reliance, and to reaffirm their commitment to their families.

Mass Choir, said, "The Scriptures tell us, 'Am I my brother's keeper?' And the answer is a resounding yes.

"I cannot separate myself from those who do not have an education," Tilson continued. "I cannot separate myself from those who are irresponsible. We've got to help them. We pray to the angels and saints for that.

"But do we live as we pray?" Carter asked.

"God helps those who help themselves," Tilson answered, and from his tone he made it clear he was talking

about more than just about himself, but about his race as a whole.

"The unity, the love, the commitment, the freedom of speech and opening up to let the world know black men want to take their place," said Lestrae Kelly of Baltimore.

"People have to start looking at people for who they are, not who they think they should be," Kelly added.

Tilson spoke succinctly of the bigotry he faces because of his skin color.

"Look at me in a corporation, and I'm seen as a nigger in a suit," he said. "Look

at me in warm-ups, they just call me nigger."

Father Rayford Emmons, a priest of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, said the Million Man March dovetailed with Catholic teaching on social justice.

He said he thought he could take back home the experience of participating "by discussing my experience here and taking the essential message and making it a part of our everyday lives."

"In unity there is strength" is one of the tenets, Father Emmons said. "The only way you make it in this country is to stand together." In the past, he added, "blacks, Catholics, Jews, any minority group stuck together no matter what anybody else might have said."

Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan, who called for the march, came in for his share of discussion by the Catholic participants.

"Nobody's going to convert me," Tilson said.

Father Emmons said, "Most of the things they say about him are taken out of context and exaggerated.

"If the newspapers and the media looked as carefully to the leaders in Congress who are against a lot of human services programs," he continued, "they would find a lot more ammunition against them than they would against Farrakhan."

James C. Watts, 66, of Washington, was one of three generations of marchers from his family.

"This gathering today is something God asked us to be present (at)," Watts said. What he wants, he added, is "the right to love one another and be with each other. That's my theory all the time."

Fr. Clements pushes four-point plan for African-Americans

By Mark Pattison
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON (CNS) — Father George Clements, one of America's foremost black Catholic priests, outlined a four-point plan that deserves "immediate personal attention" from black men.

Areas needing attention include homelessness of black children, addiction, men in prison, and the growing incidence of out-of-wedlock births by teenagers.

"Immediate (attention). I said immediate, immediate," Father Clements remarked Oct. 14 at a Summit for Black Catholic Men, held to coincide with the Oct. 16 Million Man March in Washington. "None of this paralysis of analysis."

Father Clements' talk was punctuated repeatedly by applause from the 150 men in attendance.

"We African-American men must

break the stranglehold that the white bureaucrats have on our own homeless children," Father Clements said. "We can blame 'em for everything (else), but you can't blame them for these homeless little black boys and girls. They belong to us."

Father Clements adopted four boys during his 22 years as pastor of Holy Angels Parish in Chicago. He founded "One Church One Child," which claims credit for 40,000 adoptions in 39 states. The program urges church communities to take responsibility for adopting a child in need of a home.

"Our African-American ancestors must be twirling in their graves" at the incidence of homelessness among black children, he said.

When African tribalism evolved under slavery into the extended-family concept, "everybody belonged to somebody," he said. "Even when we didn't have a pot to urinate in, we would still take in our chil-

dren." "The only reason black folks don't take in homeless children is because they're selfish and they don't want to share what they got," he said. "Brothers, we have an obligation to take care of our own kind."

He cited "massive denial" over drug and alcohol addiction as a major problem confronting black men.

Father Clements told of how he lectured his first adopted son, Joey, on his first day at Holy Angels about there being no alcohol allowed in the rectory. That night, priest friends of Father Clements came over for a standard fare of drinks before dinner, wine with dinner and after-dinner drinks.

Later that night, after Father Clements had gone to bed, Joey approached him and said, "I thought you said, 'No alcohol in the house.'" Father Clements said he chewed the boy out, but "from that night to this night, Clements has not taken a drink because the kid was right."

Black men must "challenge the insanity" of the "babies having babies" syndrome, Father Clements continued. One of Father Clements' adopted sons fathered a child out of wedlock.

"I said, 'Son, now you're out of my house,'" Father Clements said.

Before the baby arrived everything used to be a joke for that young man, but "the child has turned him around," Father Clements said.

With more black men in prison than in college, "we are the only ones who can bring our boys out of these jails and make something out of them," he said.

Father Clements said respect should be given to Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan as the only American today who could stage the Million Man March. But he alluded to criticisms of Farrakhan that he is anti-Catholic and anti-Semitic.

"I'm proud to be a Catholic," he said. "I got a problem with any of y'all apologizing to be a Catholic."

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