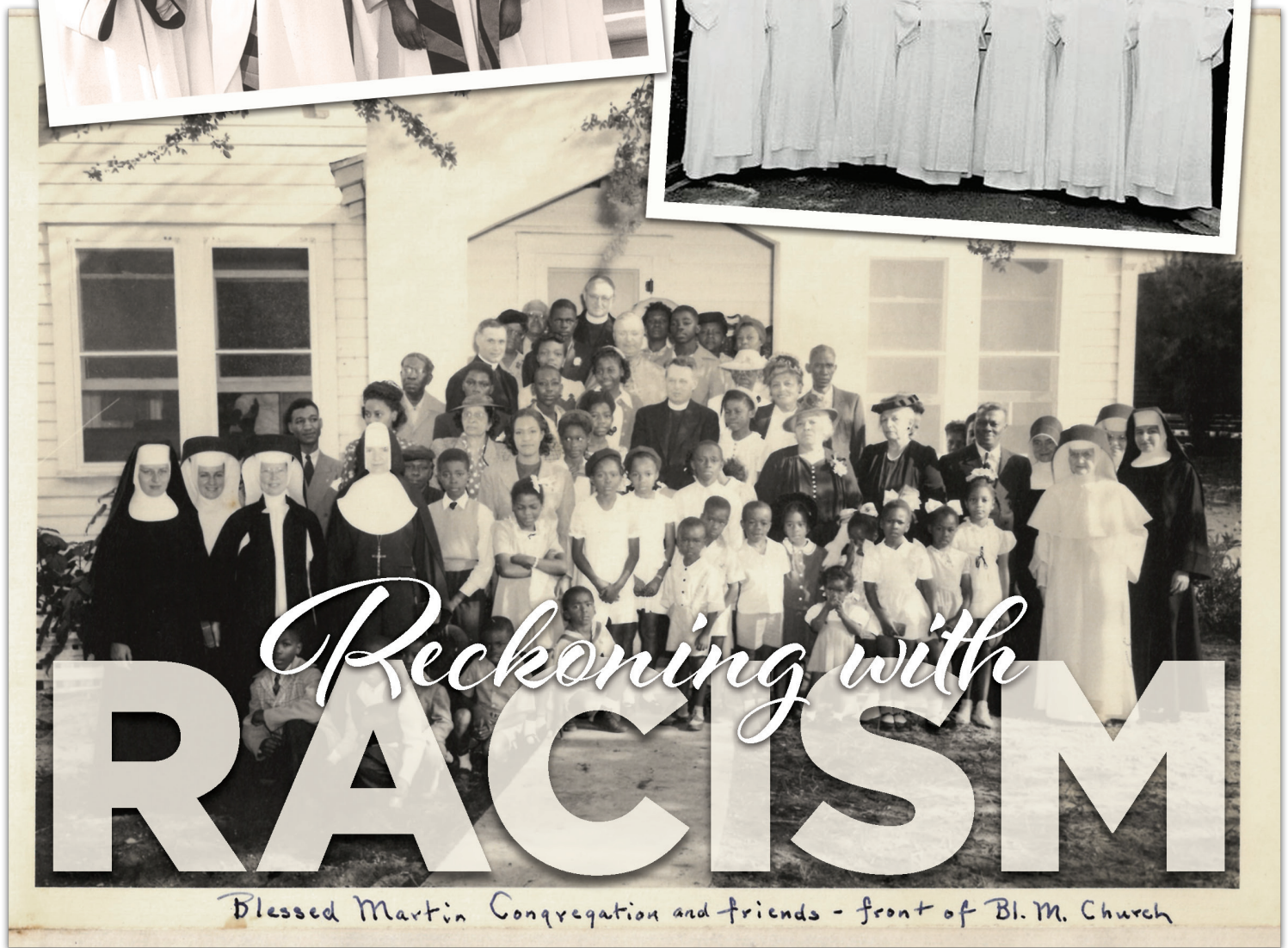




Adrian Dominican Sisters



Blessed Martin Congregation and friends - front of Bl. M. Church

A LENTEN JOURNEY

Reckoning with the Impact of Racism, White Supremacy and White Privilege in the Admission and Withdrawal of Women of Color in the Congregations of the Dominican Sisters of Adrian and Edmonds

A Lenten Journey

February 2021

Dear Sisters and Associates,


As you embark on this Lenten journey of *Reckoning with Racism*, we invite the following steps:

1. Read, reflect, and pray with the material. Note your observations, responses, remembrances.
2. Share your responses with one or more persons. Note what you are adding to the story, learning, challenged by, want to study further, desire to change.
3. Write and send your individual and/or collective reflections, stories, responses, additions to generalcouncil@adriandominicans.org or:


General Council
Reckoning with Racism
1257 E. Siena Heights Drive
Adrian, MI 49221


Your responses will expand and enrich our story of *Reckoning with Racism*, adding to our archival collection and becoming available for a more complete telling of this critical part of our Dominican story.

Gratefully,


Patricia Siemen, OP


Mary Margaret Pachucki, OP


Frances Nadolny, OP


Patricia Harvat, OP


Elise D. García, OP

General Council of the Adrian Dominican Sisters

Reckoning with Racism: A Lenten Journey was written by Elise D. García, OP, drawing on archival research conducted by Josephine Gaugier, OP, with Congregation Archivist Lisa Schell and Assistant Archivist Beverly Bobola, OP, supported by Congregation Secretary Marie Joy Finfera, OP. It includes a personal reflection by Jamie T. Phelps, OP, PhD, the first African American to enter the Adrian Dominican Congregation, in 1959.

*The Catholic Church's record on racial justice is not good. And if we want to give credit to sisters for building the church, they are also deeply implicated, then, in the church's failure to be a living witness for racial justice.*¹

- SHANNEN DEE WILLIAMS, PHD

I N T R O D U C T I O N

At the 2016 National Assembly of the Leadership Conference on Women Religious (LCWR), Dr. Shannen Dee Williams provided an overview on the history of racism and U.S. religious life, highlighting excerpts from her forthcoming book on the subject, *Subversive Habits: The Untold Story of Black Catholic Nuns in the United States*. Members of the Adrian Dominican Leadership Council attending the Assembly joined in affirming an LCWR resolution committing members to “examine the root causes of injustice, particularly racism, and our own complicity as congregations, and to work to effect systemic change.”²

Earlier that year at the General Chapter of 2016, the Adrian Dominican Sisters reaffirmed our 2004 Vision calling us to “challenge heresies of local and global domination, exploitation, and greed that privilege some, dehumanize others, and ravage Earth.” The Vision calls us to “confront our racist attitudes and root out racist practices in our lives and systems.”

At the 2016 Chapter, the Congregation also adopted two Enactments related to racism. In one, we recognized that “racism, violence and intolerance of diversity fuel marginalization” and pledged “our lives, money and other resources” to help build resiliency with people who are relegated to the margins. In another Enactment, we rooted ourselves in the Gospel in our commitment to “embrace and nurture our rich diversity.”

In the context of the call of our Enactments and Vision – and Dr. Williams’ insistence that “if reconciliation is possible, the first step is to recognize this painful history of racism”³ the General Council determined to obtain a review of the records of admission and withdrawal of women of color in the Adrian Dominican Archive, which includes the archival records of the Dominican Sisters of Edmonds prior to the merger in 2003. In 2017, Prioress Patricia Siemen, OP, asked Josephine Gaugier, OP, to undertake the archival research and analysis with the aim of finding any materials or documentation that could shed light on how women of color were welcomed into our Dominican sisterhood and/or whether women of color withdrew as a result of overt or covert racism.

¹ See Dawn Araujo-Hawkins, “Reckoning: White sisters respond to their own racism, to one historian’s call for justice,” Global Sisters Report, January 8, 2018, at <https://www.globalsistersreport.org/news/trends-equality/reckoning-white-sisters-respond-their-own-racism-one-historians-call-justice>.

² LCWR Resolution at <https://lcwr.org/social-justice/systemic-causes-injustice-0>, 2016 National Assembly.

³ Shannen Dee Williams, LCWR 2016 Assembly address on “Racism and US Religious Life,” from notes taken by Elise D. García, OP, August 12, 2016.

As this research was undertaken, it became clear that no matter how exhaustive the search, the data uncovered in the Adrian Dominican Archive fell woefully short of revealing a true picture of the reality of the experience of women of color seeking admission. The objective truth is that during the 135-year history of the Congregation, only six African-American women have entered, and two remain. What is the story behind that reality?

The focus of the study shifted to provide a common foundation of information on which members of the Congregation could construct a more complete narrative, adding context and content from their own knowledge and experience. This study now becomes a vehicle for all of us to reckon with the impact of racism, white supremacy, and white privilege in the admission and withdrawal of women of color in our Dominican sisterhood – and beyond.

Reckoning with Racism: A Lenten Journey is structured to invite reflection, discussion, and feedback through one-on-one conversations, Mission Group meetings, or other gatherings. It includes the following sections, with reflection and discussion questions:

- 1. A Brief Historical Context:** *Revisiting our Dominican story within the contours of the larger surrounding story of race, racism, and white supremacy in the United States.* (Page 5)
- 2. Scope of Research:** *How the archival study was conducted and what it involved.* (Page 9)
- 3. Problematics in Methodology:** *The challenges of undertaking this study.* (Page 11)
- 4. Findings**
 - **The Numbers:** *What the numbers tell us, and fail to tell us.* (Page 13)
 - **The Text:** *A few findings where words are revealing.* (Page 15)
 - **A Survey:** *An inquiry into attitudes and practices.* (Page 18)
 - **Communications:** *Who was pictured in our printed brochures, inviting vocations.* (Page 20)
- 5. Other Findings:** *Cross-cultural engagements offer another layer for consideration in the reckoning.* (Page 23)
- 6. Entering While Black:** *An Adrian Dominican Sister speaks of her experience of racism as the first African-American to enter the Congregation.* (Page 35)
- 7. Revisiting a Call:** *Revisiting a call – 45 years later – to focus on “minority vocations.”* (Page 43)
- 8. Toward Completing the Study:** *What we need to share in order to better comprehend this story ourselves, for future generations to understand it, and for all of us to transform it into a new narrative of a beloved community embracing racial equity, justice, and love as women of faith made, one and all, in the image of God.* (Page 53)

It is up to each of us, now, to enter into the story, find our place in it, reflect upon it, engage in conversation about it, submit our collective additions to it – to begin writing the radical new boundary-breaking Gospel story we all wish to create and live into as a beloved community.

A B R I E F H I S T O R I C A L C O N T E X T

Remember, Ethiopia was a Christian nation earlier than many nations in Europe. It was a Christian kingdom before Ireland was evangelized, before more of North Germany was evangelized, and before Poland was a Catholic country.

... Black Catholics arrived with the Spaniards in Florida in the 16th century.

There has been much ignorance. There's the perception that if you've got Black people who are Catholic, somebody has been messing with their religion – that they should be Baptist or something. ... The church in this country reflects the problems of the country, which has yet to solve the question of race; that has been America's tragic flaw.⁴

- C Y P R I A N D A V I S , O S B , P H D

The origin of our branch of Dominican Sisters in the United States dates to 1853 – just prior to the Civil War – when four Dominican nuns arrived in New York City from Holy Cross Monastery in Regensburg, Germany. During their time in mission in Williamsburg (Brooklyn) and on Second Street in lower Manhattan, New York, the German nuns would have encountered – probably for the first time in their lives – Black people, enslaved as well as free, and been aware of the Abolitionist movement and the political and social-economic tensions over slavery that would lead to the Civil War.⁵

⁴ Cyprian Davis, OSB, 1993 interview with editors of *U.S. Catholic*, “Our Faith: A U.S. Catholic Interview – In the Beginning, There Were Black Catholics,” published in *U.S. Catholic* on October 12, 2020. See: <https://uscatholic.org/articles/202010/in-the-beginning-there-were-black-catholics/>

⁵ The nuns were likely unaware, as most Catholics are to this day, of the role the Catholic Church played in sanctioning slavery and the exploitation of Native peoples. As Shannen Dee Williams wrote in the *National Catholic Reporter*, “In the 15th century, the Catholic Church became the first global institution to declare that Black lives did not matter. In a series of papal bulls beginning with Pope Nicholas V’s *Dum Diversas* (1452) and including Pope Alexander VI’s *Inter Caetera* (1493), the church not only authorized the perpetual enslavement of Africans and the seizure of “non-Christian” lands, but morally sanctioned the development of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. This trade forcibly transported at least 12.5 million enslaved African men, women and children to the Americas and Europe to enrich European and often Catholic coffers. It also caused the deaths of tens of millions of Africans and Native Americans over nearly four centuries.” See <https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/church-must-make-reparation-its-role-slavery-segregation>, July 15, 2020. The “claim of Christian supremacy over Native nations” was enshrined in U.S. law in 1823 by the Supreme Court decision *Johnson v. McIntosh* with a principle Chief Justice John Marshall summarized as: “discovery [by Christian nations] gave an exclusive right to extinguish the Indian title of occupancy either by purchase or by conquest.” See Jeannine Hill Fletcher, *The Sin of White Supremacy: Christianity, Racism, & Religious Diversity in America* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2018), p. 51, citing U.S. Supreme Court, *Johnson & Graham’s Lessee v. McIntosh* 21 U.S. (8 Wheat.) 543, 57 (1823).

The nuns lived their religious lives largely as teachers through the Civil War, Emancipation, and Reconstruction. As the Most Holy Rosary Congregation on Second Street continued to grow, the community responded in 1879 to the first of several requests from Catholic parishes in Adrian, Michigan, and in 1890 to requests from Aberdeen in Washington Territory. By then, the brief racial progress in the United States brought about by Reconstruction came to an abrupt end. The gains of Reconstruction-era voting and civil rights were systematically dismantled, ushering in almost four decades of Jim Crow laws that aimed to deprive Black people of their Constitutional rights, human dignity, liberty, and economic and educational opportunities. In the Southwest, Jim Crow laws extended to Mexican Americans who also were subjected to segregated and inferior schools and inhumane treatment, with signs on restaurants and public facilities declaring, “No Mexicans or Dogs Allowed.” Throughout this time, vigilantes terrorized Black people with impunity, lynching more than 4,400 Black people between 1877 and 1950 and imprisoning thousands more, providing the state with free labor.⁶

Resistance to oppression led to a period of racial uplift at the turn of the century, with the establishment of enduring institutions like the National Black Catholic Congress (the spiritual descendent of the five 19th century Catholic Afro-American Congresses) and the NAACP, and a vibrant, if small, Black middle class. Resistance also led to violent uprisings and to the Great Migration north when more than six million African Americans left the rural South for the North, Midwest, and West from 1915 to 1970.⁷ Dominican Sisters of Adrian and Everett (later, Edmonds) missioned in Midwestern and Western cities would have experienced the growing populations of African Americans, including Black Catholics.⁸

During these decades, Black men served in two world wars, defending freedoms that continued to be denied to them and their families.⁹ Between the wars, in the 1930s, under a New Deal program

⁶ “The lynching of African Americans was terrorism, a widely supported campaign to reinforce racial subordination and segregation.” See “Lynching in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror,” Equal Justice Initiative at <https://eji.org/reports/lynching-in-america/>. “The Nazis were impressed by the American custom of lynching its subordinate caste of African-Americans, having become aware of the ritual torture and mutilations that typically accompany them. Hitler especially marveled at the American ‘knack for maintaining an air of robust innocence in the wake of mass death.’” See Isabel Wilkerson, *Caste: The Origins of our Discontents* (New York: Random House, 2020), p. 81, quoting Eugene DeFries Bétit, *Collective Amnesia: American Apartheid: African Americans’ 400 Years in North America, 1619-2019* (Xlibris, 2019), p. 282.

⁷ See Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America’s Great Migration* (New York: Vintage Books/Random House, 2010), p. 9. “Over time, the mass relocation would come to dwarf the California Gold Rush of the 1850s with its one hundred thousand participants and the Dust Bowl migration of some three hundred thousand people from Oklahoma and Arkansas to California in the 1930s.” Wilkerson, p. 10.

⁸ “In Chicago alone, the black population rocketed from 44,103 (just under three percent of the population) at the start of the Migration to more than one million at the end of it. By the turn of the twenty-first century, blacks made up a third of the city’s residents, with more blacks living in Chicago than in the entire state of Mississippi.” See Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns*, p. 11.

⁹ During the second World War, 120,000 Japanese Americans were forced into internment camps. “The roundups began quietly within 48 hours after the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, on December 7, 1941. The announced purpose was to protect the West Coast. Significantly, the incarceration program got underway despite a warning; in January 1942, a naval intelligence officer in Los Angeles reported that Japanese-Americans were being perceived as a threat almost entirely ‘because of the physical characteristics of the people.’” See T.A. Frail, “The Injustice of Japanese-American Internment Camps Resonates Strongly to This Day,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, January/February 2017 at <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/injustice-japanese-americans-internment-camps-resonates-strongly-180961422/>.

to provide housing to low- and middle-income families, a state-sponsored system of segregation was initiated that pushed Black people and other people of color into housing projects. The newly established Federal Housing Administration furthered segregation by refusing to insure mortgages in and near African-American neighborhoods – a practice known as “redlining.”¹⁰ All the cities where U.S. Dominican Sisters were missioned during the past century and the families they served were impacted by these policies, which created and maintained segregated neighborhoods, businesses, schools, and parishes.

These unjust and oppressive policies were continued after the Second World War when Black veterans were systematically excluded from the housing and educational benefits afforded to their white counterparts by the GI bill.¹¹

In the 1950s and 1960s, intensified resistance to decades’ long oppression led to the Civil Rights era, with federal anti-discrimination legislation enacted to bring an end to Jim Crow. Continued unrest over perduring inequities triggered by the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., led to violent uprisings and further demands for racial equality and justice. These were joined by similar demands among Latina/os and Native Americans in organized struggles against decades of white domination and oppression.¹² The Fair Housing Act of 1968 made redlining illegal but decades of exclusion from generational wealth building through housing continues to impact Black families to this day. Oppressive practices continued in the late 20th century through discriminatory drug laws and sentencing, resulting in skyrocketing incarceration rates for Black men; racial profiling; backtracking on voting rights; and impunity in lethal policing practices toward people of color, especially Black men, into the first two decades of the 21st century.

¹⁰ See Fletcher, *The Sin of White Supremacy*, pp. 66-68. “[A]ccess to these government-sponsored programs was racialized. ... White Americans made a series of deliberate decisions to deny blacks access to urban housing markets and to reinforce their spatial segregation. ... The widespread practice of redlining, whereby banks and insurance companies color-coded areas deemed hazardous due to non-White residents and withheld loans and coverage, was driven by the racial project of White supremacy and a hierarchy of humanity as it manifest in the housing system.”

¹¹ “While the GI Bill’s language did not specifically exclude African-American veterans from its benefits, it was structured in a way that ultimately shut doors for the 1.2 million Black veterans who had bravely served their country during World War II, in segregated ranks.” See <https://www.history.com/news/gi-bill-black-wwii-veterans-benefits>.

¹² The Indian Removal Act of 1830, for example, forced Native Americans from their lands, resettled to other territory “of no interest to whites. Their property was then made available for white settlers. This stolen land became the basis for white economic enrichment that could be passed on as an inheritance to future generations. This economic disenfranchisement led to the impoverishment of future generations of Native Americans.” See Bryan N. Massingale, *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2010), p. 38.

REFLECTION AND DIALOGUE

As you consider this brief historical context, what questions arise for you about our history as Dominican Sisters and the racial reality in which we have been immersed?

How conscious were you of this history as you were living it then – and living it now? What stories can you tell that help shed light on it?

What would you now want to be sure is included in the telling of our history as Dominican Sisters in the United States?

S C O P E O F R E S E A R C H

The cross of Jesus calls us to conversion, to radical transformation of life for life. ... Lived conversion of heart, mind, and action is not what someone else must do, but who we must become. For it is in our social dis-order, not someone else's, that social oppression has taken root. It is our consciousness, not someone else's, that is permeated with and troubled by disgraces of social sin. The cross of the Jewish Jesus evokes our integrity, calls us to responsibility for one another, calls us to entrust our lives to the dangerous Jesus.¹³

- M . S H A W N C O P E L A N D , P H D

This study of admissions and withdrawals of women of color in the Adrian Dominican Archive was undertaken during the course of 18 months in 2018 to 2019, resuming for an additional three months in 2020. It was conducted by Josephine Gaugier, OP, with support from Marie Joy Finfera, OP, Secretary of the Congregation; Lisa Schell, Congregation Archivist; and Beverly Bobola, OP, Assistant Archivist.

Among records of the Dominican Sisters of Adrian, the study included a review of:

- more than 120 boxes of archival files identified as “Withdrawn Sisters” and “Withdrawn professed, novices, postulants/candidates,” dating from 1902 to 2020; and
- 25 boxes containing files of Mothers General/Prioresses, Provincials, and Directors of Novices and/or Formation.

Among records of the Dominican Sisters of Edmonds, the study included a review of:

- five boxes containing files of Sisters who withdrew from the Congregation of the Holy Cross between 1907 and 2003 (the year of the merger);
- five boxes identified as “Formation House, Initial Formation and Sister Formation;” and
- 14 boxes of material, titled “Postulant Declaration, Profession Formula” (one box), “Official Correspondence” (one box), and “Edmonds Official Prioress Correspondences” (12 boxes).

¹³ M. Shawn Copeland, *Knowing Christ Crucified: The Witness of African American Religious Experience* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2018), p. xxiv.

The review aimed to uncover any direct or indirect communications regarding issues of race or discrimination found in:

- correspondence related to initial inquiries and application forms of all women who were received and later withdrew from the Congregation, and post-communications related to these women;
- profession lists and postulant lists;
- any questionnaires and/or Sister Formation Conference materials from 1954 to 1974 to ascertain if the Adrian Dominican Sisters or Edmonds Dominican Sisters participated in any of the Conference's surveys or sociological studies;¹⁴ and
- any other related materials.

In addition, as part of the study, Sister Jo spoke with members of the Adrian Dominican Congregation, including four women of color, who had personal knowledge of the life experiences of some of the women of color who left the Adrian Dominican Congregation.

¹⁴ In particular, the review searched for evidence of Adrian Dominican participation in a sociological study of religious communities cited by Dr. Shannen Dee Williams that was conducted by Raymond Bernard, SJ, in 1941-1949, titled "Consequences of Racial Segregation" in *American Catholic Sociological Review* (Vol. 10, No. 2). No trace of this study nor of Adrian Dominican or Edmonds Dominican participation in it was found in the Archive. "Between 1957 and 1958 and this is during the great expansion of the Black Catholic population as a result of the Great Migration, [Bernard] had identified over 350 vocations that were lost – either denied or women who were allowed to go in but something happened and they left within a few months. 355 between 1957 and 1958 during these greatest growths of the Black Catholic community where you're having tens of thousands of these Black kids going into these Catholic schools in the urban North, Midwest and West. ... What's interesting is those are the ones that are documented. Many of the women I interviewed said, 'I never wrote the letter. I asked my teacher. I asked the visiting vocation director.' And so the rejection was oral. There would be no written record of the rejection. So to think about 355 that were lost in one year alone, we're talking hundreds if not thousands of vocations. And that is profound when you begin to think about these vocations of these women who did go in. Sister Cora Marie Billings, the first Black woman accepted into a community in Philadelphia, she herself nurtures over 10 vocations, 10 vocations! Think about what would have happened for the Church in that moment if their gifts, their spiritual and intellectual gifts would have been welcomed, nurtured in those communities. And certainly they could have brought some clarity with regard to racism. I think we would be in a very different place with the Church in terms of our leadership with those vocations. And that's just the women who were doing some of the very hard work of educating, nursing and building and sustaining." See "Why Black Catholic History Matters: An Interview with Dr. Shannen Dee Williams, Creator of #BlackHistoryIsCatholicHistory" at <http://villanovachurchmanagement.com/home/webinars/why-black-catholic-history-matters-an-interview-with-dr-shannen-dee-williams-creator-of-blackhistoryiscatholichistory/>, transcribed by Elise D. García, OP.

P R O B L E M A T I C S I N M E T H O D O L O G Y

We are, each of us, responsible for every decision we make that hurts or harms another human being. We are responsible for recognizing that what happened in previous generations at the hands of or to people who look like us set the stage for the world we now live in and that what has gone before us grants us advantages or burdens through no effort or fault of our own, gains or deficits that others who do not look like us often do not share.

We are responsible for our own ignorance or, with time and openhearted enlightenment, our own wisdom. We are responsible for ourselves and our own deeds or misdeeds in our time and in our own space and will be judged accordingly by succeeding generations.¹⁵

- I S A B E L W I L K E R S O N , P U L I T Z E R J O U R N A L I S T

The first challenge in undertaking the study was to identify women of color in the Congregation's archival records. The application forms of the Dominican Sisters of Adrian have never included questions about race or ethnicity, only a question about "Nationality." The application forms of the Dominican Sisters of Edmonds never included questions about race, ethnicity, or nationality.

The nationality question on the Adrian Dominican application form was changed in 1970 to one inquiring about citizenship. It came about as part of a revision of the application form made in 1969, following the establishment of a Pre-Admissions Office. The form then began to ask: "Citizenship: Are you a native-born American? If a naturalized citizen, give date of final naturalization papers."

The study relies on indications in the records of a woman's self-identification as a person of color and, in the case of the Adrian Dominicans, it infers a woman's identity as a "person of color" from her response to the "Nationality" question. In so doing, the study errs on the side of being more expansive, e.g., identifying all women from Spanish-speaking and Middle Eastern countries as women of color.

As such, candidates, novices, and Sisters identified as "women of color" in the Adrian Dominican Congregation are women whose records showed one of the following identities: African American,

¹⁵ Wilkerson, *Caste*, pp. 387-388.

Armenian, Bahamian, Colombian, Cuban, Dominican Republic, Guatemalan, Japanese, Lebanese, Maltese, Mexican, Native American, Peruvian, Portuguese, Puerto Rican, Spanish. The study found women identified as Hispanic and Filipina in the records of the Edmonds Dominicans.

Since 2003, neither nationality nor citizenship questions appear on the Congregation’s admissions forms. Ethnic, racial, and/or nationality identification is established in conversation with new applicants.¹⁶

REFLECTION AND DIALOGUE

What does the challenge of identifying “women of color” mean – for purposes of this study and as an aspect of our history?

What do you make of our not inquiring about a woman’s race or ethnic self-identification? What are the various ways we might interpret that omission? Do you think questions of race and ethnicity should be raised in admissions forms? Why or why not?

What does it mean, as Isabel Wilkerson writes, to be “responsible for our own ignorance or, with time and openhearted enlightenment, our own wisdom”?

¹⁶ Per Tarianne DeYonker, OP, Co-Director of Vocation Outreach, 2018-2021, in conversation with Josephine Gaugier, OP, in November 2020.

FINDINGS

I am a middle-aged, African American woman religious who belongs to a historically German, international congregation. I joined my Toledo, Ohio, province in 1980, and I am one of only two African American women in our four United States provinces. ... What do we do now to prepare ourselves to welcome women of color called to share religious life with us?

... I have been agitating and advocating for deep conversations about race and racial disparities with my community [since the 1990s]. For the most part, what I have experienced is an allergic reaction to engaging these issues in concrete and systematic ways.¹⁷

- L A R E I N E - M A R I E M O S E L Y , S N D , P H D

THE NUMBERS

During the 118 years under study – from 1902 to 2020 – 1,693 Novices and Professed Sisters and 783 Postulants or Candidates¹⁸ withdrew from the Adrian Dominican Congregation.¹⁹ The earliest date a woman of color (as identified by the study) withdrew from the Congregation was in 1945. The Archive contains no individual files for Postulants who withdrew, only their names and dates of withdrawal. Beginning in 1969, individual files of Candidates who withdrew were retained so it is possible to identify women of color among them, using the same methodology.

Given the available records, the study focuses on Novices and Professed Sisters who withdrew from the Adrian Dominican Congregation since 1945 and Candidates who withdrew since 1969.

¹⁷ LaReine-Marie Mosely, SND, “Intercultural Communities for Mission: Considerations of Race and Gender,” in *Engaging Our Diversity: Interculturality and Consecrated Life Today*, eds. Maria Cimperman, RSCJ, and Roger P. Schroeder, SVD (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2020), pp. 164-165.

¹⁸ Although there is no specific citation in the Formation files marking the change in usage of the term “Postulant” to “Candidate,” it appears to have taken place around 1969. Of the 783 Postulants or Candidates, the study found that 661 Postulants withdrew from 1926 to 1969 and 122 Candidates withdrew in the subsequent years to 2020.

¹⁹ The Adrian Dominican Sisters became the independent Congregation of the Most Holy Rosary, Adrian, Michigan, on June 27, 1923; withdrawals from 1902 to 1923 would have been from the Congregation of the Most Holy Rosary, Newburgh, New York.

RECKONING WITH RACISM: A Lenten Journey

During the past 75 years, 1,442 Novices and Professed Sisters withdrew, including 87 identified as women of color from the following racial or national identifications:

3 - African American	4 - Lebanon
1 - Armenia	2 - Malta
1 - Bahamas	12 - Mexico
1 - Colombia	1 - Native American
2 - Cuba	1 - Peru
14 - Dominican Republic	8 - Portugal
2 - Guatemala	13 - Puerto Rico
1 - Japan	21 - Spain

The study found that 122 Candidates withdrew from 1969 to 2020, including 14 identified as women of color from the following racial or national identifications:

1 - Bahamas	1 - Philippines
2 - Cuba	2 - Portugal
5 - Dominican Republic	1 - Puerto Rico
1 - Korea	1 - Vietnam

The archival search found the files of 263 women who withdrew from the Congregation of the Holy Cross of Everett (later Edmonds), Washington, from 1907 to 2003.²⁰ Postulants, Novices and Professed are all filed together as “Former Sisters and Applicants.” Through a review of each file and additional feedback, the study discerned that seven of the 263 who withdrew were women of color:

- 4 - Hispanic/Latina
- 2 - Philippines
- 1 - African American

REFLECTION AND DIALOGUE

As a white woman, what was your experience of entering with women of color? How aware were you of race as you entered?

²⁰ The Dominican Sisters of Edmonds, previously of Everett and Aberdeen, became the independent Congregation of the Holy Cross, Everett, Washington, on April 8, 1923; withdrawals from 1907 to 1923 would have been from the Congregation of the Most Holy Rosary, Newburgh, New York.

As a woman of color, what was your experience of entering as one of only a few or the only woman of color? How aware were you of race as you entered?

THE TEXT

The archival search included a review of correspondence between the women of color who withdrew and their prioresses, formation directors, or local superiors. An examination of the records of the 87 women of color who withdrew as Novices and Professed Sisters from the Dominican Sisters of Adrian during the 75-year period under study uncovered seven instances where statements hinting at or revealing experiences of racial or cultural discrimination were included among reasons for leaving the Congregation.²¹ These comments are excerpted below:

“I felt avoided and intentionally excluded.”

“I know why I am bitter and I am working at it.”

“Perhaps I am finding it difficult to relate to a local community of nuns because I have been so acculturated as a Latin American as a result of my Island experience and am not willing to become deculturated once again as I had been previously.”

“Cultural and language adjustments too much, yet I experienced loving respect in leaving.”

“As part of my discernment, I have concluded, in spite of any consequences, that I do not trust the Institution anymore, because there is not a guarantee that I will not feel mistreated, for reasons, I can only guess, such as racism.”

²¹ In addition to the records of these 87 women of color who withdrew, hundreds of pages of correspondence with women inquiring about religious life in the Adrian Dominican Congregation were reviewed. The letters give no indication if any were from women of color; the responses indicate every woman received encouraging responses, with correspondence sometimes lasting two to three years.

“I regret that the local houses where I have lived for the past six years have not been so Spirit-filled.”

“After having moved eight times in the past 6 years (excluding summers) and after some very ugly experiences, I find a definite need to settle down in one place for a very long time and to be very close to someone in a love relationship.”

“In the past two and a half years I have only known definite division in the hearts and minds of the sisters with whom I have lived. I know that life will never be a Utopia, yet I will never stop hoping and striving for a better tomorrow.”

The records of women in leadership positions who engaged with women who withdrew during this timeframe were also examined. Two local superiors reveal racial or cultural biases in their writings, a third refers to the impact of racial discrimination, and the fourth to the challenges of difference:

“She yields to the mercurial quality of her Latin American temperament.”

*“This Sister is untrustworthy and attaches herself to others.
May be par for the course with Latin Americans.”*

*“She was unable to adjust to the fact that there is racial discrimination
in the United States.”*

“The generational gap as well as cultural differences created considerable tension and difficulty in the daily living out of community. However, [the Sister], as well as the women she lived with, grew in understanding of common life and vowed commitment.”

No comments revealing or hinting at racism or discrimination were found in the correspondence between the seven women of color who withdrew from the Dominican Sisters of Edmonds and their superiors. An African-American Sister who left the Edmonds community during the first year of her Novitiate never indicated that she left because of discrimination. She stated to another Sister that she felt “it was just not a good ‘fit.’”²²

²² As recounted by Lorene Heck, OP, to Elise D. García, OP, in an email dated January 21, 2021.

REFLECTION AND DIALOGUE

*As you read the comments made by women of color who withdrew, what stirs in you?
What other comments are you aware of or have you heard from women of color who withdrew?*

What do the comments of the superiors evoke in you? Are there other racist or discriminatory comments or behaviors by superiors that you are aware of or witnessed?

As a woman of color who remained in the Congregation, what experiences would you share to expand awareness and understanding? As a white woman, what experiences would you share to expand awareness and understanding?

A SURVEY

The Archive's Formation holdings also include a file titled, "Southwest Mission Chapter Survey 1985." The file shows that on November 7, 1985, a meeting of the Formation Committee of the Southwest Mission Chapter took place to tally the results of a survey. Neither the survey nor the individual responses from 43 Sisters are on file. There is no indication of who received the survey nor any other documentation as to its purpose, only a list of the names of the 43 survey respondents. The file – and, by inference, the survey – is relevant to this study because it includes a document²³ with the following discussion question and "points to consider":

For Discussion:

"How do we need to change before Hispanics, Blacks and other minorities, such as the divorced and separated, would feel comfortable in our Congregation?"

Points to consider:

- (1) Experience has shown that many applicants, candidates & Sisters from minority groups have had a difficult time being accepted as peers in our Congregation when they have been living with us.
- (2) Many of our sisters work with the poor and minority people. If God speaks to us through the poor, can we afford not to change our image of ourselves to include them?
- (3) Many of our sisters are not now promoting vocations from any group because they are not sure that we are a viable group at this point.
- (4) One girl who was sent to the "Experience Religious Life" weekend in Adrian last year was completely turned off by our professional and theological jargon. She came from a simple town and lifestyle.

One other comment related to the above was found. It notes that: "If a candidate is from a minority group, it would help if she had some exposure to our Adrian Dominican culture and language before being expected to absorb the experience of Adrian, Michigan."

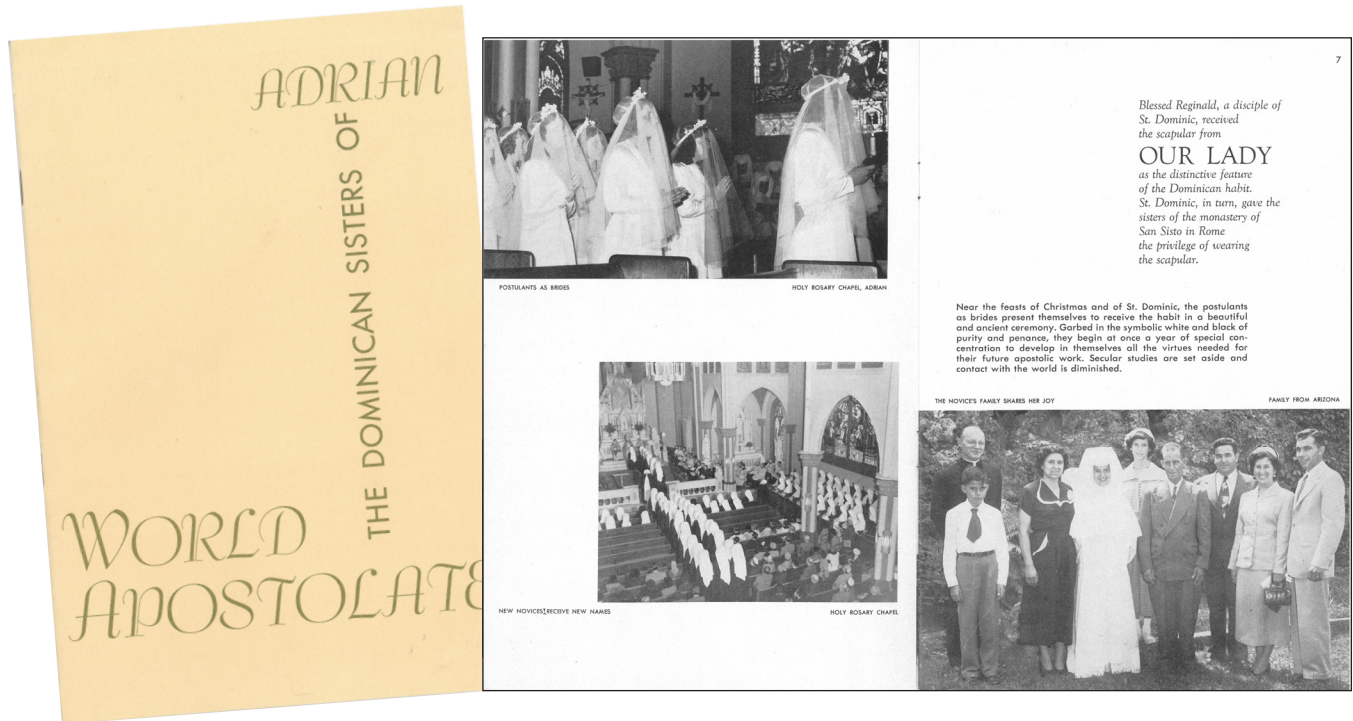
²³ The document is titled "SOUTHWEST MISSION CHAPTER."

REFLECTION AND DIALOGUE

What do you make of the question, “How do we need to change before Hispanics, Blacks and other minorities, such as the divorced and separated, would feel comfortable in our Congregation?” Who is envisioned as comprising “our” Congregation – then, and now?

What are the expectations behind the comment that “it would help if she had some exposure to our Adrian Dominican culture and language”? How would you unpack the assumptions in this statement?

If you have any first-hand knowledge about this meeting of the Formation Committee of the Southwest Chapter and/or the survey, please share it.



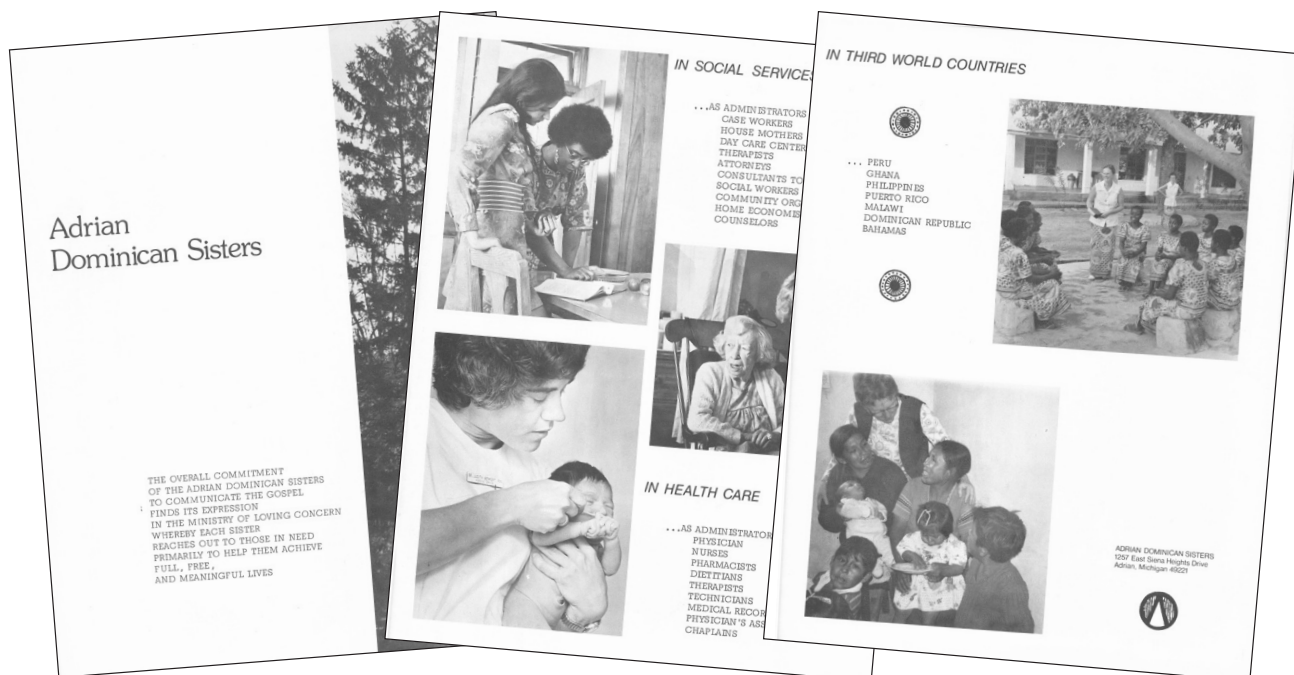
COMMUNICATIONS

Two collections of materials were found related to Adrian Dominican publicity and communications related to vocations. Approximately 30 brochures were found. Few are dated but they span from 1941 to 2015 with dates approximated by dress (in habit or not), the individuals depicted, and/or the events pictured.

The earliest printed vocation outreach piece in the Archive is an all-text brochure with the date 1941 penciled on it. Next is a 24-page booklet titled *World Apostolate: The Dominican Sisters of Adrian* published c. 1955. Among the 44 black and white photos is one of a family of color from Arizona, pictured with their daughter/sister – a new Novice on Reception Day. The first vocation brochure featuring a photo of an African-American woman – Jamie Phelps, OP – was produced in the late 1970s or early 1980s. One other brochure, among the 30 in the Archive, features another African-American woman – Maria del Rey Plain, OP. Most of the women of color featured in Congregation vocation brochures are Latina.

Vocation brochures in the collection appear as follows, listed in approximate date ranges:

- 1973 to 1982: 14 brochures, including one in Spanish. Of the 14 brochures, four have photos. Among the four brochures with photos, one brochure features no women of color; the other three brochures include one photo of women of color in each among a total of eight, five, and nine photos, respectively.
- 1983 to 1999: five brochures with photos; one brochure features no women of color; the other four brochures include photos of women of color as follows: two photos among nine, five photos among 24, one photo among eight, and five photos among 14.



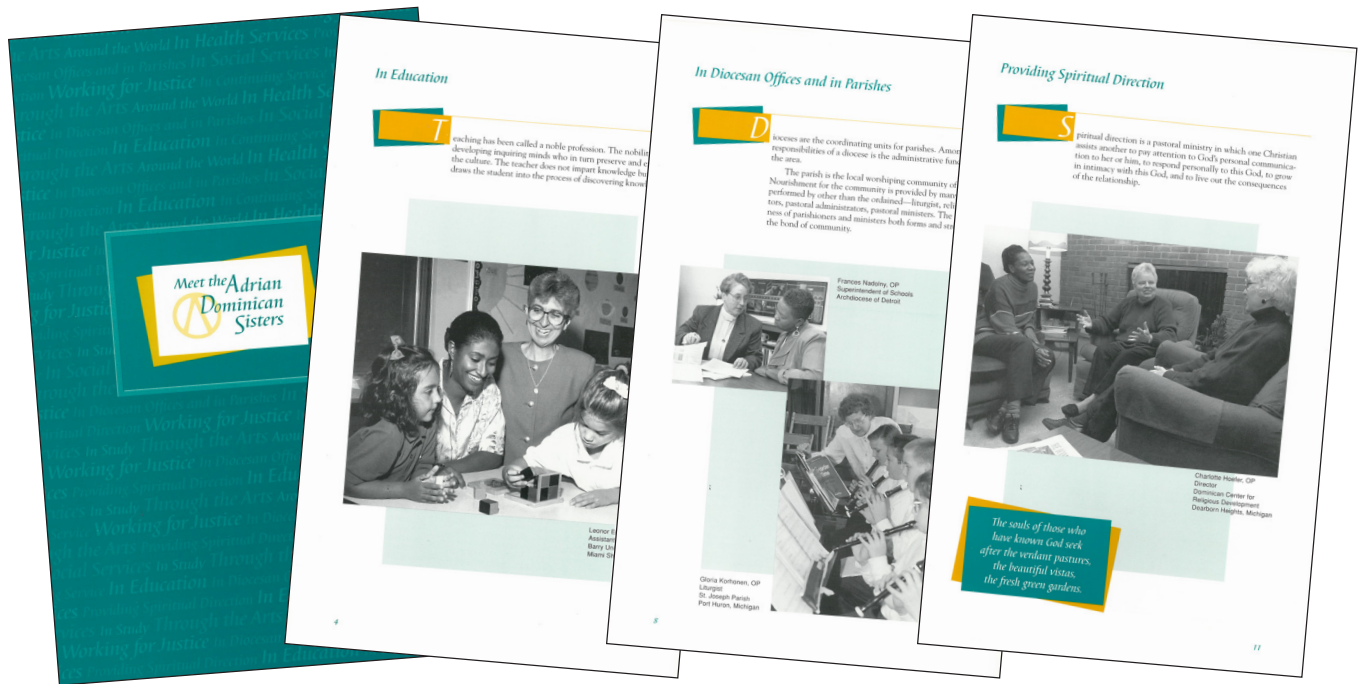
- 2000 to 2005: six brochures with photos, including two in Spanish; two brochures feature no women of color; the other four include photos of women of color as follows: two photos among seven, two photos among 14, and one photo among 20.
- 2006 to 2015: three brochures with photos; all feature women of color as follows: three photos among seven, three photos among 12, and two photos among seven.

A search of the archival collection of materials from the Dominican Sisters of Edmonds found no vocational brochures.

Vocation material in use by the Congregation from 2016 to 2021 includes:

- two brochures with photos; both feature Sisters of color as follows: five photos among six and 12 photos among 24;
- 12 ministry cards, each featuring a Sister; three are women of color;
- three discernment videos featuring Sisters of color among 14 produced;
- English and Spanish language versions of a weekly blog: “A Sister Reflects;”
- “Preach with Your Life” video series, featuring three Sisters of color among 17 Sisters; and
- “Who We Are” Adrian Dominican webpage featuring photos of four Adrian Dominican Sisters in vocation ministry, two of whom are women of color.

RECKONING WITH RACISM: A Lenten Journey



REFLECTION AND DIALOGUE

What do our communications say to you about our efforts to invite women of color to our Dominican religious life?

O T H E R F I N D I N G S

As we study the history of Black Catholics in our church, we deepen our understanding of how God's will for our salvation was mediated in and through the everyday experiences of the faith-filled lives of the followers of Christ. Our Black Catholic ancestors in the faith, responding to the call and power of the Spirit within them, became sacraments of God's love and justice for the community. They struggled so that we could come to the fullness of life intended for all human beings (see Jn 10:10). They struggled so we could live in unity with one another and with all others because of our love of God (see Jn 17:21-23). Our Black Catholic ancestors in the faith came to know that their call to Christian discipleship required that they live the "way" of Jesus, embodying for our times the unconditional love and justice that Jesus embodied in his time and place in history.²⁴

- J A M I E T . P H E L P S , O P , P H D

In a 1981 paper by Congregation historian Mary Philip Ryan, OP, titled, "The Adrian Dominican Congregation in Relation to Black People in the Apostolate," Sister Mary Philip writes:

We are of German origin, a sapling from Holy Cross convent of Contemplative nuns, which is rooted in Regensburg, Bavaria, and has been there since the year 1233. ...

Although the first purpose for the mission to this Country was to teach the children of German families, the nuns reached out to children of Irish and other European families. ...

For the first two decades in Michigan, our pioneer sisters taught pupils of Irish, German, French, Scotch descent in the farmlands of the Thumb of Michigan and small towns not far from Adrian. It is most likely that they never saw Black people in those places in those years. Their mission was to immigrants from Europe who were among the struggling poor people of that period.

Our first call to a city was heard in the first decade of the 20th century. Three schools were staffed in Cleveland, Ohio, for the children of Czechoslovakian and Slovenian families. In these settlements there were no Black people.

²⁴ Jamie T. Phelps, OP, PhD, "Communion Ecclesiology," in *Uncommon Faithfulness: The Black Catholic Experience* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2009), ed. M. Shawn Copeland with LaReine-Marie Mosely, SND, and Albert J. Raboteau, pp. 115-116.

In the second decade of this century, calls were answered for schools in Chicago, most of them on the south side. In these schools the pupils were first and second generations of Irish, French, Italian, German, and other European families with here and there a blending of Asiatic children. Although Black families were moving into Chicago in that period, there is no record of a Black child in these schools until the end of the 1930s and the beginning of the 1940s, and the number would be negligible.²⁵

MISSIONS ENGAGING PEOPLE OF COLOR

Beginning soon after the turn of the 20th century, the Congregation established teaching missions in the Southwest – New Mexico and Arizona – that served children of Mexican and Native American descent. Mother Camilla Madden, OP, and later Mother Augustine Walsh, OP, were concerned about serving children from families that were poor, but the initial motivation for sending Sisters to the distant Southwest was to aid in their recovery from tuberculosis. The first of these, St. Dominic School and Academy in Nogales, Arizona, opened on October 10, 1910 – the year of the Mexican Revolution. In *Amid the Alien Corn*, Sister Mary Philip writes about the mission:

The motherhouse ledger shows that the congregation built and supported it. The Mexican families were unable to pay tuition for their children, but Americans contributed generously. Salaries for domestic labor and other expenditures in the convent house book set this mission apart from all the others in its time. Obviously the sisters assigned there were too delicate to undertake household labor in addition to their teaching. ...

Eventually, the school closed. There seemed to be no alternative after most of the people abandoned the town; but Mother Camilla could not reconcile herself to what seemed to be desertion of the few straggling Mexican children. She waited until 1917 before she made the final decision; and was uneasy until two years later, in 1919, she opened another school for poor Mexican children in Roy, New Mexico.²⁶

²⁵ Mary Philip Ryan, OP, “The Adrian Dominican Congregation in Relation to Black People in the Apostolate,” (undated), p. 1. Adrian Dominican Archive. A handwritten note at the top of the first page says, “This was done at the request of Sr. Jamie [Phelps, OP] for the Conference of Black Religious.” Archival records indicate Sister Mary Philip presented this paper at the end of a June 21-26, 1981, conference at Weber Center titled, “Ministering in the Black Community: An Agenda for Cooperative Action.” Sisters Shawn Copeland, Christine Matthews, and Jamie Phelps comprised the planning team, aided by 15 Resource Staff – persons with “extensive pastoral and/or educational experience.” Presentations covered Black history, Black Catholic history, Black Cultural Experience, African Roots, Psychology, Theology, Evangelization, Religious Education, Parish Leadership, and Parish Structures. Presenters included Dr. William Strickland; Rev. Cyprian Davis, OSB, PhD; Sister Patricia Haley, SCN; Sister Francesca Thompson, OSF, PhD; Dr. Harriette P. McAdoo; Dr. Edwin Nichols; Sister Thea Bowman, FSPA, PhD; Sister Jamie Phelps, OP, MA, MSW, Doctoral Student; Rev. Clarence Williams, CPPS, MDiv.; Dr. Nathan Jones; Sister Elizabeth Harris, HVM, MA; Sister Dolores Harrall, SND, PhD; Mr. Bishop King, MA; Rev. James Goode, PhD; Sister Mary Philip Ryan, OP, MA; and Brother Joseph Hager, FMS, MA, liturgical planner and musician.

²⁶ Mary Philip Ryan, OP, *Amid the Alien Corn* (St. Charles, Illinois: Jones Wood Press, 1967), pp 259-260. Sister Mary Philip notes that a woman working as a secretary in her brother’s law office in Nogales was there to help the Sisters when they established the mission. Her name was Catherine Barry; in 1912 Catherine moved to Adrian to enter the Congregation, taking the name Sister Mary Gerald.

In her paper on the Congregation in relation to Black people in the apostolate, Sister Mary Philip writes that in 1936, Mother Gerald Barry, OP, “was taken through what was then called ‘Colored Town’ in West Palm Beach.” She continues:

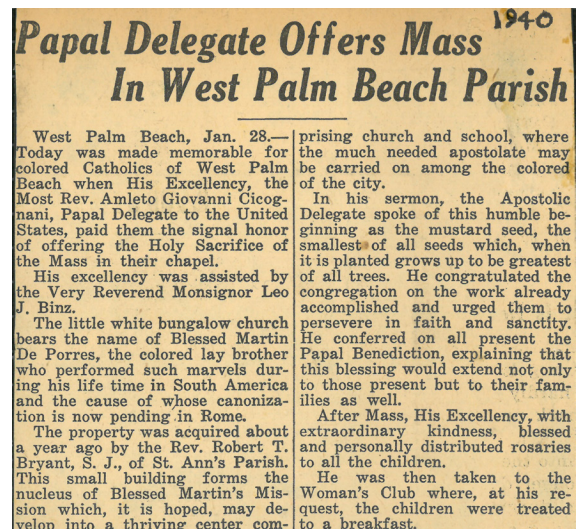
As the sisters drove along, children and parents went out to greet them. Mother Gerald got out of the car and talked with them. When she asked whether they would like two sisters to come on Saturdays and Sundays to talk about God, the response was so certain that she arranged with the Jesuits who had charge of St. Ann’s, for Saturday instructions and Sunday Mass. The beginning group increased from year to year, and the program continued for 26 years, until de-segregation in 1962.²⁷

A white Sister who in the early 1940s attended St. Ann’s School, the Jesuit parish school staffed by Adrian Dominican Sisters, has happy memories of Black children her age coming over to join them in preparing for First Communion.

The Archive includes photos and newspaper clippings about Adrian Dominican Sisters missioned to teach at Blessed Martin de Porres School, a “Colored Catholic Mission,” established by the Congregation in 1940 in Fort Pierce, Florida. In her paper, Sister Mary Philip writes, “In the year 1940, our Congregation purchased a theatre in Fort Pierce and converted it into an elementary school for Black pupils. At first very few came, but within a short time the classes were quite well attended with both Catholic and Protestant children. The school did well for 22 years, until de-segregation in 1962. In that year the annalist recorded: ‘Our children have finally come to something better for them.’”



A picture collage from an album titled “A Quick Glance – at COLORED TOWN,” undated.



A newspaper article from 1940 announces that Msgr. Amleto Giovanni Cicognani, Papal Delegate of the United States, offered a Mass at Blessed Martin de Porres Church.

²⁷ Ryan, “The Adrian Dominican Congregation in Relation to Black People in the Apostolate,” p. 2. This ministry came to be known as St. Ann Center for Colored.

A 1993 article about Blessed Martin de Porres Mission in *The Florida Catholic*, titled “Black Catholics to record oral history,” notes:

Any discussion of the history of black Catholics in the Diocese of Palm Beach would be incomplete without mention of Blessed Martin de Porres Mission. Founded in the mid-1930s, Blessed Martin de Porres was affiliated with St. Ann Parish in West Palm Beach and was the only place that local black Catholics could practice their faith for several decades. . . .

“A lot of us came up in the Jesuit mission,” [Lorraine Lyles, Director of the Diocesan Office of African Americans and Black Catholics] said. “Many of the original members are still around. We want to get as much oral history as we can from them and the Adrian Dominican sisters who taught there. When they tore the church down, they gave the statues to the different families and we would like to track those things down. There aren’t that many families, so it’s not hard to pull us all together.”²⁸

In the 1950s and 1960s, a number of Adrian Dominican schools in the Midwest that had served the children of largely white middle-class Catholics began to serve Black students, Catholics and non-Catholics. On the occasion of Archbishop Wilton Gregory’s appointment to lead the Archdiocese of Washington, D.C., this excerpt of a reflection he wrote in 2008 on his faith journey was included in an article published in the *Catholic Standard* on May 13, 2019:

“I am a Catholic today because of a Catholic school in the Archdiocese of Chicago. St. Carthage was a small parish school on the south side of Chicago. The 1950s saw swift and sweeping neighborhood racial changes in the city, drastically impacting parish school populations, so the pastor of the parish at the time and the Adrian Dominican principal decided to invite non-Catholics who were largely African-Americans to enroll in the school.

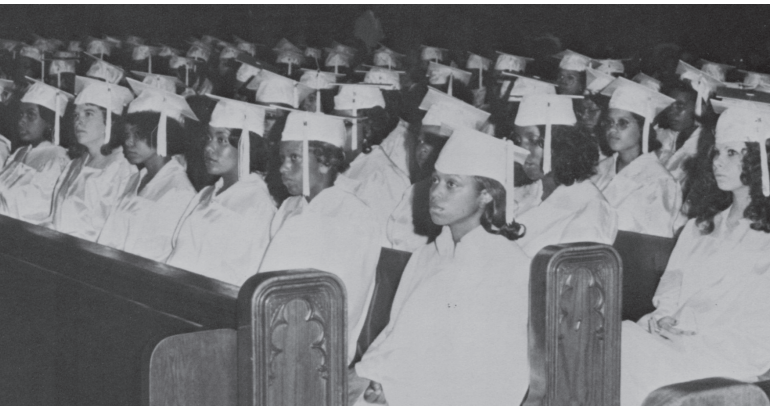
“I was one of those invited non-Catholic kids.”

Archbishop Gregory concluded his reflections, writing that St. Carthage School’s “atmosphere of faith, excellence and joy . . . caused a certain young man to seek out the baptismal font . . . and eventually the priesthood of Jesus Christ.”²⁹

How many Black classmates of young Wilton and Black girls at other schools taught by Adrian Dominicans had vocations that were neither sought nor cultivated? Why or why not?

²⁸ Tom Tracy, “Black Catholics to record oral history,” *The Florida Catholic*, B-2, October 22, 1993.

²⁹ Mark Zimmerman, “Archbishop Gregory’s journey of faith at Chicago Catholic school,” *Catholic Standard*, May 13, 2019. See: <https://cathstan.org/news/local/archbishop-gregorys-journey-of-faith-began-at-chicago-catholic-school>.



Aquinas High School in the 1970s



Dominican High School, 1984

As the 1960s unfolded, a growing Black Catholic movement inspired by the Black Power movement emerged. It led to the flourishing of “liturgical innovation as musicians, theologians, and local congregations integrated African American and Afro-diasporic religious practices into Catholic worship.”³⁰ It also raised some critical questions:

The movement made intense intellectual contributions, as a generation of black Catholic activist-scholars challenged the unspoken but ever-present assumption that white ways of being Catholic were the right ways to be Catholic. Brother Joseph M. Davis, a Marianist Brother from Dayton, Ohio, who served as the first executive director of the National Office for Black Catholics, argued that the Church had a “missionary mentality” when it came to black Catholics, meaning that white Catholics historically treated their black coreligionists as a foreign people in need of special care rather than as full-fledged members of the Church. Sister Jamie Phelps, an Adrian Dominican Sister and theologian present at the first National Black Sisters’ Conference, reflected on the ways European Catholic practices were assumed to stand in for “real” Catholicism in ways that black culture never could.

Father Clarence Rivers, the famed liturgist, expanded on this point, arguing that black culture was clearly “considered inferior, second class, at best, and inadmissible in tasteful worship.” While “the church is not supposed to be Black or white, Greek or Jew, slave or free; [...] as a matter of fact, the Roman Catholic Church in the United States has been and is radically white.”³¹

³⁰ Matthew J. Cressler, “The History of Black Catholics in America,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, June 7, 2018 at <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/history-black-catholics-in-america-180969271/>.

³¹ *Ibid.*

REFLECTION AND DIALOGUE

How do these stories add to your understanding of how racism impacted the Adrian Dominican Congregation? How do they relate to your own experience?

What feelings arise in you as you read them?

If you have any first-hand knowledge or experience of these stories, please share them.

SISTER FORMATION CONFERENCE MISSION PROJECT

In August 1960, the Sister Formation Conference announced a mission project “to promote a relationship between two communities, one in this country, and one in a mission field.” The undertaking aimed to provide “assistance to native sisterhoods particularly in India, Africa and Latin America.”³² Mother Gerald Barry received a letter from the Sister Formation Conference, dated October 25, 1960, inviting the Congregation’s participation in an effort to educate women from mission countries.

In her response of November 30, 1960, Mother Gerald affirmed the effort, stating it was “certainly an undertaking which will be bountifully blessed by God, and we are thoroughly in sympathy with it.” After explaining her delay in responding due to travel away from the Motherhouse, Mother Gerald described the efforts the Congregation already had underway, noting “our Community has been engaged in foreign mission work in Santo Domingo and Puerto Rico since 1945.” She added that “we have been providing opportunities for education for native Sisters in several areas, and have provided scholarships both at Siena Heights College and Barry College” to approximately 25 Sisters. She noted that five Sisters were currently registered at Siena and six more were expected in February. “The latter group is coming to us from the Philippine Islands.”

Mother Gerald further noted that “[i]n 1957, we established Aquinas College at Nassau in the Bahama Islands, and our primary purpose in doing so was to provide a center where the native Sisters could be trained to raise the educational standards which are, at the present time, deplorably low.” She added that the Congregation soon hoped “to be able to answer the urgent pleading of the Holy See for missionaries in other Latin American countries than those in which we are already engaged.” Mother Gerald concluded by writing: “For the above reasons, Sister, you can see that while we shall be participating in the good work of training native Sisters from under-privileged countries we are not in need of having any contacts made for us through your office.”

The study found no letters or references to this mission project of the Sister Formation Conference in the archival collection of the Dominican Sisters of Edmonds.

REFLECTION AND DIALOGUE

What do you make of the Sister Formation Conference’s initiative “to promote a relationship between two communities, one in this country, and one in a mission field”? What does Mother Gerald’s response say to you?

³² “Mission Project,” Sister Formation Conference, The National Catholic Educational Association, Saint Xavier College, Chicago 55, Illinois. An undated document announcing the August 1960 decision of the SFC leadership.



Dominican Sisters of Edmonds at St. Ann's Indian Mission, Tulalip, Washington, 1947.



After completing their formation in Adrian, Sisters (left and far right) Mary Joseph (Esperanza) Bonifacio, OP, Mary Thomas (Digna) San Vicente, OP, and Regina (Milagros) Garcia, OP, are packed to sail home to the Philippines in September 1965, with Mother Genevieve Weber, OP (center), and Mary Philip Ryan, OP, bidding them goodbye.

CROSS-CULTURAL ENGAGEMENTS

Further texture is added to the story of racism in our Dominican religious life and admissions by reflecting on our cross-cultural and overseas engagements in mission and ministry, and their impact.³³

Among the Dominican Sisters of Adrian, these include:

- Missioning Sisters to the West Indies: Dominican Republic, beginning in 1945; Puerto Rico, beginning in 1946; and the Bahamas, beginning in 1957.
- Creating a formation program for women from the Philippines in 1961 and in 1965 accompanying the women toward the establishment in 1972 of the independent Dominican Sisters of Our Lady of Remedies in San Fernando, Pampanga, Philippines.
- Missioning Sisters to South and Central America: Peru, beginning in 1963, and Nicaragua, beginning in 1979.
- Missioning Sisters to Africa: Malawi in 1972; Ghana, beginning in 1973; Kenya, beginning in 1978; South Africa, beginning in 1993; and Swaziland, beginning in 2008.
- Hosting four Dominican Vietnamese Sisters, beginning in 1968 through their college studies at Siena Heights, and in 1975 hosting another Dominican Sister and 12 members of her refugee family in a wing at Regina, later helping them resettle nearby.
- Hosting approximately 100 refugees from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua in a dedicated wing of Weber Center, beginning in 1988.
- Missioning Sisters to minister with communities in need in Alaska and First Nations people in Canada, beginning in 2005.
- The intentional engagement in mission and ministry of individual Sisters among Latina/o, Black, Asian, and Native American communities in the United States.

³³ For more detail, context, and reflection on the Adrian Dominican experience, see Rose Ann Schlitt, OP, *Wisdom-Gathering: Learnings from our Overseas Experiences of Mission* (Adrian, Michigan: Adrian Dominican Sisters, 2015).

Among the Dominican Sisters of Edmonds, these include:

- Missioning Sisters to Mexico, beginning in 1965 through the early 1970s, and to Haiti, beginning in 1988 to the late 1990s.³⁴
- Engaging in education and pastoral care with the Swinomish and Tulalip Tribes, from the 1940s through the late 1990s.
- The intentional engagement in mission and ministry of individual Sisters among Latina/o, Black, Asian, and Native American communities in the United States.

REFLECTION AND DIALOGUE

As you review this summary of our cross-cultural and overseas engagements as Dominicans, how would you describe the texture they add to our understanding of racism, white supremacy, and colonialism over the centuries?

Please share any insights you gleaned about racism, white supremacy and colonialism from your own cross-cultural experience(s).

³⁴ Sister Philomena Perreault, OP, returned to Haiti in 2003 and continued to serve until 2006 as a Dominican Sister of Adrian.

INCULTURATED FORMATION

The Archive includes material related to the ministry formation process developed by Adrian Dominican Sisters in and from the Dominican Republic. In a file titled, “Formation and Education for Ministry in the Dominican Republic,” the program objectives date to beginning in 1983-1984. Efforts over the years to provide an inculturated formation experience for women from the Dominican Republic are summarized in *Wisdom-Gathering: Learnings from our Overseas Experiences of Mission*, which notes:

For several decades, the local Sisters in the Dominican Republic had requested that a formation program be developed there for young women interested in religious life, with their assuming its responsibility. After many years and a multitude of proposals and planning, permission was finally granted and a formation program began in the Dominican Republic in 1988.

This was a time of much hope and enthusiasm on the part of our Sisters, as one who was involved in formation work noted. “Beginning our formation in the Dominican Republic has been a cause of great integral growth for us. It has opened us to the distinct world of young people of today, with a different vision of religious life and a particular and profound conception of God. ... In spite of differences of culture, language, age, and social classes, we have been able to understand that there is no obstacle to the young women to relate to the rest of the Congregation.”³⁵

One Sister identified inculturated or contextual formation as a challenge that was “lost” because it soon was moved out of the Dominican Republic. She added that the Sisters involved had no say in that decision nor did they express their views. In addition, there was no communication or consultation with the Chapter Prioress. A Sister with experience in cross-cultural formation commented that although the Congregation has tried formation in the Dominican Republic in different ways, she believes it is appropriate to look at different approaches for different times and circumstances. At this time and after more than 60 years of mission in the Dominican Republic, the issue of formation for Sisters in the Dominican Republic is still unresolved, although being explored again with the establishment of a house of discernment/formation.³⁶

³⁵ See Footnote 48 in *Wisdom-Gatherers*, p. 34, Schlitt, quoting Margarita Ruíz, OP.

³⁶ See Schlitt, pp. 34-35 for more.

REFLECTION AND DIALOGUE

What feelings arise as you read this brief summary of the efforts to inculturate formation in the Adrian Dominican Congregation?

What experiences and/or insights would be important to include in the telling of this story – and what learnings are important to carry forward?

ADRIAN SYNTHESIS SURVEYS

From 1969 to 1981, four surveys of Adrian Dominican Sisters were conducted to “provide profiles of Adrian Dominicans’ attitudes and feelings ...”³⁷ Each successive survey added measures – beginning with questions focusing on change and identification with the congregation in 1969 to questions by 1977 on authority, religious lifestyle, assertiveness. In 1981, the survey included attitudinal questions on “social change” and “social justice as ministry criteria.”

In her preliminary report on the Adrian Synthesis Surveys, Mary-beth Beres, OP, wrote, “The measure of attitude about social change was developed in a survey for the Sisters of St. Joseph of Cleveland, Ohio, and added to the Synthesis in 1981.”

³⁷ See Mary-beth Beres, OP, “Attitudes and Feelings of Adrian Dominicans: A Preliminary Report Based on the Adrian Synthesis Surveys 1969-1981,” January 1982, Adrian Dominican Archive.

This scale measures the extent to which members favor personal and congregational involvement in social change. The questions focus on structural change to eliminate injustice particularly in the areas of racism and discrimination against women.

[The findings showed] that most survey respondents favor active involvement in social change. ... Based on these responses, many members of the congregation believe that social injustices are a serious problem and that the congregation should actively work to eliminate injustices. The members also personally support such issues as equality for women and are willing to live and work in integrated situations.

Attitudes about social change are highly correlated with age. Younger members are more likely to favor active involvement in all areas of change.³⁸

Sister Mary-beth concluded her paper with the observation that “the majority of congregation members are collegially oriented women ... willing to take risks particularly in accepting changes in religious lifestyles and actively working for social change.”³⁹

REFLECTION AND DIALOGUE

What do you think the Adrian Synthesis Survey, if it had included additional questions on social justice in 1969, would have revealed about members' views related to racism and discrimination against women?

³⁸ Ibid., p. 9.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 27.

ENTERING WHILE BLACK

An Adrian Dominican Sister speaks of her experience of racism entering our Congregation.

JAMIE T. PHELPS, OP, PHD

I am an African American religious woman who as a child had to be taught by her parents to overcome the interpersonal and structural racism she would encounter in her life journey.

I was born a “Free Negro” in 1941, the youngest child of six born to Alfred and Emma Phelps in Pritchard, Alabama, near Mobile. I am not sure when, or if, my great grandparents had been enslaved. My ancestry traces predominantly to Africa with vestiges of Northwestern European ancestors, including Irish.⁴⁰

My grandparents were free, property-owning citizens in and near Pritchard. My maternal grandfather, James Brown, whom we affectionately called “Daddy Boots,” owned a cotton farm with tree-covered acreage. My paternal grandmother, Mrs. Reed, whom we called “Mamma Julia,” was a strong independent woman who owned five rental houses. My grandparents on both sides of the family believed that owning property and providing their children with a college education would guarantee our freedom.

My father was sent out of state to attend high school at a Catholic boarding school in Virginia – St. Emma’s Military Academy, the nation’s only military academy for African-American boys.⁴¹ He was baptized Catholic at St. Emma’s before graduating and returning to Alabama to enroll in college.

My parents, Alfred Phelps and Emma Brown, were both born free in 1911 and met as students attending Alabama A&M College (now University), in Huntsville. They married after graduation and began their family of six children, William, Alfreda, Marionette, Julius, Alfred Jr., and me, Jamie.

We were baptized at St. James Church in Pritchard, Alabama, which was staffed by the Josephite Fathers, a community initiated by the Mill Hill Fathers of England. The Irish and English members who entered from the United States were compelled to make a “Negro Vow” by which they promised to minister exclusively to “Negroes.”

⁴⁰ Ancestry.com ethnicity estimate for Jamie T. Phelps: Nigeria 38%; Cameroon, Congo, and Western Bantu Peoples 24%; Benin and Togo 14%; Ivory Coast and Ghana 14%; England and Northwestern Europe 4%; Mali 4%; Norway 1%; and Ireland 1%.

⁴¹ The school was established on a 2,200-acre former tobacco plantation on the James River, purchased in 1895 by Louise and Edward Morrell, the sister and brother-in-law of now Saint Katherine Drexel, founder of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament. The property was later donated to the Sisters, who in 1899 opened a boarding school for African-American girls, St. Frances de Sales, across a creek from the boys’ school. The two schools graduated more than 20,000 young African-Americans boys and girls until they closed in the early 1970s. More than 130 of the people who had been enslaved on the plantation are buried on the grounds. See <http://richmondfreepress.com/news/2019/jun/21/nuns-sell-st-emma-and-st-frances-property/> and <https://www.wtvr.com/i-have-a-story/former-cadets-push-to-save-old-african-american-military-academy>.

My father maintained his Catholic faith after marrying my African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Protestant mother, who agreed to have their children baptized Catholic at St. James Catholic Church. About a year after my birth and baptism, in October of 1941, my parents decided to migrate north to Chicago.

In Chicago, my father established a moving company, bought our first home on the westside, and invested in rental real estate. My father and his siblings all started their own businesses; it was both a family tradition and a way to deal with the racism that strictly limited opportunities for African Americans. Shortly after moving to Chicago, my father relocated us when he bought our home at 3022 West Warren Boulevard, in a predominantly Irish-American neighborhood.

My siblings were enrolled in St. Matthew's, a Roman Catholic parish and school staffed by Irish Catholic priests and the Adrian Dominican Sisters. I was too young, staying home until I started Kindergarten at the neighborhood public school near our home.

My mother, a stay-at-home mom who focused on raising her children, took us to school and classical music classes at the Chicago Musical College in downtown Chicago. Music was very important to my family. My father began his musical education at St. Emma's, playing saxophone as part of his high school curriculum. After we moved to Chicago, he insisted that his children learn to play classical piano and a second instrument.⁴² Ours was a musical family. We opened our home to the neighborhood occasionally for classical concerts and children's "jam sessions," with my father, siblings, and our childhood friends joining in.

As we each graduated from high school, we were encouraged to go to college and pursue whatever field interested us. My parents told us that God had gifted us with talent and intelligence and we were to develop these gifts for the benefit of the community. When my brothers finished high school, they joined my father in his business enterprise. Alfreda attended the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, majoring in music. Marionette went to DePaul University, studying political science with the goal of becoming a lawyer. Unfortunately, she encountered a racist and sexist professor who could not imagine a Black female lawyer. Her struggle with the professor did not cause her to quit school but she did abandon her goal of becoming a lawyer. Both Alfreda and Marionette did social work for the City of Chicago while in college to help my father pay for their education and begin their service to the poor of Chicago.

Even before beginning school, I had been urged by my parents to think about my gifts and how I was going to use them for the community. I remember, as a 4-year-old, noticing there were three "helping" professions: Teachers, nurses, and telephone operators! (This was before cell phones.)

⁴² We all studied classical piano at the Boguslawski School of Music, which later became a part of the University of Illinois. My father bought us an upright piano but as we progressed in our studies, he replaced it with a grand piano. Julius followed my father's path by learning to play saxophone and other wind instruments. I studied classical ballet, interpretive dance, and tap dancing at the Chicago Musical College.

After making first confession and communion as a 7-year-old at St. Matthew's, I began to go to daily Mass and went to confession weekly. I used the occasion to talk with the priest about my relationship to God and how I could serve God. I decided that while a telephone operator could help with emergencies, a "Sister" was concerned about God and the souls of people. To me this was a higher calling – and it had nothing to do with blood, like nursing! I was attentive to the joy and excellent teaching the Adrian Dominicans embodied.

At least once a year, the diocesan vocation director would visit St. Matthew's and urge us to consider becoming priests or sisters. The encouragement of my "spiritual directing confessor" strengthened my determination to enter religious life. In eighth grade, I mentioned the idea of entering the convent to my teacher, Sister Bernard Marie (LaTourelle, OP), and to Sister Jean Lawrence (Geyman, OP), the first-grade teacher I had assisted as an aide. Both were encouraging and joy-filled.

Since I was going to be graduating soon, I thought I should answer God's call to the sisterhood by writing to Mother Gerald Barry, OP, to ask if I could enter the Adrian Dominicans when I graduated from eighth grade. That's when I met my first resistance.

I wrote that I was aware there were young girls being admitted as postulants attending high school, and that I thought I could be one of them.⁴³ I assured Mother Gerald that I had been baptized as an infant and had attended St. Matthew as a student, enclosing the paperwork. I wrote that I loved most of the Adrian Dominicans who had been my teachers for my entire elementary school years and that I had shared the idea of applying with one of my parish priests and the Sisters, who all thought I should seek admission.

When Mother Gerald spoke with me on the phone, I recall that her first inquiry was, "Are you Catholic?" (In recent reflections, I think Mother Gerald thought all Blacks were Protestant.) She suggested that I might want to go to two years of high school before coming to join the Adrian Dominicans. She let me know that the congregation was "all white" and suggested that I might need to be more mature to adjust to living in an "all-white congregation."

I was disturbed by what I considered a racially prejudiced response, but having been taught by my parents to respect my elders, I offered no challenge as I listened to her decision and explanation. I was shocked and disappointed – and did not tell my parents the totality of the conversation and my interpretation. I simply told them Mother Gerald thought I needed to wait until I was a little older.

This was the first time I encountered the reality of prejudice and racism in religious life, and the way it could impact my ability to respond to God's call. I had encountered a little racism from a few of my

⁴³ The Congregation's Preparatory School was still in existence at this time, "designed to attract more potential members by providing them with both an academic program and formation training. ... Girls, who needed to be recommended by their teachers and parish priests, came in the summer after their eighth-grade year to begin what was a two and a half year process." See Nadine Foley, OP, and Arlene Bachanov, *To Fields Near and Far: Adrian Dominican History 1933-1961* (Adrian, Michigan: Adrian Dominican Congregation, 2015), pp. 102-107.

elementary school classmates and from some parents who did not want me to date their sons. And there was one Adrian Dominican Sister at St. Matthew's who thought I couldn't possibly be intelligent enough to enter the Adrian Dominicans and become part of a community of women engaged in the field of education. I had never experienced personal racism that intimidated me or made me feel inferior to my white peers or their families.⁴⁴

I went on to graduate from eighth grade with the highest grade-point average among my predominantly white Euro-American classmates and was awarded the General Excellence Award. I loved the Adrian Dominican spirit so much that I asked if they had a high school in Chicago I could attend. I was told there was none on the westside of Chicago.

No one told me about Aquinas High School, which was only five blocks from where my aunt and uncle, Veda and Price Phelps, lived with their three children. If we had known, my parents might have made arrangements for me to live with my cousins and commute home regularly. After all, my father and his brother Price had both gone away for high school – to St. Emma's in Virginia, far from their Alabama home. But we were never given the possibility even to consider such an option. This was perhaps the second instance of institutional Adrian Dominican racism I experienced. To this day, when I meet Sisters my age who are Aquinas graduates, I think, "I might have gotten to know and befriend her when we were teenagers, if institutionalized racism had not been in play!"

I ended up attending Josephinum, an all-girls Catholic high school, where I encountered peers of Polish, German, Irish, Lithuanian and Slavic descent. I learned new ethnic dances and acquired an excellent Catholic education in an ethnic community. I only had three African-American Catholic classmates, one of whom, Dr. Evonne Blakey, remains a close friend.⁴⁵

As I approached high school graduation, I again applied to the Adrian Dominican Sisters. I prayed to God: "I'm trying to do your will, but if they say 'no' a second time, you know it is the Sisters who are blocking your will. I can only say, 'I tried.' We will simply have to seek another way for me to serve you."

The second time, I received a "yes" from Mother Gerald.

Mother Gerald received me in her office late at night when I arrived in Adrian for my entrance on September 8, 1959. My father, mother, sister



High school picture of Jamie Phelps affixed to her 1959 application for admission to the Adrian Dominican Sisters.

⁴⁴ Marionette had encountered racism at St. Mary's High School in Chicago and transferred to Lucy Flower, joining our older sister Alfreda.

⁴⁵ Evonne and I both graduated among the top 10 in our class of about 110 young women. We both considered religious life, though she eventually married. Both of us completed our doctoral degrees, she in field of education from DePaul University and I in theology from the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. Both of us remain practicing Catholics, she as a faithful and active lay Catholic woman and I as a faithful Adrian Dominican woman religious.

Alfreda, and two Adrian Dominicans from eighth grade – Sister Bernard Marie and Sister Jean Lawrence – accompanied me.

Sister Margaret Philip (Kathleen) O’Connell, OP, my Postulant Mistress, welcomed me and treated me the way she treated the other women in our Holy Angels crowd. When she was tough on the others, she was tough on me and this “equality of treatment” was welcomed. I liked her because she told each of us what she was thinking and I/we could know that she was telling us the truth as she saw it! Sister Patrick Jerome’s (Mary Mullins, OP) quiet holiness was more of a challenge for me, but I could trust that she, too, was honest and truthful with me.

When I was nearing the end of the Novitiate, they both recommended me for first vows and privately assured me that they had confidence that I would persevere to final vows. I knew they “had my back!” They prepared me for my first mission to St. Carthage and sent one of my crowd with me so I would have a peer and friend to share my first mission experience. Madonna Patrice (Jeanne) Keyser, OP, and I were friends and we shared our observations when we noticed that our superior was kinder to Jeanne than she was to me.⁴⁶



*Jamie Phelps, OP, c 1964.
Logo on the brochure promoting the*

This first superior of ours had a blood sister in the Congregation who would visit occasionally. She noticed how her sister was treating me and took me aside, telling me to report the situation to my novice mistress. She also told her sister that she was going to report her attitude and treatment of me to my novice mistress. I was called to the Motherhouse to discuss the situation, but when I went in to talk with Sister Patrick Jerome, all I could do was cry. “PJ” told me to try to pull myself together and come back when I could regain my composure and talk with her calmly.

In the meantime, Sister Margaret Philip met my superior in the kitchen where she was eating. While she ate, my superior talked negatively about me to everyone sitting at the table. Sister Patrick Jerome later told me that she had heard about my superior’s false interpretation of me and my behavior and that Sister Margaret Philip had told her, in her dramatic way, that she was not describing the “Martin Thomas” she had formed in the Postulancy and had observed in the Novitiate! Sister Margaret Philip told my superior that she was obviously lying about me and that her own blood sister had reported the mistreatment.

Later, Sister Margaret Philip took me aside and told me that she and Sister Patrick Jerome would stand up for me. The result: Mother Gerald reassigned me to my second mission, St. Columbanus.

⁴⁶ I quickly figured out that since Jeanne had obviously come from a wealthy family who owned an Upper Peninsula summer resort, my superior was trying to ingratiate herself to Jeanne to get money for our local community. Jeanne and I discussed this and didn’t let it divide and conquer us. We remained friends until Jeanne left the Congregation by her own decision.

RECKONING WITH RACISM: A Lenten Journey

What a grace-filled contrast my second superior, Sister John Joseph (Anne O’Conner, OP), was! Though a quiet spirit, she expected us to follow the rule; she was neither hostile nor mean. I was living in a community of Sisters closer to my age and it was an entirely different situation. We enjoyed working as an educational team together. The older Sisters mentored me and the other younger Sisters who were new teachers. We did our teacher preparation work around the dining room tables and a spirit of comradery and team work prevailed. The school year ended with the annual play in which faculty and students joined to thread contemporary popular music into a musical with a theme and message. The students and faculty became a family with the common goal of ending the school year on a joyful note!

I praise God who did not abandon me and my call to the Adrian Dominican religious congregation because of these initial rejections. The racism we have encountered in the Catholic church and society has not triumphed because the God who dwells in us helps us “do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine!”

As an Adrian Dominican religious woman, by the power of God acting in and through me, I have served the Church and larger human community as an educator teaching at all levels or education: elementary to doctoral. I have participated in God’s healing and empowering ministries as a psychiatric social worker and community organizer, helping my clients discover and use their God-given power and gifts. As a theologian and spiritual director, I have mediated God’s presence sacramentally and helped my students, who in their theological research sought to use their God-given power and gifts for the well-being of all the People of God, in our rich racial, gender, economic, geographic, and social diversity.

I give thanks to my family, those Adrian Dominican Sisters who guided me through my early years, my formation directors, Sister Margaret Philip and Sister Patrick Jerome, and all those who befriended and accompanied me in our mutual intellectual and spiritual journey as members of the Dominican Order and the National Black Catholic Sisters’ Conference and other Black Catholic and Catholic institutions and organizations.



I give thanks to my students, particularly my graduate and doctoral university students, and faculty colleagues at the Catholic Theological Union of Chicago, The Institute of Black Catholic Studies at Xavier University of Louisiana, the University of Dayton, the University of Notre Dame, and Loyola University of Chicago who engaged in a process of mutually shared discernment of Truth and challenged us to live in accord with the will and Way of God in the particular circumstances of our contemporary world.

May we continue to listen to and act in accord with the will and Way of our Divine-Human Triune God. Let the Church, the People of God, say “Amen!”

*Jamie T. Phelps, OP, received an honorary doctorate degree from Aquinas Institute of Theology in July of 2016.
Photo by Dave Moore, <https://www.davemoorephotography.com>*

REFLECTION AND DIALOGUE

What do the details of Sister Jamie Phelps’ family life – her siblings, parents, grandparents, and ancestry – tell you about her, and about the African-American experience in the United States during the past two centuries? What does it mean to start your autobiography by noting that you or an ancestor were “born free”? Was there anything that surprised you? If so, what was it, and why? What are you learning?

What do you make of Mother Gerald’s response to the eighth-grader, at the top of her class, seeking admission to the Congregation through the Prep program? What do you make of Sister Jamie’s feelings in response – and of not wanting to fully share with her parents the reasons Mother Gerald gave for her “No.”?

How are your experiences of entering the Adrian Dominican Congregation and your early years similar to and different from Sister Jamie’s?

REVISITING A CALL

Every Black Catholic priest, sister, brother, deacon and lay pastoral leader can relate experiences of how our presence in the church was met with wariness, hostility or incredulity (“You’re Catholic?”); our leadership abilities were doubted or dismissed; our vocations were denied or challenged; and our Catholicism was deemed suspect.⁴⁷

- REV. BRYAN N. MASSINGALE, STD

The archival search found information about a call within the Adrian Dominican Congregation in the mid-1970s to explore concerns about the lack of Black vocations and to establish a special formation program for minority applicants. A file titled, “Minority Sisters Correspondence,” contains letters, communications regarding phone calls, and other documents relating to events leading up to a weekend meeting that took place on September 12-13, 1975, and its aftermath. It also includes four quasi-audible cassette tapes, recording portions of the September meeting.

A chronology of this call, with the names of the Sisters involved, is presented for reflection as part of our history and to stimulate further recollection and stories from those who participated so as better to complete the historical record. This part of our history is also presented with an invitation for each of us to revisit the call through our critical lenses and understandings today, and its present day imperatives.

August 1974 | Proposal to Establish a “Minority Commission”

Jamie Phelps, OP, submitted a proposal to the newly elected General Council at the 1974 General Chapter, calling for two actions: “The formation of an Adrian Dominican Minority Commission composed of representatives of the minority groups present within our congregation. In instances where the minority groups are not represented a representative who works with that minority group should be included.” And, “A study of Adrian Dominican Ministry among minority groups will be researched from the perspective of our ministerial thrust of gospel-justice. This study should be conducted by the Minority Commission with technical assistance in conjunction with the Office of Mission and Ministry.”⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Bryan N. Massingale, “The first African-American cardinal is a tribute to the faith of Black Catholics – and a gift to the entire church,” in *America*, October 30, 2020. See: <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2020/10/30/wilton-gregory-cardinal-faith-black-catholics-united-states-bryan-massingale>

⁴⁸ The proposal, titled “Ministry,” was undated but Jamie Phelps, OP, verified in a conversation with Elise D. García, OP, on January 30, 2021, that she submitted it to the General Council in August 1974. The proposal included quotes from Scripture, Church documents, and liberation theologians Gustavo Gutiérrez, PhD, and James Cone, PhD, as the “Rationale for Minority Commission and Minority Study.”

March 9-10, 1975 | National Black Sisters' Conference: Formation Workshop

Adrian, Michigan

The NBSC sponsored a Formation workshop relative to Black vocations planned and directed by M. Shawn Copeland, OP.⁴⁹ An analysis of existing formation structures led Jamie Phelps, OP, to consider “a process for identifying and developing a formation program which would facilitate Black Vocations entrance to Adrian.”⁵⁰

March 15, 1975 | Provincial Assembly in Detroit

Detroit, Michigan

At the Detroit Assembly, Prioress Rosemary Ferguson, OP, asked the Sisters “if they knew of any women who had seriously considered entering Adrian but who hesitated for some reason or other?” According to the memorandum chronicling these events, Doreen Poupard, OP, and Joslen Letscher, OP, “began to share their concern for the lack of Black Vocations and questioned the Congregational efforts regarding the same.” Sister Rosemary “responded supportively and commissioned Sister Doreen to establish an ‘ad hoc committee’ to explore the question further.”⁵¹

March 24, 1975 | Meeting with Prioress of the Congregation

Adrian, Michigan

On March 24, Sister Jamie kept an appointment she had previously scheduled with Sister Rosemary where she “expressed her personal concern and interest in working to develop a productive vehicle to facilitate the formation of Black women interested in religious life as Adrian Dominicans.” She also presented Sister Rosemary with a copy of the “Minority Commission” proposal she had previously submitted. Sister Rosemary encouraged Sister Jamie to contact Sisters Doreen and Joslen “as persons who had similar concerns as herself.” In addition, tentative plans were made for Sister Rosemary to host a meeting sometime in June 1975 of a committee of Sisters who “would meet in Adrian to explore the questions of ways and means to encourage, form and maintain Black vocations.”⁵²

⁴⁹ Then serving as Executive Director of the National Black Sisters' Conference, Sister Shawn had just submitted an article to the *National Catholic Reporter*, titled “through a glass darkly: a reflection on religious life among black women.” In it, she wrote: “Our greatest need and most difficult task is that of replicating ourselves. We have had little success; fewer than 1,000 of some 130,000 religious women in the United States are black. There are few religious congregations to which to turn. Not many predominantly white religious congregations are willing or able to develop an Afro-centric posture – first: admitting that the exigencies of blackness require black women to control and define the total experiences and expressions of their being, and second: that a conscious attempt is needed to discover, discern, affirm, cultivate, and pursue innovative models for the inclusion of black women.” Sister Mary Shawn Copeland, OP, Executive Director, National Black Sisters' Conference, “An Article Submitted to the *National Catholic Reporter*,” hand-dated March 5, 1975, Adrian Dominican Archive.

⁵⁰ From a memorandum addressed to Sister Rosemary Ferguson, OP, “RE: INCREASING INTEREST IN THE FORMULATION OF A PLAN AND OR PROCESS FOR FACILITATING THE ENTRANCE OF BLACK AND LATINO WOMEN INTO THE ADRIAN DOMINICAN COMMUNITY” sent by Jamie Phelps, OP, María Antonia (Rosalie) Esquerra, OP, Juanita Flores, OP, and Shawn Copeland, OP, dated June 9, 1975. Archive of Adrian Dominican Sisters.

⁵¹ Ibid. All excerpts are taken from the memorandum.

⁵² Ibid.

April 1975 | Conversations Among Sisters Concerned about Black Vocations

Various phone conversations took place among Sisters concerned about Black vocations, including Latina Sisters interested in discussing minority recruitment. Sister Doreen planned to host a meeting in May to prepare for the June meeting with Sister Rosemary. The May meeting was postponed when Juanita Flores, OP, called for a meeting to discuss the matter first among Sisters of color, including Sisters Jamie, Shawn, María Antonia (Rosalie) Esquerra, OP, and Maria del Rey Plain, OP.

June 1 and 10, 1975 | Correspondence

Sisters Jamie and Rosemary exchanged correspondence about “the tentative plans to call a committee meeting” in June, per their March 24 meeting. In her June 1 letter, Sister Jamie noted that she had reached out to Sisters Shawn, Maria del Rey, Joslen, Doreen, Josephine Gaugier, OP, and Judith Engel, OP, as Sister Rosemary had suggested. She also made note of a phone conversation she had with Sister Juanita, who was interested in the discussion about recruitment of minority vocations and the proposal to establish a “Minority Commission.” Sister Rosemary apologized for not being able to keep the June appointment, adding her “first clear day is August 12 or 13, or September 12 or 13.” Sister Rosemary noted, “If you schedule this with all concerned, then we can discuss both the vocation issue as well as the Minority Commission.”

June 6-7, 1975 | Meeting of Sisters of Color

Lansing, Michigan

Sisters Juanita, Jamie, Shawn, and María Antonia met at Sister Juanita’s residence “to explore minority concerns about vocations to Adrian from the ‘minority’ communities. Sister Maria del Rey was scheduled to attend but could not because of the demands of the closing of the Academy in Adrian.” The Sisters sent a summary of their meeting to Sister Rosemary, noting that though the Sisters came together with a formal agenda, they found themselves sharing “their experiences and struggles being members of a majority white congregation.” The summary noted that “This was a hope-filled and very supportive process for each of us. It was good to know that each of us had moved to a position of total dependence upon the Lord in the face of rejection and alienating situations encountered as we moved among our Adrian sisters.” The Sisters agreed “to continue to participate in the Congregational deliberations and meetings regarding Black and Latino Vocations” and “to explore further the idea of a ‘Minority Commission’ as submitted in Jamie’s proposal to Sister Rosemary and the Council.”⁵³

June 11, 1975 | Letter to Prioress of the Congregation

Sister Jamie sent Sister Rosemary a copy of the five-page memorandum providing a chronology of the events cited above. She also shared her sense of the current “state of upset and alienation” among the Black-Catholic community “because of the unilateral closing of four elementary schools in the Black and/or transitional communities” by Cardinal John Patrick Cody, Archbishop of Chicago.

⁵³ June 9, 1975, memorandum to Sister Rosemary Ferguson, OP, “RE: INCREASING INTEREST IN THE FORMULATION OF A PLAN...”. All excerpts are taken from the Memorandum.

July 12, 1975 | Second Meeting of Sisters of Color

Chicago, Illinois

Sisters Shawn, María Antonia, Juanita, Jamie, and Maria del Rey met at Sister Jamie's residence to "Continue discussion of exploring the topic of 'minority' vocations and the 'Minority Commission'". After sharing "their reflections, feelings and concerns regarding their own religious vocation at the present time," the Sisters came to key agreements on what the Congregation could do "to facilitate, i.e., identify, nurture and maintain vocations from the Black and Latino communities." They identified the need for:

1. Experimenting in various admissions processes for full membership: engaging Black and Latino psychologists for psychological testing of Black and Latina candidates and involving Black and Latina Sisters in the admissions process.
2. Black and Latina role models in positions of power and authority.
3. Supporting Black and Latina members in experiments in life styles and service models "uniquely suited to address ourselves to the specific needs of the Latino & Black Communities."
4. Subsidizing advanced education of Black and Latina Sisters.

The Sisters also agreed on what Black and Latina Sisters could do, i.e.:

1. Participate in the admissions process.
2. Prepare and review vocation outreach materials.
3. Consult on formation programs and the Office of Mission and Ministry with regard to ministry to the Black and Latino community.⁵⁴

September 12-13, 1975 | Meeting with Congregation Prioress and General Council

Adrian, Michigan

Attendees included Sisters Rosemary and Cathryn Deutsch, OP, from the General Council; Sisters Jamie, Juanita, Rosalie, and Shawn; and Sisters Doreen and Joslen, who, along with two other white Sisters present – Judith Engel, OP and Josephine Gaugier, OP – were engaged in ministries with Black or Latino communities. Sister Maria del Rey was unable to attend.

No minutes or written record of the day-and-a-half-long meeting were found in the Archive, only the agenda and cassette recordings.

The two-part agenda, following prayer, centered on a discussion of vocations and the proposed Minority Commission.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

SUGGESTED AGENDA

Prayer: Meditation Hymn: “I’ll do His Will”
 Reading: I Corinthians 12:4-11
 Spontaneous prayer response...

I. Vocations

- A. Purpose of our meeting
 - a. Overview of Data
 - Black Community – Sr. Shawn
 - Latino Community – Sr. María Antonia
 - Discussion
- B. Personal Reflections of Adrian Dominican Milieu
 - a. The Black Perspective
 - b. The Latino Perspective
 - c. The White Perspective
 - Discussion
- C. Possibilities in Programming for Vocations/Formation
 - Discussion

II. Discussion of Minority Commission

Sister Jo Gaugier created a partial transcript of the 45-year-old cassettes, which were not entirely audible. Her notes, including excerpts from the audio cassettes, provide a sense of the meeting, as follows:

Sister Jamie opened the meeting, noting that the group was gathered to talk about Black and Latino vocations, following up on prior conversations among those gathered. Sister Shawn provided an overview, noting that she intended to do two things: “To say something generally about trends in the Catholic Church with regard to the Black community and, then, to speak about the question of religious women in America: Do Black women fit in or *not* fit in?”⁵⁵

Sister Shawn traced the history of “Black people having long roots in the Catholic Church.” She noted that Orestes Brown, an abolitionist and Catholic convert, and many others like him, “spoke about the fact that the Church did very little to eradicate slavery and promote the freedom and human aspirations of Black people but opted more for the status quo.” Sister Shawn said she was referring to this “history of omission and commission” in the Catholic Church not for the sake of raising it *per se* but as a necessary predicate for the group to be able to reflect on “our possible attitudinal, intellectual, and emotional relationship with regard to Black and white people today.” She observed with dismay the “stunning factor” that a then-recent LCWR slide presentation on the history of religious life did not include *any* Black Sisters. “[T]his absence of any Black women obscured the historical

⁵⁵ All quotes are drawn from the Transcript of the Meeting drafted by Josephine Gaugier, OP, from August 15, 2018, to September 11, 2018. Archive of Adrian Dominican Sisters.

presence of Black women in religious life,” she said, sharing that she was “terribly disappointed” in the omission. “It makes one be reminded that we tend to think of religious life as exclusively a white piece of property. And I think that what God’s been telling us now for more than a hundred years [is] that that’s not really true.” Sister Shawn outlined the history of Black Catholic Sisters to the present day, including the congregations founded by Black Catholic women, and the role of the Civil Rights movement in “forcing the question of integration” among other U.S. congregations of women religious.

During the next part of the meeting, Sisters of color shared stories of their experiences of entering the white-dominant Congregation, as well as their continuing challenges. The conversation then turned to the rationale for developing a process of formation for women of color, engaging all participants in the meeting. Questions and concerns were raised about a number of areas, including the need to have women of color in the admissions or formation process, the need to go into communities and “really recognize and validate the Black or Hispanic vocations that are there,” the need to invest financial resources in these efforts, and related topics. The discussion also took note of the general challenges the Congregation was experiencing in its formation program during these Renewal years, as formation personnel were attempting to respond with multiple adaptations aimed at meeting the rapidly changing needs of the day.

The tapes do not record the end of the meeting or its outcome; additional steps ensued, as follows.

October 27-28, 1975 | General Council Meeting

Adrian, Michigan

Rosemary Ferguson, OP, Jeanne Burns, OP, Nadine Foley, OP, Cathryn Deutsch, OP, Jeanne O’Laughlin, OP

The minutes reflect that “Sister Rosemary asked for discussion of the proposals submitted by a group of our minority sisters.” These centered on creating a Minority Commission, a study of ministry among minority groups, and minority vocations. Following discussion of each proposal, the Council identified actions that could be taken now on two of the three proposals and “charged Sister Jeanne O’Laughlin to bring [the proposed Minority Commission] through the planning process so that expectations, goals, plans for recruitment of members, budget, etc., can be specifically addressed. When this process is completed the proposal could be returned to a Council meeting for a decision.” The minutes note that “Sister Rosemary will respond to the group.”⁵⁶

On October 31, 1975, Sister Rosemary sent a letter to Sisters María Antonia, Shawn, Juanita, Jamie, and Maria del Rey, stating that the General Council had considered the proposals they had submitted. “We were all quite interested in the topics you presented and have taken action regarding each proposal,” she wrote.⁵⁷ The letter continued:

⁵⁶ Minutes of October 27-28, 1975, General Council Meeting, Adrian Dominican Archive.

⁵⁷ October 31, 1975, letter to María Antonia Esquerra, OP, from Sister Rosemary Ferguson, OP. A typed note appended to the letter states, “This letter also sent to: Sr. Shawn Copeland, Sr. Juanita Flores, Sr. Jamie Phelps, Sr. Maria del Rey Plain.”

The first request for an Adrian Dominican Minority Commission raised some points that demand further exploration and planning in order to clarify and understand the implications involved in establishing such a committee. You will be hearing from Sister Jeanne O’Laughlin since the planning office has been charged with developing the details of implementation.

The second proposal that calls for a study seems feasible to implement now, using those who attended the September 13th meeting as a task force for the study and tapping available resources of the Life/Mission Division of Central Services. The planning staff will be contacting you about this project also.

The third and major concern, of course, was that of vocations. Some action can be taken on all of your recommendations now or in the near future. The formation team will incorporate specific policies regarding the testing of candidates and the involvement of Black and Latino sisters in the admissions process at their next board meeting.

The Council will consider appointment of a minority person to the pre-admissions board or formation team for the year 1976-77.

The Council encourages any Black or Latino member to send them specific proposals regarding the experiment of life styles and service models that address the needs of the Latino and Black communities. The subsidy review board and ministry fund were established with these needs in mind.

Regarding the advanced education of Black and Latino sisters, we feel that ample opportunity has been and will continue to be given these sisters for continuing their education.

The next communication is a March 3, 1976, memorandum from Jeanne O’Laughlin, OP, and Carol Jean McDonnell, OP, to the General Council regarding “Minority Proposals,” which the Planning Office was charged with following up on at the October 28, 1975 Council meeting.

The memorandum references a meeting held on February 28-29, 1976, with the five Sisters who submitted the proposals. Sisters Jeanne and Carol Jean forwarded to the General Council the fruits of that meeting, noting that the group of five Sisters will submit the names of Latino and Black psychologists to the formation team and seek an appointment on the formation team through Formation Director Sarah Sharkey, OP. They note that the group recommends that the formation team “be composed of qualified Black, white, Latino sisters who would develop a formation program which is respectful of the needs of Black, white, Latino persons as we plan for religious life style and ministry for the future.”

In the Planning Office memorandum, Sisters Jeanne and Carol Jean stated that they were recommending no action on the proposals concerning life style or education of Sisters of color as there already were existing channels to move these forward – e.g., through dialogue with a co-provincial or application for study.

The memorandum concluded by noting that the concept of “a commission or committee” was discussed and that the group of five Sisters recommended that a committee named “Adrian Dominicans of Color on the Continent” (ADOCC) be established with a full-time person charged with working within the Life/Mission division. The memorandum added that “Due to the desire that this person be equal to other directors it was finally suggested that an office of ADOCC be developed at the Central Service level.” The five Sisters recommended that Sisters María Antonia Esquerra or Shawn Copeland be considered to serve as the Director of ADOCC, and outlined the responsibilities of the committee. A typed note appended at the end of this proposal states, “The Planning Office highly recommends the establishment of an office to address corporately the needs and concerns of persons of color on the continent. This office should be integrated into the Life/Mission division.”

On April 5, 1976, the General Council sent a memorandum regarding “Proposal for an Office of ADOCC” to Sisters Shawn, María Antonia, Juanita, Jamie, and Maria del Rey. It noted at the outset that the proposal “to establish an office at the Generalate level to accommodate the concern expressed by Sisters representing the minority groups was presented to the General Council.” The response of the General Council continued, as follows, in its entirety:

We, in the Council, are in agreement that your concerns need addressing, not only in our Congregation, but in the Church, and of course, in society. However, none of us feels that establishing a separate office for this purpose is feasible.

Whatever the needs to be addressed, we have the channels for so doing in our present structure. It may well be that there are inadequacies, but we believe we can find ways to attend the questions within the structure, instead of creating a separate office for every major need in society. The Congregation is mindful of the minority people in our country, and to this end, considerable Congregational funds are expended, and a quality group of dedicated women put their lives at the service of these people. Besides this direct approach, i.e., the availability of our personnel and the use of our funds, we hope that all of us will become more conscious of the urgency of the issues you represent so concisely.

As a result of our concern we have asked the Life Mission group to direct their attention to your concerns whenever possible. We also would encourage them to include any or all of you in future programming in which your expertise and experience can be utilized.

We would like to suggest you continue to meet at least twice a year on an “ad hoc” basis in order to maintain a vehicle of communication between those knowledgeable about the concerns of people of color and the Congregation.

We appreciate the investment of time and energy expended by you, as well as the sisters in the planning office who have met with you.

The Minutes of the March 23-24, 1976, meeting of the General Council were examined to see if they shed any light on the leaders' decision making. The Minutes provide itemized details of the report that Sisters Jeanne and Carol Jean presented to the General Council and then record the following, in its entirety, pertaining to this discussion:

At the conclusion of the report the Council engaged in lengthy discussion following which it was determined that:

- The concerns identified by the minority group could be addressed by the Life/Mission division of Central Services. The Life/Mission members will be asked to direct their attention to the concerns of the minority group and to utilize these sisters as resource persons wherever possible.
- Sister Jamie Phelps will be contacted concerning the opening for a full-time person in Pre-Admissions. This position entitles her to participate in the Life/Mission division of Central Services.

Sister Rosemary was designated to communicate with Sister Jamie concerning the pre-Admissions position and to convey to the minority group the decisions of the Council.

REFLECTION AND DIALOGUE

Place yourself in this timeframe and the sequence of these meetings and exchanges, the language, the concerns, the different perspectives. What are you observing? What are you feeling? What are you learning?

RECKONING WITH RACISM: A Lenten Journey

How do you understand the response: "... but we believe we can find ways to attend the questions within the structure, instead of creating a separate office for every major need in society"? How would you have responded then? How would you respond now?

In what ways is this conversation still taking place today? How do you feel we are called to act now?

If you have any first-hand knowledge of these events and/or of what happened (or not) in subsequent years, please share them.

T O W A R D C O M P L E T I N G T H E S T U D Y

[W]e must believe ... that we can transform our societies to be antiracist from this day forward. Racist power is not godly. Racist policies are not indestructible. ...

Race and racism are power constructs of the modern world. ...

Racism is not even six hundred years old. It's a cancer that we've caught early. But racism is one of the fastest-spreading and most fatal cancers humanity has ever known. It is hard to find a place where its cancer cells are not dividing and multiplying. ... But if we ignore the odds and fight to create an antiracist world, then we give humanity a chance to one day survive, a chance to live in communion, a chance to be forever free.⁵⁸

- I B R A M X . K E N D I , P H D

No one study could ever fully address the complex and multi-layered phenomenon of racism and white supremacy and its impact on Dominicans and other women religious in the history of the United States to the present day. This survey to review the records of admission and withdrawal of women of color in the Adrian Dominican Archive provides an opportunity for us to expand our understanding of and reflection on these issues well beyond the very narrow and incomplete slice of history this study yields.

We invite all of us to take the next steps toward providing a more complete picture for our collective reflection – and, more significantly, to guide our action moving forward.

Please draw from the notes you have taken in prior reflections and dialogue to share a written response that will form part of our Congregational Archive and help to complete this study. We know it will never be complete; however, your contribution added to that of others will help significantly to amplify it.

⁵⁸ Ibram X. Kendi, *How to be an Antiracist* (New York: One World/Random House, 2019), p. 238.

NEXT STEPS

1. Review your own written reflections. Please submit any stories, experiences, or insights that you think are important to provide the Congregation with a more complete picture of the impact of racism and white supremacy on the admission and withdrawal of women of color and any other aspects of our life as Dominican Sisters.

2. Share your reflections with others. Following contemplative reflection and dialogue, please submit your collective response to these questions:

- What are your most significant learnings from participating in this Lenten journey of Reckoning with Racism?

- As you consider your learnings, the continuing and urgent challenges posed by racism and white supremacy today, and our call as women religious, what steps do you think are important for us to take now as a Congregation?

NOTE: If you remain in touch with one or more women of color who left the Congregation and sense that she might be willing to share the story of her experience, please consider reaching out. Members of the Toward Communion: Undoing Racism/Embracing Diversity group are creating a template of questions to help guide your conversation. The woman's reflections will be included in our Archive and help us come to a better understanding of the insidious role of racism and white privilege in our Congregation.

C O D A

We seem to be drawing closer to our Mission of Jesus, wherein we hope to become more authentic bearers of His love, and co-creators of his justice and peace. After being with you this week, listening, I find new hope in what can happen to Black and White people bonding together in faith, and thus through Jesus our Lord, coming to an understanding of hearts and minds. ... I pray that any effort to work, play, and live with one another will not be in vain. *We have already missed entirely too much of the beauty, the holiness, and the love from one another.*

– Mary Philip Ryan, OP

*“Ministering in the Black Community”
Weber Center, 1981*



*“Ministering in the Black Community:
An Agenda for Cooperative Action” workshop
at Weber Center on June 21-26, 1981.*

On the cover, clockwise from top right:

Rosalie Esquerra, OP, teaching young adults in the 1980s through Life Directions, an organization she helped found in 1974 to address violence through the dynamic of “peers inspiring peers” that continues to serve at-risk youth in Detroit and Chicago.

Dominican Sisters of Edmonds celebrate the investiture on June 14, 1964, of Novices, including the first African-American Sister, and of First, Renewing, and Finally Professed Sisters. Front row, from left, Sisters Patricia (Jean Raymond) Carel, Lorene Heck, Linda (Stephanie) Brinck, Ruth Palmer, Mother Frances Miller, OP, Aleda (Paulette) Lemire, OP, Deanne (Martin de Porres) Gayle, Geraldine (Michele) Kopp, OP, LaVerne Backes, Sharon (John Marian) Park, Judith (Jolene) Fransicovich. Back row, from left, Shirley (Johanna) Pernerl, OP, Patricia (Ignatia) Lennon, OP, Diane (John Marie) Park, OP, Judith (Julia) Crippan, OP, Mary (Corinne) Epps, and Patricia (Joseph Marie) Harbeck, OP.

Adrian Dominican Sisters with students and friends at Blessed Martin de Porres Mission in Fort Pierce, Florida, 1945.

Four African-American women in the Congregation, from left – Shawn Copeland, OP, Jamie Phelps, OP, Maria del Rey Plain, OP, and Cheryl Delahoussaye, OP – are joined by Reginald Whitt, OP, and Jerome Robinson, OP, on the occasion of Sister Shawn’s final profession in 1977.

All photos from the Adrian Dominican Archive.

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Adrian Dominican Sisters