

**Report of the Canon Missioner for Black Ministries in the Diocese of New Jersey
to the 2019 Diocesan Convention**

The Diocese of New Jersey is blessed with ten Historically Black Churches among the one hundred and Forty-four congregations. This statistic is relevant to note, as the overall wider Church experience the decline in membership and occasional closings of churches. Through the Office of Black Ministry (OBM) the national Church acknowledges the significant contributions by its definition of Black Ministry, here quoted:

“Black Ministries - The history of contributions to The Episcopal Church by its black clergy and black congregations is long and inspiring. The church pays tribute to this legacy by supporting and fostering the growth of black congregations through partnerships that reach across ethnic and racial boundaries, from the Episcopal provinces, dioceses, and deaneries to local parishes.” Further its mission is defined:

“The Mission of the Office of Black Ministry is to listen to and promote the aspirations of Black Congregations; to encourage self-reliance, cultural identity, economic self-sufficiency, and spiritual growth; and to work towards the eradication of racism and discrimination, and any and all forms of injustice that may exist within the Church and society.”

The diversity that exists within congregations of our diocese is a testament to the work and commitment of several organizations within the Diocese which seek to remove the barriers which separate us as followers of Jesus Christ.

The current reality is that most churches are faced with the similar challenges which threaten their survival and their ability to be self-sustaining. Whether from an aging and decreasing membership; ageing and deteriorating facilities; and changing demographics of our neighborhoods. Experience has taught us that solutions to these issues require individual attention due to the unique personalities of each parish.

Notwithstanding the several initiatives by our Diocese, especially with regard to Congregational Development, there is a concern within congregations that sustainability is becoming more problematic as circumstances are changing and churches are finding it difficult to maintain its current level of operation without assistance.

The dedication of the congregations of our Historical Black Churches continue to be unwavering under their inspiring leadership. Examples of increased community outreach providing services beyond their membership are encouraging, and there is renewed energy in carrying out their mission. Attendance at diocesan sponsored events are well supported especially the Annual Absalom Jones Service of Witness and the Annual Dr. Martin Luther King Memorial Service. In addition, the forums hosted by the Commission on Black Ministry provide important and useful information for congregations.

With few exceptions, the operation of our Black churches is dependent on subsidies from the diocese in the form of grants from the Board of Missions and other designated funds. Without exceptions each church responds to the Marks-of-Mission giving requests as capable. Without these continued subsidies the churches may be forced out of existence in the short term, as they make the necessary adjustments and changes to ensure long term viability.

Diocesan wide support of Resolution 2019-3 submitted by the Commission On Black Ministry (COBM) is necessary to maintain the level of ministry currently provided to the Historically Black Churches of the diocese.

On a positive note, the four churches in the City of Camden (there were five), have come together in support of a vision to "Re-Purpose" the facilities of St. Wilfrid's Episcopal Church. For some years St. Wilfrid's has been without an assigned clergy, and with occasional worship depending on availability of supply clergy. However, with volunteers from other churches and denominations they provide an "Open Door Health Clinic" once a month to the community, serving sixty to eighty patrons with clothing, food and limited health services.

The City of Camden provides an excellent resource environment for Urban Ministry with a resurgence of corporate investment and administration efforts at revitalizing their economy.

The vision of the Re-Purposing project is to convert the facilities into an Urban Ministry Training Center, and along with partners provide needed services to the community. Further information will be provided as the plans are formalized and presented to the diocese for discussion and approval.

It is my hope and prayer that this 235th Diocesan Convention will be the beginning of a new culture of unity and family that embraces the theme of "The Power of Love" from our Presiding Bishop, as we move forward to strengthen our faith and love for each other.

Respectfully Submitted,

Rev. Canon Clive Oscar Sang, Dcn.

Canon Missioner for Black Ministry, Diocese of New Jersey