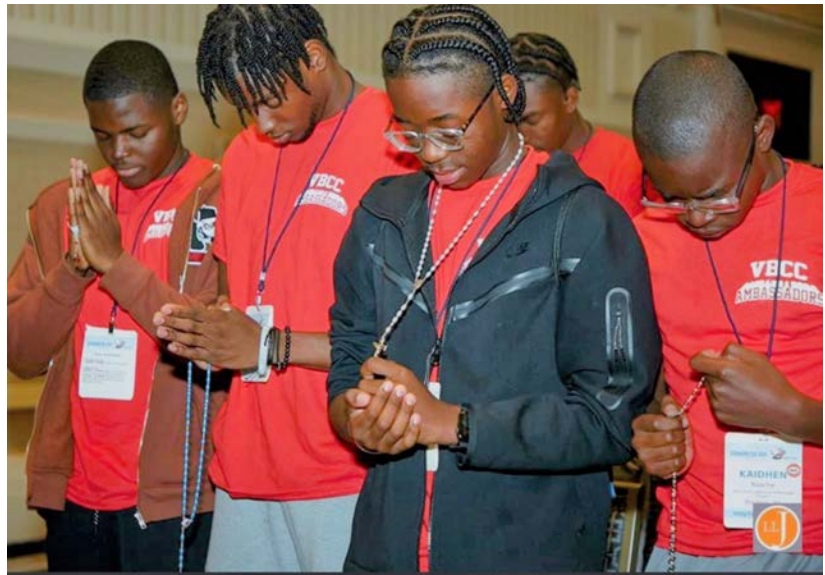


LITTLE SUMMA

“Love takes up where knowledge leaves off.” ~ St. Thomas Aquinas

Ambassadors Go to D.C.

Thirty Ambassadors and adult leaders from the Vicariate of Black Catholic Concerns made their way to Washington D.C. last July to attend the 13th National Black Catholic Congress. The event dates back to 1889 when President Grover Cleveland met with over 100 black leaders. This year’s event was attended by 2500 people. Father Dwayne and the Ambassadors were asked to lead the youth track. Another 40 people from the Brooklyn Diocese also attended including Bishop Robert Brennan.



Ambassadors Transform at the Black Catholic Congress

“Going to a National Black Catholic Congress was definitely an eye opener not only to my faith but to my leadership skills and how I perceive my own race,” said Ambassador Jada.

“Seeing people from different parts of the country was such a wonder to see. I would have never imagined how much sacrifice people made to come to this one in five year event. I can see why they are so excited to go, the choir is great and the masses make you actually feel the presence of Jesus and of God.”

Among the people who had the greatest impact on Jada was Washington Cardinal Wilton Gregory, who was the main celebrant at the opening Mass at the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington D.C. July 21.

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“Serving for Cardinal Gregory made me feel nervous. Walking down the aisle with an excessive amount of cameras in my face was nerve racking, but when I listened to the crowd closely it brought me to ease. I heard so many people being touched by me altar serving and being the only girl in the altar among 200 bishops, priests and deacons. Hearing people shout ‘You go girl!’ and ‘That’s black girl magic’ made me feel like God had a

purpose for me to be in the service to not only represent the youth but young black female Catholics.”

Jada was also inspired by the cardinal when he spoke at the town hall gathering during the Congress along with Bishop J. Terry Steib, the bishop emeritus of Memphis, Tennessee.

“We may not look the same but we belong to the same family,” she recalled the cardinal telling the youth.

“The love from the bishop and cardinal for the youth made me really feel touched and loved,” Jada said. “Their message was to never give up because faith is apart of who we are. And sometimes it is hard to be catholic.”

Brooklyn Bishop Robert Brennan also came down to Fort Washington, Maryland.

“The amount of reverence Bishop Brennan has shown to me and my fellow cohorts in the ambassador program is inconceivable,” said Ambassador Kadeem. “Between spending time with us whenever he got a chance and talking with us to build relationships, there was never a moment when Bishop Brennan’s love wasn’t felt.”

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Ambassador Joseph also felt God’s love envelope him during the Congress.

“Black Catholics have perfected the ways to use music to transcend, touch, and uplift the hearts of those listening,” Joseph said. “The choir at every prayer session did not falter in energy, talent and passion which is what makes them and their music amazing. I felt the presence of life from their music from the very first listen and I’m extremely happy to have been able to experience it.”

During the Congress the youth also had an opportunity to take part in smaller break-out sessions with adult and youth leaders.

“One thing that resonated with me was that the priest from the chat room was singing a lot of old people’s songs from the 90s,” Ambassador Derrick Pena said. “He told the story of how Mariah Carey said she didn’t know JLo for ten years, then when she was asked about it she responded how she knows about JLo but she doesn’t know her personally: she has never conversed with her. Then he said the same thing applies to God and I felt that. I know about Jesus but I don’t talk to him through prayer in the Bible to know him personally. This trip gave me



the opportunity to get to know God a little better.”

The youth-track break-out sessions also offered the Ambassadors an opportunity to hear the living testimony of other young black Catholics from throughout the United States.

“It felt nice to hear from people who understood what it’s like to be a teen and help affirm us in our faith,” said Ambassador Christian Lafontant.

Christian also was impressed by how far word of the

Ambassador’s has spread.

“It was nice to see how Father Dwayne had built up a high reputation for the Ambassador’s already,” he said.

Christian brought something priceless from the congress.

“I feel like my faith has been strengthening and I have a lot to think about when I pray,” he said.

God’s Grace showered the ambassadors even before they went to the congress. Their trip began with a stay at the Washington D.C. retreat house of the Franciscan Sisters of the Atonement. “I got to meet a lot of amazing people and receive many opportunities that seemingly came out of nowhere,” Christian said.

Jada said she was scared of staying with the sisters at first when she looked them up online.

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“I went in there with a close mind set and left with an open one,” she said. “The sisters were amazing and so funny. I would have never imagined that sisters would have so much humor.”

“The tranquility and simplicity of the house reminded me of how rich in family and connection you can be with as little as possible,” Joseph said.

“For the short period of time that the members of the ambassador program were blessed enough to share with them, the sister’s kindness has left a permanent imprint on my heart and soul,” Kadeem said.

Ambassador Ruth Mekoko remembers the sign attributed to Dorothy Day that hung in the retreat house: “Hospitality used to mean more that opening a door, offering a bed. It meant opening your heart to the needs of others.”

“The sisters really embodied the quote and shared their hospitality,” Ruth said.

The trip also afforded the Ambassadors an opportunity to explore historic sites and venues.

“We went to the National Museum for African American History and Culture,” Ambassador Jonah said. “I have never seen art like that. The history was very empowering and uplifting. It motivates me as a young African American in today's society.

This art tells me that I should keep pushing for my dreams and goals.”

Jonah said he was offered a glimpse of the true goal when he offered his time to pack food for the hungry.

“One of the staff members there said: ‘imagine when you go to heaven you see one of the kids you helped today.’ This stuck out to me because this shows how we should continue to live our lives in the way Jesus would and to give back to our community.”

“Be a Visionary,” is how Joseph summed up what he learned during the trip. “That is exactly what His Eminence, Wilton Cardinal Gregory, and many other archbishops and bishops call us, young people of the church, to be.

“Many great leaders before us have all been empowered and motivated by visions—God’s vision—to create and foster a world of equality and peace. Their sacrifice to this vision is the reason why we are here—at this time, at this place, and at this congress.

“Among the many experiences I’ve had with the Ambassador Program this was among the best. I’ve been able to experience once in a lifetime moments,

immerse in the Black Catholic culture, and become closer with other Ambassadors.



Pastor is Father Dwayne
Newsletter by Antonina