

**An Account from *Holy Trinity News*
of the 1994 Reconciliation Service
with Epiphany Parishioners**

**Historic Reconciliation with Epiphany Parishioners
Asks Forgiveness for Past Racism
by *Kathy Millian* (1)**

Holy Trinity Church offered a public apology April 19, 1994, to its African American members and their descendants who, as a result of racial discrimination, left Holy Trinity 71 years ago and founded Epiphany Parish of Georgetown.

It was an historic event. It took place in the Holy Trinity sanctuary in the form of a prayer service called "Reconciliation: Our Story."

The Reconciliation focused on racial harmony with special attention to Holy Trinity's own history of racial discrimination and injustice in the years when the African-American members of this parish were segregated in the balcony and not permitted to take part in all aspects of parish life.

The Holy Trinity Racism and Intercultural Sensitivity Group researched the history and planned the service over two years, with close cooperation from the Office of Black Catholics of the Archdiocese of Washington. It was cosponsored by Trinity's Adult Faith Formation Committee.

Kathy Millian represented the Racism and Intercultural Sensitivity Group and read the apology at the prayer service. (2)

"As a parishioner of Holy Trinity and on behalf of all parishioners of Holy Trinity who have gone before me," said Millian, "I ask the forgiveness of the African American members of this parish and their descendants for the discrimination, injustice, and unkindness that they and their families suffered here.

"I apologize for the active wrongs that hurt you and for the wrongs that were caused by us standing by and doing nothing in the face of unfairness."

Jackie Wilson, Executive Director of the Office of Black Catholics, said, "It was an inspiring and healing event for me to participate in, to hear from their own lips the

struggle of the African American people of Holy Trinity who held onto the faith rather than turn their backs on the Catholic Church.”

The Reverend Monsignor Raymond G. East, (3) Pastor of St. Teresa of Avila parish in southeast Washington, presided over the service and offered a libation to the ancestors of both parishes to honor and ask them to be present as “our story” was recalled. The Gospel story of the man born blind was dramatically portrayed by members of Epiphany, St. Aloysius, and Holy Trinity under the direction of Kathy Hartley.

The highlight of the evening was Dorothy W. Thomas’ telling of the story of her own girlhood recollections of being a member of Holy Trinity parish. Thomas was a member of the parish from 1912 to 1923 and has been a member of Epiphany parish since its founding.

She recalled the year a new nun told the African American girls at Sunday school she was shocked they had not been allowed to participate in the May procession in the past and that they would be in the procession that year.

When Thomas and the other girls appeared on the appointed day in their white dresses and with their flowers, they sat in a classroom while the white girls lined up and left. After a while, a man came into the room and told them that a mistake had been made and that they would not be in the procession.

Her family took the girls to St. Augustine’s Church (then located at 15th and M Streets), but by the time they arrived, the May procession was already over. The girls walked back to Georgetown from St. Augustine’s, leaving petals of their flowers along the way as their own devotion to the Blessed Mother.

Thomas received a standing ovation after telling her story.

In his homily, Monsignor East urged parishioners to struggle against racism, which in different forms remains as much of an obstacle today as it was in the times when the church required African American members to sit in the balcony, with screens separating them from the choir.

He pointed out that, years after the end of enforced segregation, the Roman Catholic churches in our city remain largely self-segregated. He emphasized that although it was long time coming, the prayer service was a first step, not a culminating

event.

At the conclusion of the prayer service, Monsignor East and Pastor Larry Madden, S.J., (4) offered pledges to carry on the purpose of the service. Fr. Madden pledged to work with members of the parish community to combat racism and promote understanding. Monsignor East pledged to remain in the Roman Catholic Church and to challenge it to end racism.

A reception in the Parish Center, organized by Jo Owen, followed the prayer service.

The Racism and Intercultural Sensitivity Group looks forward to continuing Holy Trinity's connection with its former members who founded Epiphany Parish and to new projects that combat racism and encourage understanding. . . .

Apology

As a parishioner of Holy Trinity and on behalf of all parishioners of Holy Trinity who have gone before me, I ask the forgiveness of the African American members of this parish and their descendants for the discrimination, injustice and unkindness that they and their families suffered here.

I apologize for the active wrongs that hurt you and for the wrongs that were caused by us standing by and doing nothing in the face of unfairness.

We greatly admire your faith and the courage and strength that led you to establish your own place of worship, Epiphany Parish.

In the last song of this evening's service, we ask that on judgment day we will all find an open door at the house of our Lord Jesus. I pray that the founders of Epiphany and their families will from this day forward feel that they can find an open door at this house of our Lord Jesus.

Document Source: *Holy Trinity News*, May-June, 1994. Transcribed and annotated by Peter J. Albert

Notes

1. Kathy Millian is grateful to Jacqueline Wilson, past executive director of the Office of Black Catholics of the Archdiocese of Washington (1979 to 2002), for her assistance and advice on the preparation of Holy Trinity's Reconciliation Service, and she mentions Cyprian Davis, O.S.B.'s, 1990 book *The History of Black Catholics in the United States* as an important factor in generating the work of the committee (conversation with Peter J. Albert, June 19, 2023). Parishioner Kathy Hartley recalls the video *Black Georgetown Remembered*, released in 1989, and Georgetown University Press's publication of that book in 1991, as further stimulating the awareness of the committee that worked on the Reconciliation Service (Kathy Hartley to Albert, Apr. 30, 2023).

Members of the planning committee for the Reconciliation Service included Margaret Costello, James Dyson, Rev. Mgrs. Raymond East, Dorothy Gray, Kathy Hartley, Rea Howarth, Ken Jacques, Fr. Joe Lacey, S.J., Ray McGovern, Kathy Millian, Sr. Elizabeth O'Connor, Jo Owen, Darlene Palmer, Jane Parks, Dorothy Thomas, Bob Vollinger, and Jackie Wilson.

2. The text of the apology read by Kathy Millian was printed at the end of the article.

3. The Rev. Mgrs. Raymond G. East, pastor of St. Teresa of Avila Parish from 1989 to 1997 and again since 2005.

4. Lawrence J. Madden, S.J. (1933-2011), pastor of Holy Trinity from 1993 to 2000.