

Q2

APR-JUN

# THE VILLAGE DRUM

SPRING 2026



Office of Black Catholic Ministries  
Sr. Jane Nesmith, Director



Catholic Diocese  
of Cleveland



@BlkCatholicsCLE

## WYD SEOUL 2027

The next World Youth Day will take place in Seoul, South Korea! A diocesan-wide pilgrimage for young adults, ages 18-35, will take place August 1-10, 2027. Bishop Malesic will accompany the group, along with several other members of the clergy. Join us as we gather with young people from around the world to celebrate WYD with Pope Leo. For more information, please contact:  
Dr. Megan Lowes-Bolin  
[mbolin@dioceseofcleveland.org](mailto:mbolin@dioceseofcleveland.org)



## WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH CELEBRATION

BY TONY WILLIAMS, ST. AGNES+OUR LADY OF FATIMA PARISH

On Saturday, March 7, 2026, a Women's History Month Celebration was held at St. Agnes Our Lady of Fatima Church in collaboration with The Office of Black Catholic Ministries, honoring the lifetime achievements of Sister Juanita Shealey, CSJ, and Mrs. Edna Duffy, founder of the Duffy Liturgical Dance Ensemble.

The event began with an African Drum procession of the Wisdom Council and the Calling of Our Ancestors, requesting permission to proceed with the hymn, "Come Holy Spirit Come." The celebration began with performances featuring Tri-C Creative Dance Academy dancers performing "Over My Head I Hear Music in the Air", sung by soloist Barbara J. Barrett.

Dr. Regennia Williams of the Western Reserve Historical Society gave welcoming remarks and served as commentator. Phillis Clippis provided a historical overview of Black Catholics in Cleveland and the establishment of black parishes, beginning with Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament in 1922.

St. Agnes and Our Lady of Fatima Praise Dancers gave a tribute to Sister Juanita in motion to "Jesus Loves Me", accompanied by the soulful voices of Barbara J. Barrett, Sandra Gay Chapman and Mother Marcella Caffie. Those in attendance gave a standing ovation for Sister Juanita Shealey, CSJ, celebrating her remarkable 73 years of religious devotion and trailblazing leadership in education and Black Catholic ministry.

Terri Jackson, a former pupil of Mrs. Duffy, acknowledged the impact she made on her life and development and appreciation for the art of dance and music. Ms. Jackson then serenaded Mrs. Duffy with a song she had taught her.

A surprise tribute honored Mother Marcella Caffie, celebrating her unwavering faith, generosity and extraordinary musical gifts. After this uplifting moment, honorees and guests gathered for a Soul Food luncheon catered by Legacy Sauce.

## APRIL

April 11, 9:30am-3pm

Black Catholic Men's Retreat  
St. Agnes/Our Lady of  
Fatima Parish, Cleveland

April 16, 6:30pm-9pm

Catholic Jewish  
Bridgebuilders: Running and  
Speaking Against Hate  
Maltz Museum of Jewish  
Heritage, Beachwood

April 26, 11am-4pm

To the Heights: A Father-Son  
Retreat (7th-12th grade)  
Center for Pastoral  
Leadership, Wickliffe  
Guest speaker: Elvis Grbac,  
former quarterback and  
Super Bowl winner  
Tickets: \$35/person,  
scholarships available.  
Contact Rafe Lewis at  
rlewis@tobcle.org

## MAY

May 1, 6:30pm-8pm

Young Adult & Black  
Catholic Ministries - Wine  
& Cheese Dinner Social  
St. Agnes/Our Lady of  
Fatima, Cleveland

May 29-31, 2026

OGN Spring 2026 Renewal  
Weekend: Navigating Life  
with God's Perfect Vision  
Jesuit Retreat Center,  
Parma

Cost: \$150 per person for  
OGN members; \$100 per  
person for first time  
renewalists

*Includes overnight stay,  
meals and materials.*

## WOMEN'S HISTORY (CONT.)

During the luncheon another surprise tribute was made to Sr. Juanita Shealey, CSJ, by three students from Ss Robert and William Catholic School. Sister Juanita was delighted to receive a volume of 88 letters written by the school's seventh and eighth grade students, thanking her for the lasting impact she has made upon the church, school, and community. Sister clenched her binder with the words, "I'll keep this with me, this is special."

The celebration concluded with family and community members sharing even more touching reflections, followed by lively musical tributes that honored the enduring legacy of these remarkable women.



## COLLABORATIVE LENTEN REVIVAL

BY LETITIA JACKSON, ST. ALOYSIUS / ST. AGATHA PARISH

The Office of Black Catholic Ministries sponsored the Annual Collaborative Lenten Revival from March 18-20, 2026 at St Aloysius/St. Agatha Church. Bishop Edward Malesic officiated at our opening Ash Wednesday liturgy. Concelebrants were Fr. David Domanski, Pastor of Holy Spirit Church, Fr. Paul Dressler, Pastor of St. Agnes/Our Lady of Fatima Church and Fr. Dan Schlegel, Pastor of St. Raphael Church in Bay Village, Ohio.

Fr. Kareem echoed in word and song that all living things need to be rooted and fed as many came to the altar for prayer with expectations for an outpouring of God's Holy Spirit. The Spirit showed up, indeed, moving throughout the Church as we received ashes reminding us that we are dust and unto dust we shall return... that we were just pilgrims on the journey and stand in validation of one another.

Within the grandeur of St Aloysius/St. Agatha Church, we were enthralled with the splendor of celebratory and inspiring music and movements by the Diocesan Gospel Choir and Praise Dancers, respectively. The theme, "Rooted in Faith, Rising in Hope", sent ripples of inspiration and encouragement throughout the three-day event.

Close to 300 attendees braved the cold to return each night to continue to water the Roots of our Faith. The Revival concluded Friday with a community meal meant to fortify us on our Lenten journey.

# AFRICA'S ENDURING PRESENCE IN SCRIPTURE

BY WALTER MORRIS III



Dr. Cary Dabney, Assistant Professor of Theology at Walsh University, offered a powerful reminder that Africa has always been deeply woven into the biblical story. In his lecture, "African Presence in Scripture", Dr. Dabney challenged the common assumption that Africa appears only at the margins of the Bible, inviting listeners to rediscover a sacred heritage that spans from Genesis through the early Church.

By examining scripture alongside geography and history, Dr. Dabney showed that African nations such as Kush, Ethiopia, and the Land of Punt were central to the biblical world. These regions were not distant footnotes, but active participants in God's redemptive work.

He also highlighted key African figures whose faith shaped salvation history--Hagar, Zipporah, Ebed-Melech, Simon of Cyrene and the Ethiopian eunuch. Their stories affirm an important truth: Africa is foundational to the Bible, not peripheral. People of African descent are not encountering Christianity as outsiders, but reclaiming a faith connection that has existed since the very beginning.

We extend sincere thanks to Dr. Dabney for a lecture that was both enlightening and spiritually affirming, helping to reconnect many with Africa's enduring presence in God's story.

## MAY HE REST IN PEACE

BY PHILLIP CLIPPS, ST. ADALBERT/OUR LADY OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT CHURCH

My friend, Gregory Clifford, served as Chairman of the Diocesan Advisory Committee of the Office of Black Catholic Ministries before he moved to heavenly glory on Thursday, February 19, 2026.

I first met Greg Clifford in the mid-1980's when we worked as delegates from our parishes on the Black Catholic Advisory Board. He was a natural leader, and together we accomplished many good works. This is just one small aspect of the man his parish community called "Mr. Aloysius", because of his commitment and support to his home parish. Greg was an "always" kind of person - consistent in all his endeavors: family, church, community and profession - always willing to say "yes" to service.

His devotion to family and community serves as the blueprint for all of us striving to be better human beings. Greg did not waste his time on earth and his life will serve as an illustration for me to do the same. Time is precious, and he showed us how to use it well.



## JUNE

June 14, 2pm

Wedding Anniversary  
Jubilee

Cathedral of St. John the  
Evangelist, Cleveland  
For couples married in  
1976.

June 14-16, 2026

St. Cecilia Retreat for  
Music Ministers: Seeking  
Wholeness and Holiness  
Center for Pastoral  
Leadership, Wickliffe

June 19, 10am-4pm

Juneteenth Celebration  
of Freedom

St. Dominic Parish,  
Shaker Heights

Mass at 10am followed  
by food, fellowship & fun

Visit our website to learn  
more about these events:

[dioceseofcleveland.org/events](https://dioceseofcleveland.org/events)



# THEA BOWMAN: EMBRACING DIVERSITY

BY LORNA ASKEW, ST. DOMINIC PARISH

On February 7, 2026, the Racial Equity Task Force – Learning and Action Committee at St. Dominic Church hosted a community meal and dialogue honoring Servant of God Thea Bowman. Several people from around the Diocese gathered for an evening that included a light supper, music from the St. Dominic choir, and a presentation reflecting on Sister Thea's life and ministry. Known for her joyful faith and powerful witness, Sister Thea Bowman helped the Catholic Church more fully recognize and celebrate the gifts and traditions of African American Catholics. The diverse gathering of participants was encouraged to view the documentary, "Going Home Like a Shooting Star: Thea Bowman's Journey to Sainthood", in preparation for the event.

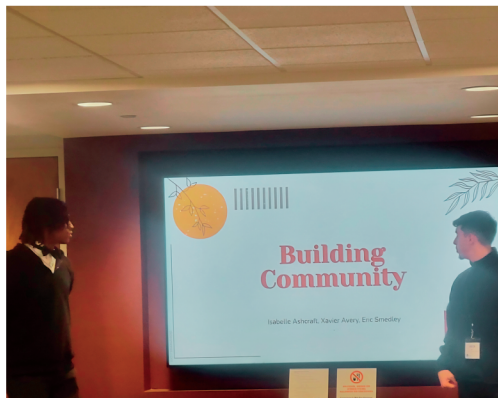
# BUILDING COMMUNITY THROUGH FAITH AND FELLOWSHIP

BY ERIC SMEDLEY, JR., ST. AGNES+OUR LADY OF FATIMA PARISH

I am grateful to have had the opportunity to grow not only as a leader, but as a servant to my community during my past two years as a member of the Cleveland Diocesan Youth Advisory Council. The experience challenged me to think deeply about the needs of those around me and how faith can be a powerful force for connection and change.

In my second year, my group, including Xavier Avery, focused on community-building projects. Mine was called "Full Court Faith". The goal was simple and meaningful: A welcoming space was created for African American youth to gather, stay active, and grow spiritually. Every Wednesday, we hosted an open gym followed by a Bible study, blending fellowship, mentorship and faith in a way that felt both engaging and impactful. Bishop Edward Malesic listened attentively as we presented the outcome of our projects.

"Full Court Faith" soon became more than just a weekly event, it became a community. It offered young people a positive alternative, helping them off the streets and feeling a sense of belonging within the Church. Through this project, I saw firsthand how consistent presence, faith, and genuine care can bring people together and inspire change. The message that I carry forward from this experience is "strong communities are built through intentional connection, faith, and showing up for one another."



Visit our website to learn more about our ministries and subscribe to receive our email newsletter.  
[dioceseofcleveland.org/BlkCatholicsCLE](https://dioceseofcleveland.org/BlkCatholicsCLE)

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