

# THE INSTITUTE FOR BLACK CATHOLIC STUDIES

## HISTORY

The historical roots of the Institute for Black Catholic Studies at Xavier University of Louisiana are intertwined with those of the National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus (NBCCC), which was founded in 1968 and the Black Catholic Theological Symposium (BCTS) that convened for the first time October 12-15, 1978. The Symposium was organized under the auspices of the NBCCC and directed by the creative leadership of the Reverend Thaddeus Posey, OFM Cap. In planning this gathering, Father Posey worked in association with the Reverends Augustus Taylor and David Benz and consulted with the Reverend Dr. Joseph Nearon, SSS and Sister Jamie Phelps, OP. Their efforts brought together Black Catholic priests and vowed religious women and men who were trained as pastoral and intellectual leaders and critical thinkers in the various theological and ecclesial disciplines. This first assembly of the Symposium was held at the Baltimore Motherhouse of the Oblate Sisters of Providence, the first Catholic religious congregation of vowed Black women. Participants presented formal papers and responses that addressed some of the topics crucial to the development of a distinctively Black Catholic theological and pastoral response to the Black condition. These topics included values, self-concept, liturgy, catechesis, and spirituality. The papers from this meeting were edited under the direction of Father Posey and published as *Theology: A Portrait in Black*.

### **From Proposal to 'Pilot Program'**

In the effort to sustain and support the pastoral theological reflection and work of Black Catholic pastors and educators, Father Posey, with the encouragement of other Symposium participants, presented a second proposal to the 1979 spring meeting of the Board of Directors of the NBCCC. This proposal called for the establishment of an educational institute with a curriculum organized around the pastoral and intellectual needs of Black Catholics and under their leadership and direction. Still, such an educational institute was not an altogether new idea. In 1969, soon after the founding of the NBCCC, Father Augustus Taylor, with genuine foresight, suggested the creation of a structured academic program through which to share Black Catholic viewpoints among ourselves and with the hierarchy, pastors, and religious women and men ministering in African American communities. Given its embryonic state, the NBCCC was unable to actualize this idea at the time. However, by 1979, with more than a decade of organizational and programmatic experience, the National Black Clergy Caucus was ready to entertain and oversee the implementation of such a plan. Furthermore, in the thinking of the NBCCC Board, Xavier University of Louisiana the only Black Catholic university not only in the United States, but also in the Western hemisphere – was the most likely academic site to accredit and to host the program. With the approval of the NBCCC, Father Posey met with Dr. Norman Francis, President of Xavier University in New Orleans, to explore hosting at Xavier an educational institute focused on the pastoral and theological needs of Black Catholics. Further, the NBCCC Board instructed Father Posey to form a consultant group for the project. Members of this group included the Reverends David Benz, Edward Branch, Sister Jamie Phelps, OP, and (the former Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary Sister, Toinette M. Eugene).

Very quickly, plans got underway for a 'pilot program' for 1980. In order to give the proposal a broad base of support within the University and within the local Church, during the 1979-1980 academic year Dr. Francis and Father Posey scheduled a meeting with key administrators and faculty at Xavier University and with the Catholic bishops of the Archdiocese of New Orleans. At this meeting, at the request of Father Posey, Sister Phelps, who at the time was a doctoral candidate in systematic theology at the Catholic University of America, gave a presentation on the significance of such an educational program for the Church in its ministry to Black Catholics.

### **The Emergence of the Institute for Black Catholic Studies**

The 'pilot' run of what is now known as the Institute for Black Catholic Studies (IBCS) began in the summer of 1980. The inaugural faculty and their courses were: the Reverend Dr. Cyprian Davis, OSB, who taught "Church History," the Reverend Dr. Joseph Nearon, SSS, who taught "Black Approaches to Scripture," and (the former Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary Sister) Toinette M. Eugene who taught "Black Approaches to Religious Education." Mr. Steve Wesley had been scheduled to teach "Catholic Education in the Black Community," but the Course was dropped. Father Posey served as Director of the Program. Sixteen (16) students registered for the first summer session. Classes were held in St. Joseph Residence Hall and in the office of Campus Ministry, which at the time was directed by the Reverend (now Bishop) Moses Anderson, SSE.

In February 1982, the Board of Trustees of Xavier University approved the curriculum design of the Master's Program in Pastoral Theology. This action empowered the Institute for Black Catholic Studies to initiate the Degree Program that would be accredited and awarded through the University's Graduate School. The faculty was expanded to include among others: Dr. Sister Thea Bowman, FSPA, who offered courses in African American Literature and Preaching; the Reverend Bede Abram, OFM Conv., STL, who replaced Toinette Eugene as instructor of "Black Approaches to Theology," and Dr. Delores Harrall, SND de Namur, who taught "Catholic Education in the Black Community."

The first graduation of candidates for the Th.M. program was held in July 1984. The graduates were Sister Eva Marie Lumas, SSS, Sister Addie Lorraine Walker, SSND, and Reverend James Voelker.

### **The Development of Certificate and Enrichment Programs**

Although the years 1985 through 1993 were ones of programmatic and institutional development for the Institute, its growth and extension started almost immediately. Since the first summer session of the Institute, there has been a commitment to encourage and strengthen vocations to the priesthood and to the religious life within the Black Catholic community. In 1981, the National Black Sisters' Conference (NBSC) designated a committee comprised of Sisters Elizabeth Hams, HVM, Rosetta Brown, OP, and Patricia Haley, SCN, to explore and to set up a program to support Black candidates and vowed religious, seminarians and clergy in their spiritual journey. One component of this program was to take place at the Institute. In consultation with Sister Phelps, the NBSC Committee designed and inaugurated the first session of the "Formation Program" which was directed by Sister Haley and funded by the NBSC. The program aimed to challenge and to assist Black candidates and vowed religious, seminarians and clergy in growth, maturity and renewal in the spiritual life as well as to assist Vocation Formation Personnel of religious congregations in working with Black candidates. This program built on and benefited from the expertise the NBSC gained during the early and mid-1970's when it conducted several Institutes in

Formation. By 1990 the "Formation Program" began to sponsor special sessions for those involved in the process of vocation discernment as well as to support lay women and men who are interested in personal spiritual growth and renewal. This undertaking has evolved to its present format and is known as the "Vocation Enrichment Program."

During his tenure as Director, Father Joseph Nearon both stimulated and advocated the expansion of educational components within IBCS through the initiative of IBCS faculty, students, and alumni. The first of these expansions was the Master Catechist Certificate Program, a training and formation program for Christian educators and catechists ministering in the Black community. This program was coordinated and directed by Sisters Lumas and Walker. The Master Catechist Program was the result of their collaboration on their practicums for the Th.M. Degree. In its early years the Master Catechist Program was funded by grants from the NBSC. A second expansion came through a proposal presented by Ms. Janice Jackson and Ms. Roxanne Byrd for youth ministry, as well as the work of Ms. Valerie Shields for a Certificate Practicum. In the summer of 1992, the Certificate Program in 'Youth Ministry' was established under the collaborative leadership of Sister Jane Nesmith, SBS, and Ms. Shields. A program addressing leadership in the parish was first suggested by Father Nearon and Sister Haley. The Reverend Dr. Donald Sterling drew up the initial plans. The Certificate Program in 'Leadership in the Faith Community' was conducted for the first time in the summer of 1993 under the direction of Mr. Leon Henderson.

### **Administrative Development**

The emergence and growth of the various IBCS educational components has called forth the creative, imaginative, and pedagogical talents as well as the administrative, evaluative, and consultative gifts of many Black Catholic women and men. In 1982, Father Nearon joined the faculty of Xavier University of Louisiana and assumed the position of Director of the Institute, holding this position until his untimely death in 1984. From 1984-1985, Father Abram served as Director of the Institute. During the early years, 1982-1985, Father Posey functioned as Assistant Director of the Institute, but in 1985, he assumed the role of Director, working in this capacity until 1991. From 1984 until 1990, the Reverend Dr. Cyprian Davis, OSB served as a kind of 'internal academic dean' to ensure the Institute's scholarly and pastoral integrity. From 1991 through 1994, The Reverend Dr. Joseph A. Brown, SJ, served the Institute as its director.

From the onset, the NBCCC recognized that if the 'pilot program' were to expand and thrive, the administration and faculty would need to be open to critique and feedback from consultants and advisors from a wide range of perspectives and expertise. To facilitate this process, Father Posey drafted a plan for a committee of IBCS administrators, faculty, and student representatives along with appropriate Xavier University administrators to work out policies for the Institute regarding curriculum, degree and Certificate requirements, faculty hiring, student admissions, etc. The Committee, which assumed responsibility for these decisions, was the precursor of the current IBCS Policy Committee. In addition, an Advisory Committee comprised of prominent African American Catholic laity, religious, and clergy supported the IBCS in fiscal, recruiting and public relations matters. From the beginning, Dr. Norman Francis has pledged the support of the Institute by Xavier University by making it clear that the Institute was a presidential priority.

In 1994, The IBCS Policy Committee in collaboration with the Deans of Xavier University's School, first Dr. Nathaniel Felder then Dr. Alvin Richard began a review of the Institute's operating policies and procedures. During this time, the day-to-day, on site operations of the IBCS were handled by Ms. Valerie Shields, while a Core Administrative Team - Dr. M. Shawn Copeland, Mr. Leon Henderson, M.A. (Associate Director of Student Life), Sister Dr. Jamie Phelps, OP (Acting Associate Director for the Degree Program), Dr. Addie L. Walker, SSND (Associate Director for Certificate and Enrichment Programs) supervised administrative and programmatic matters.

After a national search in 1996, Xavier University President Norman Francis named Sister Eva Regina Martin, SSF, Ph.D., the Director of the IBCS effective in August 1997. In the same year, Sister Martin confirmed the following appointments: Sister Dr. Jamie Phelps, OP, Associate Director for the Degree Program, Dr. Addie L. Walker, SSND, Associate Director for Certificate and Enrichment Programs, Mr. Leon Henderson, M.A., Associate Director of Student Life. In the year 2000, Sister Eva Regina Martin appointed Sister Dr. Eva Marie Lumas, SSS Associate Director for Certificate and Enrichment Programs.

She also appointed Dr. Veronica Morgan Lee to the position of Associate Director for the Degree Program but because of illness Dr. Morgan Lee was unable to serve in this capacity. In her place Dr. Shawn Copeland served as Acting Associate from 2000 – 2003. During her term, Sister Eva Regina Martin introduced several new initiatives: an institute journal entitled *Sacred Rock* which published the writings of graduating students and faculty along with some papers from students participating in the certificate programs. Sister also initiated a program called Youth Empowerment with high school student as participants. Finally, she inaugurated the IBCS Preaching Institute. In 2003, Sister Eva Regina Martin was elected to a congregational leadership position leading to relinquishing her responsibilities as Director of the Institute. The university began a second search for a Director.

During the interim Dr. M. Shawn Copeland, Associate Director for the Degree Program, Sister Eva Lumas, Associate Director of the Certificate and Enrichment Programs and Dr. George Franklin , Acting Associate Director for Community Life collaborated as a team under the leadership of Ms. Kathleen Dorsey Bellow who served as Coordinator of the Institute. In 2003 Dr. Norman Francis appointed Sister Dr. Jamie Phelps, OP as the Institute's Director effective August, 2003. In October 2003 she appointed Dr. Copeland as Associate Director for the Degree Program and confirmed the continuance of Dr. George and Sister Dr. Eva Lumas. In 2004, Sister Dr. Phelps appointed Br. Mukasa Theodore, OSB as Acting Associate Coordinator for Community Life. Dr. Cecilia A. Moore and Dr. Kathleen Dorsey Bellow were appointed Associate Director for the Degree Program and Associate Director for the Certificate and Enrichment Program respectively.

Due to fluctuating interest and enrollment, the C&E Catechist Formation, Youth Ministry and Leadership in the Faith Community programs were formally evaluated. In 2005, the C&E Policy Committee recommended to the IBCS Director that the C&E Program be restructured in three one-week modules that respond to the ongoing need for faith and pastoral ministry formation in the Black community and address the challenges of time and money faced by many volunteers. C&E students who were currently working towards certification in the Youth Ministry and Catechist Formation programs would be allowed to complete their course of study and achieve certification. C&E certification processes would be otherwise suspended while the Committee continued to study the ministry needs of dioceses and the direction of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) regarding the formation of lay

ecclesial ministers. Recognizing its importance in the development of parish life, it was proposed that a focus on Young Adult Ministry be added to the Youth Ministry track.

The new format was first implemented during the summer of 2006 when the IBCS met at the University of Notre Dame (UND). The previous August, Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf of Mexico causing great destruction in Mississippi and Louisiana. New Orleans, including Xavier University, suffered extensive damage as a result of Katrina. Offers of assistance came in from many universities across the country. UND administrators proposed to Dr. Francis that the IBCS meet on its Indiana campus. Sister Dr. Phelps moved to Notre Dame and set up operations for the 2006 session. Under Dr. Francis' leadership, XULA underwent extensive repairs and returned to service in time for the 2007 gathering of the IBCS.

In 2008, Reverend Dr. Roy Lee joined the IBCS staff as Acting Coordinator for Community Life. He was followed by Br. Eric "Mukasa" Theodore, OSB, who held the position in 2009. Reverend Dr. Lee returned to the Institute as Coordinator for Community Life in 2010. In 2011, Sister Dr. Phelps resigned as Director of the Institute to continue her research and writing. Dr. Loren J. Blanchard, Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs, appointed Dr. Pamela R. Franco as Interim Director. Her tenure lasted for three years. During the three year period of the IBCS having an interim director, Xavier University's administration conducted an external review of the IBCS in general and the Th.M. degree program in particular. The External Review Committee submitted several recommendations seeking to enhance and progress the IBCS and its operation.

In 2013, Dr. Pamela Franco appointed Dr. Kirk Gaddy, Ed.D. as Associate Director for the Master degree program, and Dr. timone davis as Associate Director of the C&E programs. In the Fall of 2013, a national search for a new Director of the IBCS was conducted. Reverend Dr. Maurice J. Nutt, C.Ss.R. was selected as the new director and began his tenure on June 30, 2014.

### **A Unique Venture to Enrich Our Church**

From its inception, the Institute has proved to be a unique venture. With its intimate academic association with Xavier University of Louisiana, IBCS is the first and primary national center for the study of the Black Catholic experience. The Institute's constituent programs bring together theory and practice, systematic and pastoral theology, rigorous academic study and committed ministry, classroom learning and practical application, rural and urban ministerial concerns, the marketplace and the church. Conceived in an interdisciplinary context, the various program components of the Institute advance a holistic appreciation of the human person. In critical appropriation of the African heritage of Black Catholics, the Institute is intentionally intergenerational and accords a place of special honor and respect to the Elders of our community. The Institute's faculty is an outstanding group of nationally and internationally respected African American and African priests, vowed religious and laity who are pastoral leaders and educators, scholars and researchers. The IBCS strives in every way to meet the charge Pope Paul VI issued to Catholics of African descent - to enrich our Roman Catholic Church with our "precious and original contribution" of Blackness.