

# School festivities celebrate diversity

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Faith & Family

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Mike Latona/Catholic Courier

ROCHESTER — Erica Bryant acknowledged that segregated schools and drinking fountains, sit-ins, and boycotts are generally connected with the civil-rights movement of the 1960s. On the other hand, she pointed out, it was as recently as 1998 that a black man, James Byrd Jr., was dragged to death in a racially motivated crime in Texas.

"Civil rights is not something that happened a long time ago ... history is still in the making. We've come a long way, but it's still up to us," Bryant said of the ongoing need to strive toward equality.

Bryant made her remarks Feb. 9 while serving as keynote speaker for a multicultural assembly at Our Lady of Mercy High School. A 1999 Mercy graduate, Bryant went on to graduate from Boston University and is now a newspaper writer for the *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*.

Following Bryant's address, the assembly featured music and dancing in celebration of Black History Month in February. The event was sponsored by FOCUS (Formal Organization for Culturally United Students), a group of Mercy students from various ethnic backgrounds who strive to increase awareness of diversity at Mercy and celebrate the unique gifts of all cultures. Among the afternoon's highlights were the singing of the Negro National Anthem — "Lift Every Voice And Sing" — by Mercy freshman Barbara Thibodeaux; violin renderings of Negro spirituals



Mike Crupi/Catholic Courier

Nazareth Academy senior Jenna Ricigliano (from left, with white shirts), sophomore Mercedes James, seventh-grader Mary Hoffman and eighth-grader Brittany Eaves perform a traditional African dance Feb. 11 during the school's multicultural day.



by Mercy junior Marlagyia Snow; and dancing by Rochester Institute of Technology student Kelly Benjamin as well as the Pearls Step Team from Wilson Magnet High School.

Also celebrating multicultural diversity last week was Nazareth Academy, which on Feb. 11 staged a morning series of workshops and

an afternoon assembly. The workshops were spread out in numerous classrooms, with a different cultural theme in each room led by students and faculty. They ranged from an Irish dancing demonstration; to profiles of Ethiopian, Kore-

an, Baklavan and Native American culture; to displays of Chinese calligraphy and Ukrainian eggs.

The assembly included an array of music, dancing and costumes with cultural themes. They included a PowerPoint "tour" of South Korea; more Irish dancing; a double-dutch dancing team; opera music; gospel tunes; and a lengthy celebration of African culture led by Clyde Morgan with the help of more than 40 students. Morgan is an African dance specialist and professor at SUNY College at Brockport.

Serving as emcee for the Nazareth assembly was a 17-year-old senior, Alicia Sheppard, who opened and closed the event with poems she wrote promoting multicultural unity. Her final words to fellow students were: "Many diversities — one world."

Alicia, who has taken an active part in the annual multicultural day all four of her years at Nazareth, told the *Courier* that these kinds of events serve as positive reminders of the need for unity.

"We can express diversity not just at Nazareth, but everywhere. We can be one without any fights or violence — we just have to work at it," said Alicia, who is African American. "Here at Nazareth we make it work every day, and I wouldn't have it any other way."

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