

**ST. PETER CLAVER'S PARISH (BROOKLYN): AFRICAN AMERICAN  
MISSION, WAY-STATION, OR HOME?**

**by**

**Victoria Marie Davies**

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APPROVAL

NAME: Victoria Marie Davies  
DEGREE: Master of Arts (Anthropology)  
TITLE OF THESIS: ST. PETER CLAVER'S PARISH (BROOKLYN): AFRICAN  
AMERICAN MISSION, WAY-STATION, OR HOME?

Examining Committee  
Chair Dr. Gary Teeple

---

Dr. Michael G. Kenny  
Senior Supervisor  
Professor of Anthropology

---

Dr. Marilyn Gates  
Associate Professor of Anthropology

---

Dr. Don Grayston  
Lecturer  
Humanities Program  
External Examiner

Date Approved

September 8th, 1994

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"St. Peter Claver's Parish (Brooklyn): African American Mission, Way-Station,

or Home?"

Author:

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature)

Victoria Marie Davies

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Name)

September 8th, 1994

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

## ABSTRACT

This is an anthropological study of an African American Catholic parish in the inner-city of Brooklyn, New York. The study seeks to explore how the original members became adherents to the Roman Catholic faith and why and how their descendants have maintained the parish as a vibrant community. This study also explores the relationship of the parish with the wider church and worldly communities.

The Roman Catholic parish has often been a buffer between a dominant population and non-dominant racial or ethnic groups. Considering the racism that existed in the United States and the Roman Catholic Church at the time of the establishment of the parish, 1922, this study aims to discover why and how the original adherents embraced Roman Catholicism and in view of racism's persistence, why they remained.

Most parish studies concern immigrant groups in European countries, Canada, and the United States or ethnic and linguistic groups suddenly included in newly created nation-states of the nineteenth century, such as Canada and Italy. Focusing on this parish and its African American constituency sets this study apart from the parish studies of European enclaves in North America as well as from the pathological studies of African Americans which focus on societal problems. This study explores the community building and maintenance strategies adapted in response to exclusion from both the mainstream of United States society and the Roman Catholic Church in the United States. The history of the parish reveals the inappropriateness of calling St. Peter Claver's parish a mission. The data indicate that because of residential segregation the parish has not become a way-station on the way to a better location. Belief in their religion, their parish church and themselves motivate the parishioners to

improve the conditions of the present location. Hence, St. Peter Claver's has remained "home" to the majority of its parishioners.

Participant observation was the major research method, supplemented by interviews, examination of parish bulletins, and other parish publications. Participant observation consisted of participating as a practicing Roman Catholic by attending Mass, novenas, prayer groups, and special devotions (ritual events).

The research findings suggest that the level of the parishioners activity not only kept the parish community vibrant but also that the concerns and involvement of the people extend into larger networks and the wider society. The data indicate that future studies could include questions concerning: religious affiliation and its impact today, the "mainstream" elements of inner-city life, the networks that exist between the inner-city and the "outside" beyond those of governmental social service agencies.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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## CHAPTER 1

### OVERVIEW

#### Introduction

According to Kosmin's 1989-1990 study, Black Catholics make up five percent of the total population of Catholics in the United States and nine percent of the total black population. New York has the largest number of Black Catholics, 440,000, followed by Illinois with 240,000, California with 240,000, and Louisiana with 190,000 (Kosmin, 1991). This population has been largely ignored by students of anthropology, sociology, history, and religion. Previous anthropological studies of parishes focused on European enclaves in North America. The objective of this study is to discover what attracted the original members to St. Peter Claver's parish of the Roman Catholic Church, why they stayed, and how their descendants maintain the parish as a vibrant community within but also part of the wider community.

Free African Americans have inhabited the Bedford-Stuyvesant area of Brooklyn since 1820, seven years prior to the abolition of slavery in New York State in 1827. At that time it was called Weeksville after its founder, James Weeks (Mapp, 1991). Mapp (1991) suggests that the settlement was prosperous enough to support a school, an orphanage, an old age home, and Protestant two churches. Why did it take the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) over a hundred years, until 1922, to establish a presence in this area? What factors contributed to African American converting to this new church in their midst? In view of the derogatory perception of the parish by outsiders as a "Negro mission" until the 1970s, why did African Americans remain

faithful adherents to the RCC and the parish? How and why have the people built and sustained the parish and their church over time? These are the questions this study aims to explore.

Most parish studies deal with non-dominant ethnic groups that are newly arrived immigrants to a country or linguistically different ethnic groups that are incorporated into a new nation-state. In these instances the parish becomes the place of transition from old country citizens to fully assimilated citizens of their new country or, as in the case of Quebec, the site of linguistic and ethnic nationalism. This study will add to the literature on African Americans and religion that goes beyond the study of traditionally "Black Churches", such as Baptist or Pentecostal which discloses another significant difference. The way in which the St. Peter Claver's differs from other non-dominant group parishes that have been studied is that the clergy in the latter case usually belong to the same "racial" and ethnic group as their parishioners.

The reasons for choosing this particular parish are both professional and personal. St. Peter Claver parish is the oldest African American parish in Brooklyn (which together with the borough of Queens has the largest concentration of African American Catholics in North America); my maternal grandmother was among its first parishioners, and I was baptized there. However, although these connections were present, the experience of participating in a setting where I would be a member of the racial "in-group" was completely new to this researcher in all aspects whether in a worship, educational, or social environment. Another significant factor is that while many mainline churches are experiencing a decline in membership, the RCC is experiencing an increase due mostly to the increase in African American membership. Lincoln and Mamiya state, "since 1985, black Roman Catholics have grown from 990,000 to close to 2 million members, with gains coming largely from Caribbean

immigrants and upwardly mobile African Americans seeking parochial educational alternatives to the urban public schools" (Lincoln and Mamiya, 1990:159). Always a focal point for blacks from the southern United States and the Caribbean who come to Brooklyn, Bedford-Stuyvesant began receiving large numbers of Blacks from South and Central America, the Caribbean, and Africa after the Immigration Act of 1965; this ethnic diversity is well represented in St. Peter Claver parish.

This study sought to discover how and why the people have sustained the parish as a vibrant community over time. The exploration of the interaction and relationships between the church and the community on local, diocesan and national levels yields insight into the adaptive strategies used by African Americans in pursuit of the practice of their religion as well as participation in the wider American society.

### **Review of Relevant Literature**

The literature reviewed below falls into three categories: anthropological works on African Americans, studies of parish communities, and works that can be said to have the official sanction of the RCC on issues of ethnicity and race.

#### **Anthropology and African Americans: Benign Neglect - Studies of the Stereotypical**

To say that there is a paucity of mainstream anthropological literature on African Americans is an understatement. One of the consequences of minority status is having to endure being defined and categorized by the dominant group. The definition and categorization includes what facets of a culture are deemed worthy of study by that group. Hence, the majority of studies of African Americans deal with pathology, family breakdown, and moral deficit as demonstrated in the literature discussed below.

Moynihan (1965) and Lewis (1966) were responsible for the two most enduring myths about African Americans. Moynihan (1965) suggests that 300 years of slavery has built family breakdown into the lifestyle of African Americans and that this in turn causes a perpetual "tangle of pathology" in African American life (Moynihan, 1965). Lewis' (1966) contribution to this litany of negatives is the "culture of poverty" thesis. This "culture" consists of poverty, low esteem, woman-dominated families, fatalism, helplessness, dependence, inferiority, and hostility to the "established" society (Lewis, 1966). Although Lewis points out that the characteristics which constitute this culture are found in the slum dwellers of Mexico City and San Juan (Puerto Rico), until recently most studies bestow on the African American sole ownership and cultivation of the "culture of poverty". These two myths are still prevalent today, in spite of the questionable methodology employed and the conclusions drawn by Moynihan and Lewis. Some of their lingering influences are examined by Demos (1990) in "Black Family Studies in the Journal of Marriage and the Family and the Issue of Distortion"

The 1986 CBS television special "The Vanishing Family: Crisis in Black America" drew the attention of millions of American viewers to the ghetto life of the black American underclass. The special represented a renewed perpetuation of a pathological image of blacks in America and led to the call by at least one sociologist (Williams, 1986) for a more understanding portrayal of the black American family in terms of its social context, that is, a predominantly white society (Demos, 1990:603).

... For sociologists, the more recent [than the Moynihan Report] CBS documentary reopens questions regarding the extent to which social scientific studies reinforce a stereotyped image of blacks and of black families in America (Demos, 1990:603).

An example of this influence is found in , *All Our Kin*, Stack's (1974) study of an inner city area of an unspecified midwestern city given the fictitious name, "The Flats". While Stack (1974) criticizes other researchers for comparing the Black family to the white middle class model and is so intent on showing how her subjects adapt for

survival, she neglects and under emphasizes the legal marriages present among her informants<sup>1</sup>. Stack (1974) stresses the conflicting pulls and obligations between kin and possible marriage partners and how these act to prevent people in the Flats from marrying. In so doing she neglects to explain or explore the seven marriages that exist, even the one she states is over twenty years in duration, to the point of omitting husband/wife relationships in her section, "Women and Men". She reinforces the "culture of poverty" thesis (woman-dominated families, dependence on welfare, hostility to the established society) that she is supposedly trying to refute. "Stack (1974) argues against stereotypes, yet does not discuss in any detail the non-stereotypical" (Davies, 1993:6).

Another anthropological work on African Americans was, *The Extended Family in Black Societies*, edited by Shimkin et al. (1978), which included works by Aschenbrenner (1978) and Lenus (1978) who also confined their studies to family and kinship but departed from the pathological approach. One possible explanation for this is suggested in Demos' (1990) article, which points out that the funding for the project was granted to "an agency of the poor, primarily Black people. . .". In other words the researchers were answerable to the local people who dispensed the funds (Davies, 1993:10).

However, Gutman (1976, 1985) and Billingsley (1976, 1988) in their systematic studies of African American families remain the primary debunkers of what Bennett (1992) calls, "the biggest myths about the Black family" (Bennett, 1992:118-124).

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<sup>1</sup>. The legal marriages that Stack under emphasizes include: (1) Viola and Leo on page 8; (2) Calvin and Magnolia on page 95; (3) Carrie married Lazar... married Kermit on page 95; (4) Lydia married Mike on page 95; (5) Eloise lives with her husband on page 96; (6) Cecil was Violet's husband (Cecil died) on page 97; and (7) Odessa's husband was killed in a fight on page 97 (Stack, 1974).

Gutman's (1976) in-depth social history exposes the myth of the matrifocal slave family as such, and therefore removes the historical basis of the "persistence" of this women-dominated family. Gutman's (1976) book stresses the deep sense of family held by slaves before and after emancipation and gives accounts of how family reunification was the uppermost priority after emancipation for those families that had been separated (Gutman, 1976). Gutman (1985) suggests it is ludicrous to regard the intact two-parent Black family as merely a reaction to and imitation of European American lifestyles and behaviour. He dismisses the assumption that Africans had no family or moral tradition prior to being stolen from Africa.

Billingsley has placed the African American family in context, that is, as part of and not separate from American society (Billingsley, 1976). He demonstrates that the trends called "pathological" with such facility in African American society are growing trends in the United States in general, namely, the increase in alternative lifestyles including adult singlehood, cohabitation, gay and lesbian relationships, childless couples, divorce, separation, single parents, working wives and mothers, and the corresponding decrease in the "traditional" European American nuclear family (Billingsley, 1976). Billingsley also points out that students of what he calls, "group life", have virtually ignored African Americans (Billingsley, 1988).

Billingsley appears to be correct because for more recent works or works dealing with other facets of African American life one has to look at studies done in disciplines other than mainstream anthropology, such as, Lincoln and Mamiya's (1990), *The Black Church in the African American Experience* or James Borchert's (1980), *Alley Life in Washington: Family, Community, Religion, and Folklife in the City, 1850-1970*, or *The History of Black Catholics in the United States*, by Cyprian Davis (1990). Davis' work is extremely helpful in filling in both the temporal



and spatial history of Black Catholics. For example, he clarifies from the beginning that not all American Catholics are either immigrants or the newly converted and suggests that some Africans may have originally been Catholic before being enslaved and brought to North America. Davis (1990) tells of King Afonso the Good who ruled as king of the Congo from 1506 until 1543. King Afonso's son, Henrique, became a priest. Davis (1990) states:

Leo X made him [Henrique] a titular bishop to act as the auxiliary of the bishop of Funchal in the Madeira Islands. Henrique resided in the Congo, and he died in 1531. With him died the hope of a Congolese church with direct access to Rome, and likewise the hope of an indigenous clergy. Thus, at the very time when the Catholic church was losing northern Europe to the Protestant reform, an African king had wished to win his people to that same church. It was the curse of the slave trade that drove many of Afonso's subjects against the church after his death in 1543 (Davis, 1990:16-18).

An encouraging statement is made by Davis (1990): "Ideally, the history of the black Catholic community should be the synthesis of carefully researched histories carried out on the local level. *To a large extent this research is still lacking*" (Davis, 1990:ix) (italics mine). The last statement sums up the situation in Anthropology, not just on Black Catholics but on African Americans in general.

The studies of RC parishes and European ethnic minorities yielded definite patterns of the role that the parish churches played in the relationships between the parishioners and the wider society. Some of the patterns found in the literature of anthropology and other disciplines on Roman Catholic parishes are briefly discussed below.

### **Studies of Roman Catholic Parishes and European Ethnic Minorities**

Hughes (1963) and Rioux, Falardeau, and Garigue (1964) deal solely and specifically with the French Canadian experience, which is similar to Peri's (1990)

description of what transpired in Italy with the creation of the Italian nation-state. The French Canadians like their Slovenian, Albanian, and Friulian speaking counterparts in Italy became parts of new nations. Unlike their Italian counterparts however, the French in Canada had been French citizens practicing their state religion until the British conquest of North America made them an ethnic and religious minority. In the cases of the Albanian-Italians, the Eastern Rite Church won its right to the worship in the Greek liturgy for its people from the authorities in the Vatican. The French Canadian Roman Catholics won from the British linguistic and religious freedoms.

Mol (1985) in *Faith and Fragility: Religion and Identity in Canada*, Brauer and Marty (1991) in *The Catholic Parishes a Way-Station of Ethnicity and Americanization: Chicago's Germans and Italians, 1903-1939*, and Gilley and Kerr (1990) in *Religion, State and Ethnic Groups: Comparative Studies on Governments and Non-Dominant Ethnic Groups in Europe, 1850-1940, Volume II* explore religion, the state, and ethnic identity. Mol (1985) describes the parishes of the various ethnic groups, such as the Ukrainians, Dutch, and Polish in Canada. Brauer and Marty (1991) explore the role of the parishes in the German and Italian communities of early twentieth century Chicago. Gilley discusses the Irish Catholics in Britain. In each of these cases the parishes served as a way-station in the nationalization process of the various ethnic groups which eventually equipped them to move out of their ethnic enclaves into the larger society.

Out-migration into the wider urban society is not always open to residents of "ghetto" areas. Wirth (1957) in describing the Jews in Chicago who move out of the "ghetto" writes: "As the area becomes predominantly Jewish, the non-Jewish settlers move" (Wirth, 1957:97). The same can be said of African Americans in any given U.S. city. In "Urbanization as a Way of Life" (1964), Wirth emphasizes the utilitarian aspect

of relationships and interactions of urban dwellers. This present study shows that utilitarian and superficial relationships between individuals are not an immutable characteristic of urban life. Using a church community as the unit of study puts the church-going, law-abiding, hard-working, average person of African descent on the ethnographic map. In giving a voice to this segment of society, this study falls into the category of "Advocacy Anthropology" as well as that of "Anthropology of Religion". The people at St. Peter Claver's are concerned not just about their own well-being but about the well-being of society as a whole. For these parishioners, their religion and its tangible representation, *their church*, are what Ortner (1973) calls elaborating symbols:

Symbols can be seen as having elaborating powers in two modes. They may have primarily conceptual elaborating power, that is, they are valued as a source of categories for conceptualizing the order of the world. Or they may have primarily action elaborating power; that is, they are valued as implying mechanism for successful social action (Ortner, 1973:94).

It became apparent during the course of the field research that St. Peter Claver Church and the RCC in general could be seen as symbols possessing both elaborating powers as described above.

### **The Official Roman Catholic Literature on the Issue of Race**

*The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* states:

". . . the Church admonishes her own sons, but also humanity as a whole, to overcome all strife between nations and races in this family spirit of God's children, and in the same way, to give internal strength to human associations which are just" (Second Vatican Council, 1965:554).

Fifteen years later in 1980, a whole issue of the periodical published by the Jesuits of the United States and Canada, *America*, was on the theme "Black and Catholic", and what most of the contributors had to say seemed to indicate that the RCC's "sons" had not heeded her admonition (O'Hare, 1980) nor listened to her U.S. bishops in *Brothers*

*and Sisters to Us: U.S. Bishops' Pastoral Letter on Racism in Our Day*. However, *What We Have Seen and Heard*, A Pastoral Letter on Evangelization From the Black Bishops of the United States, issued on September 9, 1984, the Feast of St. Peter Claver, encourages the African American laity to become active and,

Above all let there be no strife or conflict among us as a community and a people. How important it is to recognize and to respect each other's gifts! The pressures of the present age and the pressures of a minority status inevitably lead at times to self-doubt and even self-disdain. But there is always the love of Christ which calls us beyond ourselves and even beyond our local concerns and rivalries (The Black Bishops of the United States, 1984:26).

This exploration of St. Peter Claver's parish is the study of the members of a community who are putting the above quote into action in their lives. This "adaptive strategy" is one that is often overlooked in the attempt to "fix" social ills without exploring strategies and actions of the "problem" population that are already in place. This study explores only one of them, how the people of this parish have built and sustained "community" and traces their interactions and interrelationships with the local, diocesan, and national levels of the church as well as the wider community.

## **Methodology**

Arensberg's (1954) community-study method would have been very useful in this project but since this method is suggested for four persons in the field for one year and a one year write-up (Arensberg, 1954), participant observation was the best method to be used given the time and resources available. The methodological guidelines that were used for this project were developed by adapting and combining the suggestions offered by Crane and Angrosino (1984) for participant observation of the services of a religious group and collecting life histories. Crane and Angrosino

(1984) suggest observing closely and trying to describe as clearly as possible: (1) The physical layout of the service (Where is it held? How is the room arranged? What furniture or other paraphernalia are present?); (2) The human dimension (How many people are attending? relative numbers of men, women, adults, children, blacks, whites, etc.); (3) Aspects of ceremonialism; (4) The ceremony (who does what, when, with what, with or to whom?); (5) As you meet individuals whom you trust as key informants, you can begin to learn, how they became members, why they became members, how often they participate, whether they participate with family friends, or alone (Crane and Angrosino, 1984:71-72).

The combination and adaptation of the above methods allowed me to construct a life history of the parish. I felt that a single life history or focusing on one or two activities would not suffice to present an adequate representation of the St. Peter Claver's parishioners. While I found that much about St. Peter Claver's parish in typical of parishes everywhere the amount of time and activity contributed to the parish community by the parishioners was of a singular nature. In order to give sufficient illustrations of that activity and dedication over time, the construction of the life history of the parish was necessary. The following paragraphs describe how this was accomplished.

Participant observation included attending masses, novenas, funerals, special devotions, social events, and involvement in a weekly prayer/Bible study group, called a Small Faith Community. Daily field notes were recorded of the manifold activities and interchanges. By attending the various parish functions and activities a rapport was established and people began to talk freely, especially after they found out that I had family ties to the parish. People were willing to talk to me but I had to explain that I wasn't doing a history of the parish but a study of the parish and parishioners as

members of a community. The parishioners wanted me to use their real names except in one case where the informant requested the use of a fictitious surname.

Masses were attended on Sundays, first Fridays, and occasionally on Mondays. Wednesday mornings were spent at the church. From 10:30 a.m. until noon the prayer/Bible study was held. This was followed by a novena of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal<sup>2</sup> and Mass. After Mass, the afternoons were spent volunteering at the shelter for battered women that now occupies the convent building. The volunteer work consisted of teaching typing and computer skills to the women<sup>3</sup>.

I also attended social functions such as the Special Friends of Claver's "Fall Dinner and Dance", the St. Peter Claver Feast Day celebrations, the craft fair sponsored by the Forever Young Club, and the children's Christmas Pageant. On the diocesan level I attended the second annual general meeting of the Office of Black Ministry and the Praise Him VII African American Liturgy Workshop.

Seven taped interviews were conducted. An eighth interview was scheduled to be taped but the informant, who was writing a book on the founder of the parish, could not be encouraged to talk about himself and kept speaking about Father Quinn, the founder of the parish. Three written autobiographical statements were collected: the first, because the informant no longer lived in the state; the second, because of the busy

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<sup>2</sup>. On November 2, 1830, Mary, the mother of Jesus, appeared to a young nun, Catherine Laboure, in the motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul in Paris. Mary asked Catherine to have a medal struck in honour of her Immaculate Conception (the belief that Mary was conceived without original sin) following a model she would show her. The medal was struck on June 30, 1832, following the period of testing which accompanies any such apparition, with the permission of the Archbishop of Paris. (Stravinskis, 1991:645-6)

<sup>3</sup>. Because of the confidentiality involved in shelters nothing more will be said about the women in the shelter or my work there.

schedule of the informant who in addition to her overtime work was working with the children for the Christmas pageant; the third, from my mother as an addition to and clarification of what I remembered and what was said in our everyday discussions. The taped interviews were with the nun who was the Pastoral Assistant, the priest who was Acting Pastor, a monsignor who had attended St. Peter Claver School, one lay man, and the remaining interviews were with lay woman. Because the taped interviews were conducted during the day when most of the younger men and women were working there is a gender and age imbalance in this form of data collection. However, over the course of the research this lack was made up by informal talks at parish functions, by other informants, and by asking direct questions. The last month of the research period occurred during Advent, the time when most Christian churches are preparing for the celebration of the birth of Christ at Christmas. It is a time that church activities are aimed at spiritual preparation. Many of these activities were held on Saturdays or in the evening, making it possible to see the participation of the younger women and men outside of Sunday Mass.

The parish bulletins for the year 1993 were collected in order to determine if the levels of events, activities, and member involvement during the research period was typical of the year. The annual journals from 1988 - 1993 (volumes 12 through 17) along with photographs and excerpts from the Jubilee Journal (1972) were also collected to get a feel for the spirit of the parish over time. Ultimately however, the majority of the data were collected by participant observation by attending and participating in events and participating in discussions during events.

Lastly, to gain insight on the participation of the parishioners of African American churches in national gatherings I attended the "Call to Action" National Conference in Chicago. It was here that the racial division in the church was apparent.

Out of the 2,300 attendees there were only approximately 15 African Americans. I later learned that the National Black Catholic Conference is the national event that is more widely attended, including a delegate from St. Peter Claver's.

The most useful asset for this research was my "in-group" status through being African American, my baptism at St. Peter Claver Church and family history, and being a practicing Roman Catholic. Another reason and maybe more important reason for being accepted is that I made it clear that my reason for doing the research was to do a study of African Americans that did not focus on a social problem. These factors were advantages for the present research as expressed by Blauner and Wellman (1973):

There are certain aspects of racial phenomena, however, that are particularly difficult, if not impossible, for a member of the oppressing group to grasp empirically and formulate conceptually. These barriers are existential and methodological as well as political and ethical. We refer here to the nuances of culture and group ethos; to the meaning of oppression and especially psychic relations; to what is called the Black, the Mexican-American, the Asian and the Indian experience (Blauner and Wellman, 1973:329).

## **Organization**

Chapter two begins with a summary of the life and ministry of St. Peter Claver. In chapter two the study is contextually and historically situated by a description of the struggle of Black Catholics in the United States from the national to the local level. The convergence of the two forces that built the parish are described, the determination of the people to have a church in which to worship freely and the dedication of Fr. Quinn, the first pastor of St. Peter Claver Church. The chapter closes with a description of Brooklyn in the 1990s.

Chapter three describes the importance of the parish school as a contributing factor in St. Peter Claver's being thought of as a spiritual haven or home but also



significantly as the starting point for improved life chances. A description of the Mass, the focal point of Roman Catholic worship, is presented. The people of the parish are introduced using their duties at the Mass as an introduction to their personal profile. Each profile includes how the person participates in the parish and/or the community. Chapter three demonstrates how community is built not only through worship and ritual but also through concern for economic and social justice within the secular arena and within the church. The Pontifical Commission on Justice and Peace writes, "To overcome discrimination, a community must interiorize *the values* that inspire just laws and live out, in day-to-day life, the conviction of the equal dignity of all" (Pontifical Commission, 1988). The people at Claver's take this not only to mean that others shouldn't be oppressive and unjust towards them but that they too should work to ensure the "equal dignity of all".

Chapter four begins with the presentation of an informant's description of the neighbourhood in which St. Peter Claver Church is situated. Some of the concerns of the Roman Catholics on the national and diocesan level with a focus on inner-city youth are explored through the presentation of the proceedings at a national conference and the annual general meeting of the Office of Black Ministry. Local initiatives and strategies are presented to demonstrate how the national and diocesan concerns are dealt with on the parochial or local level. This section of chapter four gives an insight into the involvement and concern of the parishioners with matters affecting their community and the city as a whole by giving an account of the political situation in Brooklyn during the mayoral election campaign, including an account of a meeting of the Brooklyn Ecumenical Cooperatives of which the St. Peter Claver's congregation is a member.

Chapter five explores the terms "mission" and "way-station" in light of the data presented in chapters two to four to demonstrate that the parishioners consider St. Peter Claver's their "home". Furthermore, the data suggest that the dedication and memory of Msgr. Quinn helped the original parishioners build the community of St. Peter Claver's, but it is the strength of the parishioners faith and the living of that faith through action and involvement in their parish, community, and the youth of their community that sustain it as "home". It is in this chapter that the reflexive character of the research becomes apparent as the effects of participant observation in this project are discussed. Finally, some implications for further and future study are presented, such as studying "ghetto" communities not as isolated closed communities but as part of larger networks of interaction, studying the impact of religious affiliation on their respective groups today, and the impact of co-operative movements in general.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE SETTINGS: PAST AND PRESENT

#### A Backward Glance: The Historical Context

##### What's In A Name? St. Peter Claver (1581 - 1654)

There are several parishes throughout the United States named for this saint and all of them are traditionally African American. I feel it is safe to speculate that during the first three decades of this century, probably even now, the name served and serves as a signal that the majority of worshippers at the various St. Peter Claver churches are African American. Therefore, a little should be said about this saint who is so well known to the Blacks of the Americas.

St. Peter Claver is revered by the Black Roman Catholics in the United States, Central, and South America as the "Human Rights Pioneer" (Valtierra, 1980). He ministered to the slaves in the Colombian port city of Cartagena. From the outset he was appalled by the conditions of the slaves arriving in Cartagena in "floating coffins" (Valtierra, 1980). His humane methods of evangelization, unique for the time, involved:

. . . meeting the blacks, showing recognition for their ethnic origins and welcoming them with gifts and hugs- and fresh water, both for drinking and for washing after their dreadful voyage(McBride, 1981:127-128).

. . . From the moment of his ordination at thirty-six, Claver never deviated from absolute and loving dedication to the blacks who flooded the port of Cartagena. For the next forty years he would serve them, as the "slave of the slaves" (McBride, 1981:126).

There have been people after St. Peter Claver who have either championed the rights of Black people or worked for their evangelization; few have done both as the next section illustrates.

### **Black Catholics: Origins and Persistence**

The history of Catholicism among Africans and people of African descent is a long one which is beyond the scope of this work. However, a brief description of the struggles of African American RCs in the United States is warranted.

Since the 16th century, there were communities of Black Catholics (both slave and free) in Florida and since the 18th century in Louisiana, South Carolina, Alabama, Missouri, Illinois, New York, Kentucky, Washington (DC), and Maryland. However, the American clergy for the most part followed the proclivities of secular society instead of being the leaders in emancipation, equality, and justice. For example, the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) in Maryland owned slaves for 127 years, from 1711 until 1838 (Curran, 1983). Added to this was the fact that the American bishops ignored or were indifferent to Pope Gregory XVI's (1839) condemnation of the slave trade which cautioned:

We do . . . admonish and adjure in the Lord all believers in Christ, of whatsoever condition, that no one hereafter may dare unjustly to molest Indians, Negroes, or other men of this sort; or to spoil them of their goods; or reduce them to slavery; or extend help or favour to others who perpetuate such things against them (Davis, 1990:39).

Pope Gregory XVI finally forbade "any ecclesiastic or lay person to defend or teach anything that supported the slave trade" (Davis, 1990:40). Even after the Civil War, few American bishops were willing to work for the evangelization and ministry of African Americans in their dioceses. This unwillingness was accompanied by reluctance to admit African American women and men into convents and seminaries.

Black aspirants to the priesthood, if permitted, went to seminaries in Europe, especially the seminary in Rome operated by the Propagation of the Faith<sup>1</sup> whose aim it was to prepare indigenous clergy to minister to non-Europeans. Davis states, "In the United States, however, the notion of an indigenous African American clergy was generally unacceptable. . . . The American hierarchy in the nineteenth century and even in the early part of the twentieth century did not share the views of the Congregation of the Propaganda on the importance of people having priests from their own ethnic background" (Davis, 1990:146). The sentiments were the same concerning African American religious<sup>2</sup>. When the director and chaplain of the Oblate Sisters of Providence, the first successful order of Black women, died in 1843, Davis asserts that the "archbishop of Baltimore, Samuel Eccleston, is reported to have suggested that there was no need for black religious and that they might do well to disband and become domestics" (Davis, 1990:103). They did not heed this advice and today are one of the largest communities of religious women in the United States (Davis, 1990).

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1. The Propagation of the Faith, which is currently called the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, is an organization that was established by Pope Gregory XV in 1622 with the responsibility of coordinating and directing all missionary activity in the world except in those areas which are within the competence of the Congregation for the Eastern Churches. The Eastern Churches or Eastern Rite churches are Catholic and are in union with Rome. What we call Roman Catholic really refers to Catholics who practice the liturgy using the Latin or Roman Rite. The Eastern Rite Catholic churches include: the Alexandrian or Coptic Rite used in Egypt and Ethiopia; the Byzantine Rite used in Greece and Turkey; the Armenian Rite; the Chaldean or Eastern Syrian Rite used in Syria and Iraq; the Maronite Rite used in Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, U.S., and Brazil; and the Melkite Rite used in Egypt, Palestine, and Syria (Stravinskias, 1991).

2. The term "religious" is used as a noun to categorize those who are not ordained but have taken vows, of poverty, chastity, and obedience and live a communal life, such as, nuns, monks, and brothers.

The national lowly regard for African American Catholics was replicated in the Archdiocese of New York. The situation in New York was exacerbated by the influx of immigrants in the mid-nineteenth century. Many of these new immigrants were from Ireland and were subjected to discrimination and economic exploitation. Slavery was abolished in New York in 1827, so Blacks were in the position of vying with the Irish for "the bottom rung on the socioeconomic ladder" (Davis , 1990). The Irish saw the African Americans as threats to their livelihood; the African Americans saw the Irish as the embodiment of Catholicism. Davis (1990) writes:

The black Catholics found themselves in the middle. This cauldron of discontent finally boiled over. . . In the summer of 1863, mobs of whites -- many of whom were Irish -- attacked and killed blacks in the bloody riots in the city of New York as a result of the anger unleashed by Lincoln's signature of the first military draft (Davis, 1990:96).

The result of this neglect and racial prejudice was the development of a strong and organized Black Catholic laity. Their determination is evidenced in the fact that there were five National Black Catholic Lay Congresses held before 1900: Washington, DC in 1889; Cincinnati, OH in 1890; Philadelphia, PA in 1892; Chicago, IL in 1893; and Baltimore, MD in 1894 (Davis, 1990). Although Charles Uncles, in 1891, became the first Black priest to be ordained in the United States<sup>3</sup>, African American Catholics, unlike other ethnic groups, lacked a national body of clergy to speak on their behalf (Davis, 1990). As Davis (1990:193) writes, "From the beginning a black laity had to take charge. Strong lay leadership would remain a constant characteristic of African American Catholicism." St. Peter Claver Parish is an example of this lay initiative.

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<sup>3</sup>. African American priests were ordained earlier but not in the United States, e.g.: the ordination of James Augustine Healy in Paris (1854); the ordination of his brothers, Alexander Sherwood Healy in Rome (1858), and Francis Patrick Healy, S.J. (Society of Jesus more commonly known as the Jesuits) in Liege (1864). The ordination of Augustus Tolton took place in Rome, 1886 (Davis, 1990:261-2).

### **Colored Catholics of Brooklyn**

Despite the fact that Black Catholics had held five National Black Catholic Lay Congresses, the Black Catholics of Brooklyn were still seeking a non-hostile place to worship in 1915. Religious education was provided twice a week by Fr. Burns at St. John the Baptist Church. Not satisfied with the status quo, Jules de Weever, organized the Colored Catholic Club from among this group (Martin, 1990). It began to recruit members and supporters by visiting neighbouring parishes. Since Black Catholics were unwelcome and barely tolerated in these parish churches, the members were united in their desire for a church of their own. Their sole purpose is summed up in the first lines of their minutes:

A meeting of Colored Catholics of this Borough [Brooklyn] was held at the residence of Miss Sarah Walters, 549 Waverly Avenue, April 21st, 1915, for the purpose of considering a growing desire among the clergy and themselves to have a Church for Colored Catholics established in this Diocese (Kean, 1972<sup>4</sup>).

Bishop Charles McDonnell was concerned with recruiting chaplains for the First World War at the time, so the needs of Brooklyn's Black Catholics were not a priority. The Colored Catholic Club, frustrated that its aims could not yet be realized, disbanded in 1916 (Jervis, n.p. 198?)<sup>5</sup>.

### **Fr. Quinn (1888 - 1940)**

While preparing two African American women for Baptism, Father Bernard J. Quinn, became interested in the plight of Black Catholics. He felt that it was his special

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<sup>4</sup>. The pages of *The Fiftieth Anniversary Journal of St. Peter Claver Church*, were not numbered.

<sup>5</sup>. Fr. Jervis' booklet was unpublished but was printed in the 1980s to be distributed at St. Peter Claver's Church.

charism<sup>6</sup> to minister to them. He expressed to the bishop, "his interest in beginning an apostolate to the Black Catholics in the Diocese" (Jervis, n.p., 198?). His request was met by the bishop's own request that he volunteer to become a chaplain to serve in the First World War (Jervis, n.p., 198?).

Fr. Quinn served as First Lieutenant of the 334th Machine Gun Infantry in Alencon, France, from June 1918 to June 1919 (Jervis, n.p. 198?). It was while Fr. Quinn was stationed in France that he was profoundly influenced by the life of St. Theresa of Lisieux, who was to become the auxiliary patron saint of St. Peter Claver Church. Father Jervis (n.p., 198?) writes:

In December 1918, he read he life of Theresa from Lisieux, France. He was stationed close by to [sic] the town and received permission to visit her home. He was the first Roman Catholic Priest to celebrate Mass in St. Theresa's family home. He was profoundly affected by her life.

St. Theresa was born Therese Martin in 1873. She became a Carmelite nun at the early age of fifteen. At the age of twenty, she was appointed novice-mistress of the Carmelite convent at Lisieux.

Theresa exemplified what she called the "little way", a devotion to God both childlike and profound. She sought holiness through the conscientious performance of small actions and humble tasks. Her goodness was so remarkable that her superiors asked her to write an account of her life; *The Story of a Soul* (1898; trans. 1958) became one of the most widely read spiritual autobiographies [She died in 1897 at the age of twenty-four.]. The many miracles soon attributed to her gave meaning to her cryptic promise, "After my death, I will let fall a shower of roses." She is the patron saint of foreign missionaries and aviators,

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<sup>6</sup> A charism (plural, *Charismata*) is a special gift which, as service directed to the Lord, manifests the work of God through the Holy Spirit, all for the common good of the body of believers, the Church. For example, the gift/charism of Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament was to minister to the Blacks and Indians in the U.S., the gift/charism of the Sisters of Providence is to minister to the sick. See "Apostolate" in glossary.



and with Joan of Arc, she is the patron saint of France (Dickey, 1986:314).

At the time, Fr. Quinn was stationed in France, there was great interest in St. Theresa in general because the Vatican had broken its traditional rule of not starting the canonization process until fifty years after a person's death (McBride, 1981). She was canonized a saint in 1925, twenty-eight years after her death. Father Quinn was instrumental in initiating devotion to her in the United States at St. Peter Claver's. The devotion to St. Theresa and its effects are discussed later in the chapter.

### **Encounter**

In 1920, Father Quinn received permission from the bishop to begin his apostolate to the Black people of Brooklyn. Father Quinn was unsuccessful in his efforts to establish a Church until he encountered some former members of the Colored Catholic Club. Fr. Quinn (1921) wrote: -

The Right Reverend Bishop started me on this mission among the colored in May of last year at the Church of Our Lady of Mercy. At that time I knew but one or two colored Catholics, and so I began with their aid to find more. From statistics I found the colored population of Brooklyn alone to be 75,000 and of these approximately 4,000 were Catholics. Up to date I have been able to gather together between seven and eight hundred of them, and in my Sunday School each Sunday afternoon I have about fifty colored children taught by two of the good Sisters of St. Joseph.

As yet I have only been able to give the colored Catholics Benediction on Sunday afternoons. Added to this we have meetings at regular intervals during the month. I have a Colored Catholic Men's Club which meets every second Friday of the month, and a Colored Catholic Ladies' Auxiliary which meets on the fourth Thursday of every month. At the Holy Name Rally in Babylon on June 26, I hope to have 100 men in line. There is a class for converts going on all the time, the women being instructed by the Sisters, and the men by myself. On last Pentecost Saturday fourteen converts were baptized (Quinn, 1921:1).

Together the people and Fr. Quinn worked to raise funds to start the church. People from the other parishes and the wider community helped with donations but Fr. Quinn also had his detractors as Clarissa Watson, my key informant, relates:

See in the Thirties, was the height of segregation in this country. You would see it in the papers, lynching and things that happened. Msgr. Quinn was known, he had write-ups in the paper. There was a paper called, The Eagle, very, very anti-Black. Well, Blacks in those days, I think they thought Blacks were animals, nobody ever thought of them as human beings. So the fact that he is building a church for Blacks, well, they thought he was crazy. In fact, they called him Crazy Quinn. The priest around the corner there, at Nativity always spoke of him as Crazy Quinn (Watson, 1993).

These epithets did not dampen the enthusiasm of Fr. Quinn or his soon-to-be parishioners. All of the older people with whom I spoke remembered those times of working together for the common purpose of building their church with fondness and pride; for example, Mable Smiley, an informant as well as my godmother, had this to say in a letter that she wrote to me while I was conducting the field research:

My mother, godmother, and my mother's cousin were among the first members of St. Peter Claver's Parish when Father Quinn was trying to bring Catholicism to the "colored" community. The Masses were held at that time (1922-23) in an old horse stable which eventually became the building which now stands at Claver Place [and] Jefferson.

The members were very enthused with being a part of this project and eagerly put much work into making Father Quinn's dream a reality. They held church socials, bazaars, recitals, cake [and] pie sales in the church basement.

My mother has told me of how as an infant (some 10 months old), how she and my father would attend the church socials and the sexton, Mr. Hospidale, would help my father to take me in my pram down the steps and tuck me beside the furnace to keep warm (Smiley, 1993).

"Fr. Quinn's church for "Negro" Catholics was the last of a series of faces the property at Jefferson Avenue and Ormond Place (now Claver Place) was to wear. The building had been a Congregationalist Church, an Episcopalian Church, a Baptist

Church, a garage, and , at the time it was purchased, an express depot often referred to by the old timers as a 'horse stable' (Kean, 1972) Bishop Thomas Molloy blessed and dedicated the building to St. Peter Claver on February 26, 1922.

### **A Haven Called St. Peter Claver's**

"The [Canon] law also allows for the establishment of parishes based upon rite, nationality or language. Such parishes are often called personal parishes, since they are composed not of all persons in a territory but of persons having some similar quality" (Stravinskis, 1991:720). At St. Peter Claver Parish, the similar quality is race and anyone in the diocese who is Black and Catholic is a member of the parish (if they so desire). In addition to this, there is an ambiance at St. Peter Claver's that sets it apart. It is as if Msgr. Quinn's charismatic appeal was still operating in the hearts and minds of the parishioners. The parish was considered a haven for Blacks because the relationship between the parishioners and their pastor was built on mutual trust and respect. Fr. Quinn exhibited sentiments reminiscent of both Christ and St. Peter Claver when he wrote in a pastoral letter a few months after the dedication of the Church, "I love you, I am proud of every one of you and I would willingly shed to the last drop my life's blood for the least among you" (Jervis, 198?).

The parishioners feel pride of ownership of the Church because, "St. Peter Claver is the only Catholic Church in the U.S.A. that was built by the sweat of Blacks for Blacks. There are many Catholic Churches in NY. that have a Black congregation now, but they did not start out that way. St. Peter Claver was and is" (Esterbrook, 1993). The pastor and people of St. Peter Claver's worked together and:

In September, 1923, a school was opened using several brownstone homes. On that same site was dedicated the permanent school and youth center on October 25, 1931. A number of missions were established by St. Peter Claver Parish: St. Benedict the Moor in Jamaica, St. Martin de Porres Chapel on Stone Avenue, the Seamen's

Mission on Columbia street, the Mission on Buffalo Avenue plus 15 centers of instruction. The crowning achievement of all this was the orphanage at Wading River, Little Flower House of Providence dedicated in October, 1930, which was also used for a time as a Summer Camp for boys and girls (Kean, 1972<sup>7</sup>).

Fr. Quinn's sensitivity to his parishioners is evident because in St. Peter Claver's Church the Black membership of the church is reflected and represented with sacred symbols of Black holiness. In the RC church canonized saints are symbols as well as models of sanctity and holiness. It is also the duty of every Catholic to strive to become a saint in the broad sense that anyone who goes to heaven is a saint. The attitudes both intellectually and generally prevalent at the time (and in some cases, today) were that non-Europeans were morally inferior and therefore incapable of the virtues necessary to become saints. These attitudes were given artistic representation in the churches by the "white wash" of all representations even those of Jesus and Mary. Clarissa, my key informant, stated during my interview with her, "It is so hard for the whites to visualize that the artists paint the saints and Jesus and the angels and everyone is white with golden hair. It does not occur to them that geographically speaking, you know these people cannot be pale with golden hair" (Watson, 1993). Fr. Quinn recognized the need for his parishioners to have a sense of self-worth. Therefore he ensured that the Black identity at St. Peter Claver Church was defined not only by the worship community but by the icons portraying Black sanctity. A statue of Blessed Martin de Porres<sup>8</sup>, now St. Martin, was placed at the left rear of the sanctuary

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7. There were no page numbers in the Jubilee Journal from which this excerpt was taken.

8. Martin was born in Lima, Peru in 1579, son of Don Juan de Porres, a Spanish Knight and Anna Velazquez a free Black woman of Panama (Hunt, James A. Msgr., 1991)

area. A statue of St. Benedict the Moor<sup>9</sup> is at the right of the sanctuary area. The presence of his statue demonstrates that in the Catholic church a black slave could be raised to the altars as a saint while revealing the contradictory logic of the Europeans who venerate and revere<sup>10</sup> a former slave yet refuse to let the descendants of slaves share a place of worship.

When one enters St. Peter Claver's Church one is struck by the murals above the altar which were added in 1930. One depicts St. Peter Claver ministering to the African slaves after their arrival at Cartagena. The larger one depicts Charles Lwanga and the Ugandan Martyrs, twenty-two in all, who were declared Blessed by Pope Benedict XV (1914-1922). When the Society of White Fathers refused to ignore the impure practices of King Mwanga of Uganda, he began to persecute the Christian converts. Many of the pages in his court were Christian ranging in age from twelve to twenty-four. Charles Lwanga tried to block every effort of the king to subvert the morals of his young charges. This enraged the king who ordered their death if they would not renounce their faith.

When the young pages asserted their intention of remaining Christians their march to martyrdom began. The majority of these youths were bound and cast into a fire. One boy was stabbed to death for daring to teach the Catechism. Another had the flesh torn from his body. The willing martyrdom of these twenty-two youths of Uganda did much to strengthen the faith in Africa. Chastity, charity and humility live and

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<sup>9</sup>. St. Benedict the Moor's ancestors were brought as slaves from Africa to Sicily. His parents Christopher and Diana Manasseri were slaves on a farm in San Filadelfo when Benedict was born in 1526. He joined the order of Friars Minor at the age of 36. He was canonized by Pope Pius VII in 1807.

<sup>10</sup>. St. Benedict the Moor's feast day is April 4, but it is not observed in the universal calendar.

thrive. Chastity, charity and humility are the Christian life as exemplified in these [African]<sup>11</sup> saints (Rodgers, 1943:19).

Even though the Ugandan Martyrs were not canonized until 1964 by Pope Paul VI, seeing these examples of Black holiness in the church had an uplifting effect not just on the Black Catholics but on other Blacks in the neighbourhood who also became infused with pride in these Black Saints. The event that was to have an effect beyond the African American community was the institution of the Little Flower Novenas at St. Peter Claver's.

Shortly after St. Theresa was beatified in 1923 priests and bishops from almost every country were hurrying to be the first to say Mass in the room where she was born, not knowing that Fr. Quinn had already done so while serving in France as mentioned above. Later in 1925, when her canonization day was announced, Fr. Quinn planned to have a public novena in preparation for the event. Fr. Cullen writes (1960):

The novena started modestly enough, one service at 8 P.M. When throngs overcrowded the church, it was announced that there would be services at 4,6, and 8 P.M. on the following day. When the devoted people taxed the capacity of 500 seats again, 7 and 9 o'clock services were added. These too were insufficient for all who came, so a morning 10 o'clock service as well as a noon day 12:10 were added after four days. . . finally Monday was selected for the weekly performance of these seven services perpetually.

Brooklyn's famous trolleys serviced the area from four directions, and elevated trains from three. One wag of a conductor, instead of announcing, "Ormond Place" (the original name of the little street out front) used the cry, "Little Flower Novenas," and his car summarily emptied. Autos, then an infrequent family possession, were parked for blocks in every direction.

The Little Flower devotees that flocked the church were a financial boon to the fledgling parish. This raised the ire of the pastor of the neighbouring Roman Catholic

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<sup>11</sup>. I substituted the word "African" for "Negro". Africans never refer to themselves as "negroes" a meaningless word coined by Europeans.

Church, Msgr. Belford, pastor of Nativity Church. He was abusive to Blacks who entered "his" church as well as the whites who were the majority of the attendees at the Little Flower Novenas. His abuse was so well known that *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, January 17, 1927, reported:

The following question were put [to Msgr. Belford] and received the following answers:

Q: Why do you always abuse the colored people attending Father Quinn's church from your altar, when you were ordained to preach the Gospel, "All men are created equal?"

A: [Msgr. Belford replies] If anybody says that I ever abused colored people, he is a liar. I have never abused them in any shape, form or manner. But I have said that there is a colored church around the corner and I do object to white people going there. Anyhow, those who go there are not white[,] they're yellow (p. 15).

However, Msgr. Belford's opinion did not dampen the devotion of the faithful who fervently believed that St. Theresa was answering their prayers. McLoughlin (1931), writing on the history of the building, states that the loss of the building's spire, however it occurred is not mentioned in the article, ".does not interfere with attendance of the devout clients of St. Theresa of 'the Little Flower,' most of whom are white people, who are doing a large share in helping Father Quinn to maintain the church as a haven for [African American] Catholics" (McLaughlin, 1931). Figure 2.1 shows the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary Mass at St. Peter Claver's Church showing that even after the attendance of whites at the novena's had dwindled the parishioners maintained their church.



**Figure 2.1** Celebration of Mass for the fiftieth anniversary of dedication of St. Peter Claver's Church (Source: SPC Fiftieth Anniversary Journal, 1972)



**Today: The Current Context**

The decline in persons becoming priests and religious (nuns and monks/brothers/friars) and the increase in people leaving the religious life has had devastating effects on Catholic schools and other Church-run institutions. Added to this is the general decline in church membership in most of the major Christian denominations. Due to the increasing numbers of Catholic immigrants, many from Haiti and the Caribbean, and the growing trend of African Americans joining the Catholic church because of better educational opportunities for their children, the U.S. Catholic church has seen an increase in membership. The number of predominantly Black parishes has risen from one to fifty-three ministering to over 250,000 Black Catholics. However, this has not reduced the impact of all these factors as a whole on the church organizations in general and has affected St. Peter Claver's parish in several ways. Today the Little Flower Orphanage is operated by New York State, although, the pastor of St. Peter Claver's remains on the Board of Directors. The Little Flower Novena service is held only once on Mondays. The St. Peter Claver School is closed. The church "around the corner", Nativity, closed its doors and amalgamated with St. Peter Claver's in the seventies.

The Diocese of Brooklyn now includes Queens and consists of four vicariates, geographical subdivisions of a diocese: Brooklyn East, Brooklyn West, Queens North, and Queens South. St. Peter Claver Church is within the Brooklyn East Vicariate of the Diocese of Brooklyn and Queens geographically, but historically has no geographic boundaries and remains a personal parish.

The increase in the number of predominantly Black parishes at first glance appears innocuous enough but if one delves closer into the situation it becomes clear that this is the result of residential segregation. As in many U.S. cities as soon as

Blacks begin to move into a neighbourhood whites flee to other areas making a myth of the notion of America as a "melting pot". Hacker (1992) put the toleration point of whites for Black residency at 8% stating, "once the black proportion passes that point, whites begin to leave the neighborhood and no new ones will move in" (Hacker, 1992:36).

### **Brooklyn: A City of Churches, A City of Separation, A City of Contrasts**

As one drives onto the Brooklyn Bridge from Manhattan there is a sign over the entrance to the bridge that says "Welcome to Brooklyn, The City of Churches". Today these churches range in size and diversity from the historic Flatbush Reformed Protestant Church built in 1654 and rebuilt in 1796 (Dickey, 1986) to store front churches. Store front churches at one time usually Baptist or Pentecostal, now house any number of sects and cults. Also now joining the Puerto Rican Botanicas<sup>12</sup> are the Haitian Spiritual Supply stores. The number of Black adherents to Islamic religions, Black Moslems, Moslem splinter groups, and "orthodox" Islam appears to be increasing or at least becoming increasingly visible.

The city of Brooklyn, which became a borough of New York City in 1898, has the largest African American population of any city in the U.S. and also the largest concentration of Black Catholics. Brooklyn is New York City's second largest borough covering 181 square kilometers with 320 kilometers of shoreline. It is connected to Manhattan by the Brooklyn, Manhattan, and the Williamsburg bridges and to Staten Island by the Verrazano Narrows Bridge. The 1990 Census for Kings County (Brooklyn) lists the population distribution of the 2,300,664 inhabitants as

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<sup>12</sup>. Stores where Roman Catholic religious articles such as statues of saints, candles, and books are sold alongside articles used in Puerto Rican witchcraft, such as powders for spells, love potions etc.

52.7% white, 31.6% Black, and 15.7% Other. The Black population for the most part live in unofficially segregated sections of the borough. Neighborhoods, in general, tend to be segregated except for small pockets of integrated areas such as Brooklyn Heights. Such areas are usually in transition from white to non-white. There are also what might be called "buffer zones". For example, there is a Jewish area which separates the Caribbean population of Flatbush from the Italians in South Brooklyn on one side and an Hispanic area that separates Blacks from the Irish in South Brooklyn on the other. Bedford-Stuyvesant has been traditionally Black but is increasing in area, that is, the boundaries of what is called Bedford-Stuyvesant keep moving outward to encompass areas that become predominantly Black. However, as the Black immigration from other countries increases, some of the African Americans with southern ties and some without have been shifting their families south. So although the Black population is increasing, it is an increasingly non-American-born Black population.

Brooklyn is becoming a city of great contrasts. For example, where Washington and Classon Avenues meet, on one side of the street are two high schools where police guard the doors on school days, on the other is the Brooklyn Botanical Gardens which surrounds the Brooklyn Museum on three sides. As I stood there a man, pushing a shopping cart packed with his worldly possessions, entered through an opening in the shrubbery surrounding one of the schools and arranged his sleeping quarters for the night. A block away on Franklin Avenue, there is a conglomeration of open stores, stores covered up with corrugated iron gates, two Laundromats, a Pentecostal Church and school, and always people milling about or just passing time in jovial (sometimes not so jovial) repartee as street vendors hawk their goods. The variety of businesses is in keeping with the variety that is New York. In addition to the above mentioned businesses, there are three Chinese take-out restaurants, three

convenience stores advertising "ice cold" beer, two cut-rate variety stores, a liquor store, a drug store, a Puerto Rican restaurant, a Caribbean restaurant, a beauty parlor, two stores specializing in hair care products, a locksmith store and a barber shop with a poster of Haiti's President Aristide.

Downtown Brooklyn's Court Street is now lined with street vendors, much like I saw in Kenya while visiting there in 1991, selling quite a variety of goods, including fruits, fragrances, brass ornaments and art, T-shirts, watches, clothing, and books. On Atlantic Avenue between Court Street and Boreum Place (where I lived as a child), one whole side of the street has been converted into a parking facility. The next block remains how I remembered it, with various Middle Eastern shops and bakeries, but the A & P is now a Key Food Store.

In many places in the predominantly non-white sections of the borough abandoned houses and unkempt vacant lots are side by side with well kept homes and apartment buildings. Woven throughout the city are some vacant lots that have been reclaimed by the area residents through "Operation Greenthumb". Operation Greenthumb is a federally-sponsored community development program whose motto is, "beautify your neighborhood through community gardening". Right in the middle of these "inner city" areas there are people who are taking advantage of this opportunity to both beautify their neighborhoods and enhance their diets by carefully tending their little bit of green in the asphalt jungle.

The next chapters describe how the people of St. Peter Claver's parish make opportunities to enhance society by living their faith in ritual and in deeds. Their participation in the central ritual of Roman Catholicism and how it impacts on other aspects of their lives is explored in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE PEOPLE OF ST. PETER CLAVER'S: FORMING AND SUSTAINING COMMUNITY

#### **Community: A Faith-Based Perspective**

Since the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II), Roman Catholics for the first time were allowed to believe that their faith was not the *only* true form of Christianity and that Christianity was not the only path to God. This has in turn fostered a renewed interest in social justice, equality, dignity and "the common good". Catholics have come to see themselves as members of the whole human community and their churches as nodes on a network of both church-related and non-church-related communities. In Catholic jargon this means that we are all meant to be part of the communion of saints.

In this chapter some parish statistics are presented. Starting with their socialization in parochial school, how the people at St. Peter Claver's journey on the path onto which they have been born or converted is described. The physical layout of the church is described before an exploration of the Mass, the focal point of Roman Catholic worship is presented. The part a person plays at Mass will be used as an introduction to his or her personal profile. This profile includes how the person participates in the parish and/or the community. Community is built not only through worship and ritual but through concern for economic and social justice within the secular arena and within the church.

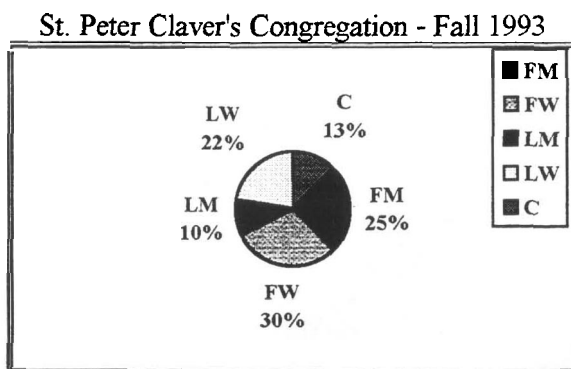
#### **The Parishioners: A Summary**

Four hundred and fifty-four registered members and approximately 200 parish supporters comprise and sustain the St. Peter Claver community. These numbers do

not include the twenty-one parishioners who passed away during any part of 1993. Three hundred and fourteen of these parishioners are members of the ninety families that make up the parish. Eleven of the married couples in the parish have been married for more than twenty-five years. Parishioners come from as far away as Africa, as close as around the corner and speak various dialects of English, French, and Spanish. Their faith expressions range from charismatic to conservative traditional. They are third generation parishioners and newcomers to the country, neighbourhood, and/or Catholicism. Yet one quarter (116) of the registered members participate in at least one of the parish's activities in addition to attending Sunday Mass. The amount of activity and participation is one of the distinguishing features of the parishioners of St. Peter Claver's Church.

The congregation has approximately 52 percent women, 35 percent men and 13 percent children as Figure 3.1 below shows. The age of the children in the chart below is fourteen and under.

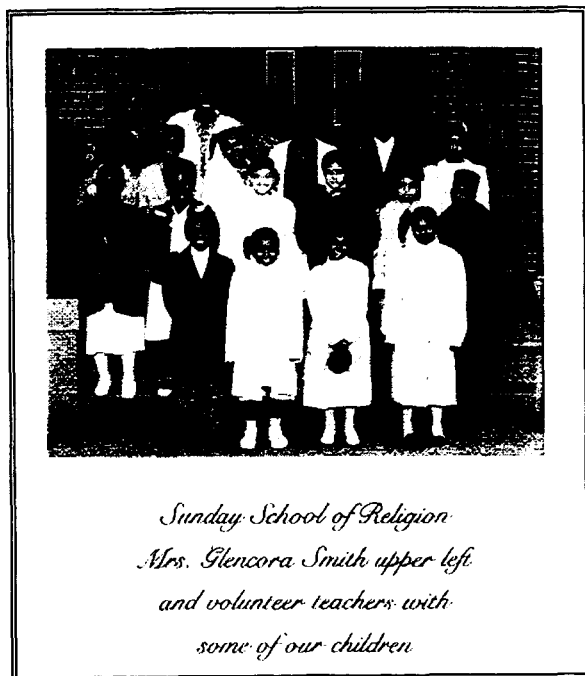
**Figure 3.1:**



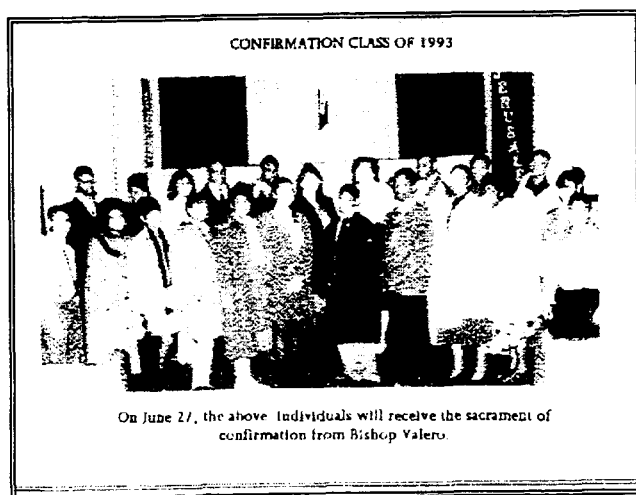
LW - Lone Women, n = 100, FW - Family Women, n = 138;  
 LM - Lone Men, n = 46; FM - Family Men, n = 114;  
 C - Children, n = 57 (Lone includes widowed, single, separated.)

Today, children ages six to ten years old attend religious instruction classes on Sunday mornings, see Figure 3.2. Older children, eleven to eighteen years old, attend

Confirmation classes on Saturday mornings at St. Peter Claver's as shown in Figure 3.3.



**Figure 3.2** Sunday School Class  
(Source: SPC 15th Annual Spring Dinner-Dance Journal 1991)



**Figure 3.3** Confirmation Class of 1993  
(Source: SPC 17th Annual Spring Dinner-Dance Journal 1993)

In days gone, by the parish complex was the only place where Black Catholics could go for spiritual expression, entertainment, and religious education. Now the school is gone, the complex houses other pursuits, such as the Monica House, a shelter for battered women and the Williston Academy (pre-school). Yet the community persists. Much of the continuity, however, began with the school that trained the parents and grandparents of today's children and continues with the religious and social justice activities in which the parishioners engage.

### **The School: Preparation For Ritual; Preparation For Life**

It is in Catholic Parochial School where one learns how to participate in the ritual of the Mass, when to stand, kneel, or sit. It is here that one learns all the responses which were in Latin until the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) declared that the Mass be said in the vernacular. One learns at Catholic school how to act Catholic, think Catholic, and be Catholic. St. Peter Claver School had a further task: to teach its pupils how to cope with and overcome the prejudice and reality of the white world in which its students would have to enter for higher education and employment. For the most part it performed its task well until it closed its doors in 1986.

While most of the people who had gone to the school remember it as a good experience, all declare that it was a good foundation for their lives. One informant stated:

I have been a Catholic all my life and have experienced prejudice from a very early age. I attended St. Peter Claver grammar school from grade 1 through grade 8 (1959-1967). We were taught by sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth. Those nuns showed their prejudice in two ways: (1) they disliked blacks; (2) they disliked girls. Consequently, I received punishment for the slightest infraction. They weren't above lying to my parents to get me into trouble. To this day I dislike nuns.



The education I received at a young age was good but if I were white it would have been better. I remember once telling a nun my aspiration was to be a doctor. She told me I should aim for something else because I would never make it. Had I been white the response would have been very different. Needless to say I survived. . . .I remain a Catholic by choice and feel that I may be able to make a change, no matter how small, to make the road easier for the next generation (Esterbrook, 1994).

Jennifer Esterbrook is a member of one of the parish's large extended families. They came to Brooklyn and the parish from Jamaica in the 1950s. Her parents celebrated their forty-third wedding anniversary in 1993. Including Jennifer's mother's sister and her mother's sister's husband the immediate family consists of eighteen people. Jennifer is the second oldest of Roland and Marguerite Esterbrook's four children. She has two sisters and a brother. Despite Jennifer's negative recollection of St. Peter Claver School, her commitment to the parish has not been dampened. This commitment is realized in her serving on the Parish Council and the St. Peter Claver Feast Day Committee. The most rewarding and probably the most labour-intensive of her activities in the parish is her leadership role in the annual production of the Children's Christmas Pageant.

Without excusing the nun's response to Jennifer's aspiration mentioned above, it is worth mentioning that the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth may not have been experienced in working with African Americans and were more influenced by the attitudes and biases of the wider society concerning African Americans than their predecessors. The Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth were founded by Blessed Francis Siedliska and serve, in addition to the United States, in Poland, England, France, Australia, the Philippines, and Iraq (Journal Committee, 1989). On the other hand, the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, who taught at the school until 1937, were dedicated to sharing "the message of the Gospel and the life of the Eucharist with the

poor and oppressed among the Black and Native American peoples" (St. Peter Claver's Journal Committee, 1989). Blessed Katherine Drexel, the Order's foundress, gave large sums from her sizable inheritance to schools and other projects, such as financial aid to African American religious orders, for the betterment and evangelization of African and Native Americans. Therefore, anyone joining the Blessed Sacrament Order would be dedicated to the aims of the order and share the order's charism. Most of the parishioners that I interviewed whether male or female attended the school during the time the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament were there and tended to agree more with the following informants.

Mable is seventy years old and now lives in Philadelphia. She is the mother of nine children, including three sets of twins. She is a grandmother and great-grandmother. She comes to Brooklyn almost quarterly to visit her now house-bound, life long friend whom she met at St. Peter Claver School. In a personal letter to me, Mable (also my godmother) wrote the following concerning the school:

When I was 4 1/2 or 5, my mother entered me in kindergarten at St. Peter Claver. The school at that time consisted of 2 or 3 houses on Jefferson Ave.

I'll always remember my teacher's name - Mrs. Frank. While under her tutelage, all the pupils were involved in canvassing for a new building to house a school. We sold chances at a penny apiece. Each card had 100 dots which when punched out bought one brick towards the building. The children worked hard, spurred on by the promise of a new school.

The sisters of the Blessed Sacrament were our teachers during that time. Then around 19[37] the order changed to [The Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth].

Even after, I had graduated from Claver, 1938, [I] was still a very active parishioner. I was on the basketball team and I also worked in the rectory with 3 or 4 other young ladies, clerical work mostly (Smiley, 1993).

Milton Hayes has a Masters degree from Fordham University, is in semi-retirement from City Bank and is also self employed as a tax consultant. He is the youngest of five children and the father of four and a grandfather. His mother, Helen Hayes, and his grandmother, Marie Victoria Boardley, were among the first parishioners of St. Peter Claver Church. The reluctance to join in more emotionally demonstrative types of Christianity and the charisma of Msgr. Quinn were instrumental in attracting both women to Catholicism and St. Peter Claver's Church.. His father Daniel Hayes, Sr. was one of the founding members of the now defunct Claver Men's Club. He attends another parish now and suggests that there is not the same commitment and encouragement at St. Peter Claver's now that the school is closed.

Milton suggests that the parish and its facilities were the heart of social as well as spiritual life to the African Americans in Brooklyn when white recreational and worship facilities were off-limits to the Catholics of African descent. St. Peter Claver's was also the venue where many celebrities performed their art or played their sport. For example, Lena Horne and the Harlem Globe Trotters were among the celebrity acts that used to perform at Claver's. The school provided the young African Americans who completed its curriculum with the skills and intellectual acumen necessary to broaden one's life chances. Milton states that the school closure was a hierarchical decision that was never brought to the people who would have, had they been asked, been more than willing to contribute to its continuance. He feels that the school closure is another example of how little regard the Church has for what is historically, socially, academically, and spiritually significant to its African American members. He feels that St. Peter Claver is his home, that the doors have been closed, and that the current pastor displays a condescending attitude to his parishioners and one of unquestioning obedience to the current bishop, whereas his predecessors were more

active in championing issues that were in the best interests of their flock (Hayes, 1993).

He recounts how important the school was for providing life chances beyond the elementary school level stating:

Fr. Cullen got me into Bishop Loughlin [High School]. . . . He made sure that every year at least two from St. Peter Claver's went to Bishop Loughlin. He made sure of that because we were allowed two. And he made sure two of us went and I was lucky enough to be one of the two at the time that I graduated, to go there. I was lucky enough through school, I was no "A" student. I did okay, I did my homework.

. . . City Bank, or whatever it was called at the time, accepted very few non-white people, very, very few. You almost had to go in on high recommendation. So the benefit that I had was that I did go to Loughlin, because Loughlin was an Irish Catholic School, primarily, white Irish, Italian, Catholic School. So, if you came out of Loughlin, you were considered a good student, someone they could depend on, and nine out of ten times they could train you.

. . . See we were closed out and only a selected few were allowed to come in, harmless. You're not going to slay yourself to become president of the company. You're just going to go there and work and be thanking God every ten minutes that you got a job. So we were no threat, just two at a time or one at a time. But that was the connection and the hook-up that went through a school like St. Peter Claver. Because of the vision and persistence of man like Fr. Cullen, who saw to it that the two [boys] went [to Bishop Loughlin HS.] every year.

There were others like the guy (I won't say any names) who was, in later years, pastor of Our Lady of Victory. He's the pastor, now he's happy, he's out with his white people in some other white parish someplace out there, I just read about him a few weeks ago. To someone like him, that wasn't important. The important thing was that he was able to show the neighbourhood and the diocese that his children, the children of the parish of Our Lady of Victory graduated, passed the regents exams, and whatever happened to them after that, good luck. If they were industrious enough, which they probably were because they got a pretty good basic education at Our Lady of Victory, it was a good school. But he didn't give the same compassion and understanding and vision, that somebody like Fr. Cullen, or before him, Msgr. Quinn.

I was thinking of the vision of men like Msgr. Quinn who took it upon themselves, to say, "Well, if they won't let these people go to Mass and hear services at Nativity and other white churches in the neighbourhood, then we'll make a place for them to go." That was his vision. Then later, as time went on, and it came down to the time when someone like myself was there, that was when whatever the rules of the game were, in other words the rules of the game from the diocese: this; that; and the other, like your parish your church, St. Peter Claver's, can get two youngsters into whatever school. He [Fr. Quinn] did it, he followed it through. The emphasis I'm making is that his vision was to see to that two of us got there and there was no special gallant movies, radio, or the camera broadcasting, putting the lights on them, no just go, you got the scholarship go! I didn't even know it was a scholarship until many years later, I come to find out that it was St. Peter Claver's that was paying for this, whatever was the required payment, it was being paid for by St. Peter Claver's, a scholarship, myself and Vincent [] got in, that particular time (Hayes, 1993).

The priests and sisters at Claver's also helped both the boys and girls on their way to better life chances. Even Jennifer, who was unsatisfied with the sisters for ridiculing her professional aspirations, went on to university after graduating from the diocesan scholarship high school, Bishop McDonnell's Memorial, which was the sister school to the one Milton was discussing. Whether or not the school years were liked, they did pave the road to better opportunities in life than were generally available to African Americans. Kosmin's findings appear to confirm this. According to Kosmin (1991) the Black Catholic population compared with all U.S. Blacks, "is younger, more urban (92% v. 83%) . . . has more males (48%) than the Black Protestant population (44%). As a result it has more high income households (14% with incomes over \$50,000 a year v. 9%)" (Kosmin, 1991:iv). It is also interesting to note that for the age group 40 to 59 years the proportion of College graduates is 25% for white Catholics and 26% for Black Catholics (Kosmin, 1991:iv).

Another St. Peter Claver School alumnus who went on to become a priest and serve in the parish (1949 - 1952), is Rev. Msgr. William J. Rodgers. Msgr. Rodgers is

the sort of person that, without trying, inspires a sense of being in the presence of someone holy. His gentle demeanor sets one at ease. When I mentioned this to another informant (my mother), she said that even as a boy people would not say a bad word in his presence. He is a learned man with a doctorate in philosophy. He no longer does parish work because of his health but is chaplain of the Queen of Peace Seniors Residence. Also a humble man, he related that he felt there were two other boys at Claver's that he thought would have made better priests than himself. I mention this because while interviewing him he stated that he never really experienced any problems because of his race and thought this presence that he exudes might possibly be effective enough to prevent actions or remarks of a mean spirited nature.

Msgr. Rodgers was born in South Carolina. He and his father, aunt, and grandmother moved to Brooklyn in 1922, after his mother's death, when he was six months old. His aunt and grandmother went to St. Peter Claver Church because they felt more comfortable there than at the other Catholic churches. He started his schooling in public school because it was closer to where he lived. But he requested to go to St. Peter Claver's and began attending Claver's fourth grade. Although he spent the first four years in public school, Monsignor states:

I got all of my elementary education from St. Peter Claver School. We had two orders of nuns there. We had the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, the ones that were trying to get Mother Drexel canonized, she's beatified. After they left the parish, I think my last year, they left the parish (maybe my last two years). Then the Polish Order, the Sisters of the Holy Family took over the teaching of the school. When I graduated they were the ones who were there. I graduated with Dolores Hayes Hunter [my cousin]. . . It was a very happy school as I recall. And I must say both Orders of nuns were extremely dedicated, considering the circumstances under which they taught. Sometimes they had two and three classes in one classroom, for example, the 7B, 8A, and 8B. And we didn't all have the same books. I'm amazed when I look back and see how the Sisters taught when we

had different arithmetic. They had to go to each child and check because each child had a different book. There would be a section say, on addition, well Sister would have to have a very good quick memory to add all the figures in her head to see if we were right. Now you can teach this way because St. Peter Claver School was always small (in my time). I think when I graduated in '37 or '38, the school had approximately one hundred students. Two classrooms we didn't even use. The school was built on a top floor . . . around a solarium. The solarium was a square [with two classrooms on each side] we didn't use two of them. One of them became the principal's office and one was a library.

All I can say about the grammar school is it was a very happy experience for me. I think the most important thing that happened in the grammar school was my desire to be an altar boy and from that desire to be a priest. I suppose it began with my being so impressed with Father Quinn. I remember I learned all the Latin in one week which surprised even the teachers. Of course at that stage I had to memorize it. But I had it all memorized in one week and I was serving Mass the next week. I loved serving Mass, Benediction, and all the other services. It was truly home for me, it was home.

And since the school was selective, selective in the sense that the Sisters would not take problem children. If you had a "D" in conduct you were not accepted in the school (in my time). . . . They didn't want children with psychiatric problems. Of course, in those days we didn't have psychiatric problems, we were too darn poor. I don't ever remember a child having an emotional or psychiatric problem, we were all so darn poor, that we didn't have time for that nonsense.

The Sisters were excellent teachers. I can never forget them. I know there have been some very serious criticisms of St. Peter Claver School by people who have gone on to college and university, but I reject that. I reject it totally. I think I got a very fine elementary education at St. Peter Claver School (Rodgers, 1993).

The above accounts were chosen because of the detail in their articulation and because they are representative of how the parishioners feel. Most people with whom I spoke had pleasant memories of the school with only two exceptions one of which was presented. Most of the concern was with the fact that the school had closed. It was felt by some informants that the school not only served the Catholics in the community

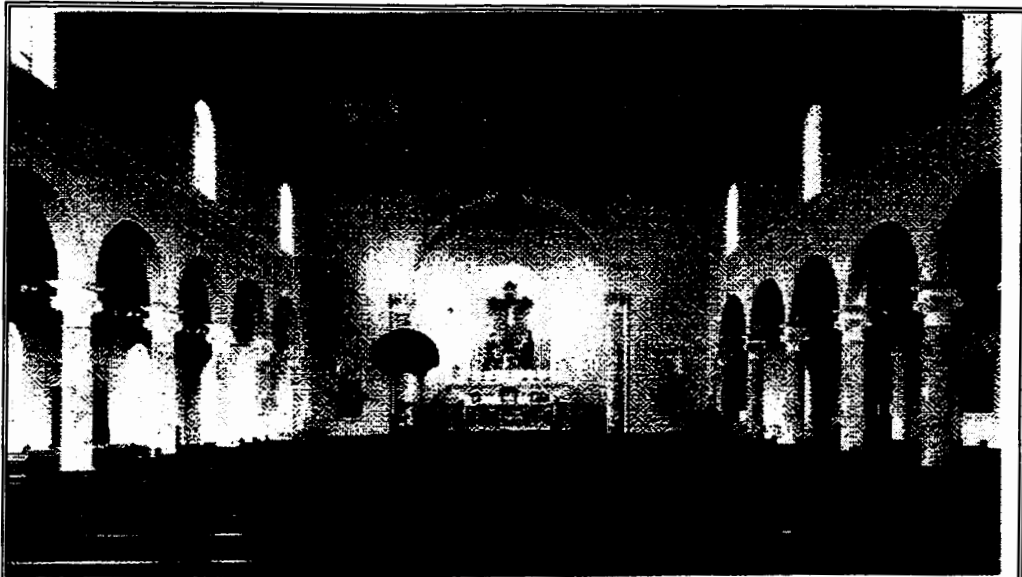
but benefited the whole neighbourhood because the building was used by the wider-community, especially for entertainment events and sports activities. Msgr. Rodgers' account is cited at length because he conveys the actual conditions under which the Sisters taught and the children learned. His account of the school depicts the *gemeinschaft* of the rural one room school house more than the usual *gesellchaft* of a big city school.

Most of the children of St. Peter Claver's parish attend other parochial schools in Brooklyn. The Archdiocese of New York appears to have recognized the role Catholic grammar or parochial schools play in broadening the life chances of the children that attend. In an effort to lower educational costs for lower-income parents, the Archdiocese has launched a television ad campaign which invites donations to help reduce the cost of tuition, thus allowing "underprivileged" children to attend Catholic school. This campaign helps non-Catholic as well as Catholic children to attend Catholic schools.

### **The Church**

Before describing the how, here is a description of where the people worship. On the far wall (from the main entrance) above the altar there is a marble crucifixion scene, only the cross being made of wood. On either side of the crucifixion scene the are the murals depicting the story of the Martyrs of Uganda and St. Peter Claver with the slaves of Cartagena, Columbia. Figure 3.4 (top) shows the church after the first restoration in 1921 before the murals where added and (bottom) includes all subsequent restorations.





*Church after first restoration, 1921. Note absence of both the murals in sanctuary and the Saints in the frieze, left and right.*



**OVERALL VIEW OF NEWLY RESTORED INTERIOR OF ST. PETER CLAVER CHURCH**

*Altar at head of main aisle is focus point.*

*Behind it to left is ambo, to right is celebrant's chair. Further back is baptismal area showing font and two baptismal windows.*

*On far left is Reservation Chapel.*

*Foreground shows new benches and new carpet.*

**Figure 3.4** Church after the first restoration in 1921. (top) and an "Overall View of Newly Restored Interior of St. Peter Claver Church [1991]" (Source: *Celebrating Our Restoration*, 1991)

The octagonal baptismal font, set in back of the altar about 20 feet, is made of marble trimmed with gold. There are two stained glass windows on the wall behind the baptismal font. The altar, also marble, is mounted on marble colonnades, all resting on a diamond shaped marble base. The lectern (gold trimmed marble) is to the left and back of the altar facing the congregation. There are eight marble columns on each side of the Church which form arches for each of the Stations of the Cross. The Stations of the Cross is a devotional practice which traces Christ's journey from the trial before Pilate to death on the Cross. Every Roman Catholic Church has seven stations on the left wall and seven on the right: During Lent people process from station one to station fourteen, stopping at each station to reflect and pray.

. . . The Stations observed are: Jesus is condemned, Jesus carries His cross, Jesus falls the first time, Jesus meets His Mother, Simon of Cyrene helps carry the cross, Veronica wipes Jesus' face, Jesus falls a second time, Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem, Jesus falls the third time, Jesus is stripped of His garments, Jesus is nailed to the cross, Jesus dies on the cross, His body is taken down from the cross, and His body is laid in the tomb (Stravinskias, 1991:902).

The columns and the walls of the church end in an alcove on either side of the main altar. The tabernacle is housed in the alcove on the left flanked by the Virgin Mary and St. Martin de Porres. St. Peter Claver and St. Francis of Assisi share the alcove on the left. On the wall to the right is a statue of Jesus in the style which signifies devotion to His Sacred Heart. Above the arches on the left side (looking from the choir loft to the altar) are murals of African Saints from the early centuries of Christianity, Catherine of Alexandria, Cyprian, Monica, Augustine, Felicitas, Athanasius, and Perpetua. On the right are murals of Saints who were canonized between the dedication of St. Peter Claver Church in 1922 and the completion of the original art work, John Eudes, Peter Canisius, Madeleine Sophie Barat, John Baptist

Vianney, Margaret Mary, Joan of Arc, and Gabriel of the Sorrowful Mother (Cullen, 1960). The seating for the priests is to the left, behind the altar, symmetrically spaced with the lectern. Two large columns behind the lectern and the celebrants' seats respectively form another arch leading to the baptismal area. The Little Flower chapel, shown in Figure 3.5, in the rear of the church contains an almost life-size statue of St. Theresa and has room enough to seat about ten people.



**Figure 3.5:** Little Flower Chapel (Source: *Celebrating Our Restoration*, 1991)

## The Mass

The Mass is the focal point of Roman Catholic worship; it precedes, follows or is incorporated in all other rituals. The only day on which Mass is not celebrated is Good Friday. Catholics believe that Jesus Christ is present at Mass in three ways: in the Word or Scripture readings, before and after the consecration of the Bread and Wine, in the community as they receive Holy Communion as the Bread of Life. The Mass consists of four parts the Introductory Rites, the Liturgy of the Word, the Liturgy of the Eucharist which includes the Communion Rite, and the Concluding Rite. Liturgy

is the act of public worship. All the rites and ceremonies of the Church are included in the term liturgy. The Mass is the highest form of liturgical expression and is the major ritual whereby Catholics act out their myth.

The Introductory Rites consists of the mutual greeting of the priest and people, prayers said by the priest and people together called the Penitential Rite and the Kyrie (Lord, have mercy), and the Opening prayer which is said by the priest alone.

The Liturgy of the Word varies slightly from weekday Masses, Sunday Mass, and Masses for special occasions. There is always at least one reading from the Bible that is not from the four Gospels. This is followed by the Responsorial Psalm. This is a reading from Psalms with one verse or phrase used as a response by the people, for example:

***Response: Let heaven and earth exult in joy.***

Sing to the Lord a new song,  
sing to the Lord, all you lands.

Sing to the Lord; bless his name. ***Repeat response.***

Announce his salvation, day after day  
tell his glory among the nations;

Among all peoples, his wondrous deeds. ***Repeat response.***

The Lord made the heavens.

Splendor and majesty go before him;

Praise and grandeur are in his sanctuary. ***Repeat response.***

The Responsorial Psalm is sometimes followed by a second reading (Sundays, Holy Days of Obligation) otherwise it is followed by the Gospel Acclamation and the Gospel Proclamation (the reading of the Gospel).

"The Gospel, the focal point of the liturgy of the word, is a reading from one of the four accounts of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection . . . the significance of the Gospel Proclamation in Catholic tradition is its reservation since the fourth century to those persons sharing the sacrament of orders, namely, deacons, priests, and bishops" (Fitzgerald, 1982:65).

The Homily or sermon follows the Gospel. The Liturgy of the Word ends with the saying of either the Nicene or the Apostle's Creed and General Intercessions in which prayers are said for the participants, the church, and the world.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist consists of the Preparation of the Altar and the Gifts. The gifts are the bread and wine and on Sunday, the collection. This is followed by the Eucharistic Prayer. It is during the Eucharistic Prayer that the bread and wine are consecrated. The Communion Rite consists of the Lord's Prayer, the Sign of Peace, and Communion. The Sign of Peace is a symbolic and actual gesture whereby worshippers shake hands, hug, or kiss each other wishing each other the peace of Christ. Communion is the high point of the Mass, where the faithful receive the Body and Blood of Christ, commemorating the instructions given at the Last Supper. After communion the priest and the people sit for a time in silence reflecting on the mystery in which they have participated.

The Concluding Rite consists of the Prayer After Communion and a blessing the focus of which is to send forth the community to translate words and actions of the Mass into deeds in their day to day lives.

Masses all over the world consist of the above elements. One thing that makes St. Peter Claver weekday Masses special is that they always begin with an opening hymn. Most weekday Masses do not have any singing. However the weekday services that I attended at St. Peter Claver always had both an opening and a closing hymn. Another distinguishing feature of Mass at Claver's is that during the recitation of the Lord's Prayer all the people join hands with someone on each side of them. This has the effect of making everyone in attendance an "in-group" member. In many congregations both in the United States and Canada women are not allowed in the sanctuary area even though this taboo ended with Vatican II. Hence, the most striking

adaptation is that the Eucharistic ministers both male and female assist in the serving communion at both weekday and Sunday Masses. This level of lay participation at Mass, especially for women, exhibits an inclusiveness that is rare in a church that is so protective of its hierarchical structures and traditions. Adults participate at Mass in addition to the Eucharistic ministers, as ushers, Lectors, and choir. Recently, family Sundays were initiated in which children will play a more active role at Mass as Lectors and the addition of children's choir for the younger children

This inclusiveness extends to even St. Peter Claver's regular "character". He is about 45, and is usually garbed in a sailor suit, probably from the Viet Nam era, and seemingly "dancing to the beat of a different drummer". He greets the priest and altar boys as they enter. During the opening parts of the Mass he greets those seated in the choir and Lector/Eucharistic ministers' sections. The Lectors and Eucharistic ministers sit on the other side of the altar from the choir. He then shakes hands with the worshippers occupying the first rows. After the Liturgy of the Word, he departs gently half saluting, half waving. One day he stayed longer and went up for communion. Being on the line for communion in front of him, I was unable to see whether he received communion or simply a blessing. People who are not Catholic, or who are Catholic and for some reason cannot receive communion, may go up at communion time and receive a blessing from the priest, as is often the case with small children who have not yet made their First Holy Communion.

The St. Peter Claver feast day Mass is a big annual event at the church. At the 1993 celebration as people entered the church the ushers handed out special Feast Day Order of the Mass booklets. Jennifer Parkinson gave a brief statement about the guest celebrants and explained that there would be a special Gospel procession.

The Mass began with an entrance hymn sung to the accompaniment of a Steel Band. The celebrants procession, led by altar boys, entered from the doors of the church used by the congregation. Msgr. Hunt (the pastor), Fr. Carter (Director of the Office of Black Ministry), Fr. Jervis (formerly of St. Peter Claver's), Fr. Athanase (to be acting pastor during Msgr. Hunt's absence) were co-celebrants along with the Archbishop of Castries, St. Lucia, W.I., the Most Rev. Kelvin Felix, the main Celebrant & Homilist. After the incensing of the altar, Msgr. Hunt introduced the other priests and the Archbishop, who began the Mass.

Preceding the Gospel there was a procession of the Gospel Book performed by liturgical dancers. One girl carrying incense led a foursome. Two followed in back on each side carrying candles, and the fourth was last carrying the Gospel Book aloft. They half stepped up the aisle to the music of both the steel drum band and the organ, pausing three times. At each pause the candle bearers would turn and face each other while the girl carrying the incense would incense the Book three times then turn and proceed with the same half step. When she was again in position in front of the procession, they would all go forward again in choreographed unison that was simple yet moving. This routine was repeated until the Book was handed to Msgr. Hunt, where It was incensed a final time before Msgr. Hunt read the Gospel. It was quite moving.

After Mass there was a street festival. American Camper bazaar type tents were set up on the corners of Claver Place and Jefferson Avenue, one of which housed the steel band which played Caribbean music as well as rhythm and blues. There was Caribbean as well as "soul food" being served from tables along both sides of Jefferson Avenue.

There are Masses that could be called rites of passage, Baptism which celebrates birth, Nuptial or wedding Mass, and requiem or funeral Mass. For example, the Baptismal Mass welcomes a baby (or adult) into the church. The whole congregation participates in the baptism of a new member of the church. In a Mass of Baptism everything is the same up until the time of the Creed. At that point the congregation reiterates their Baptismal vows along with the parents and godparents of the person being baptized. Then the baptismal party goes over to the Baptismal font where the priest pours water over the head of the person being baptized three times saying, "I baptize you, (name), in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. The priest then says another prayer before anointing the newly baptized person with oil on the crown of the head. This anointing signifies being "anointed with the chrism of salvation". The child is then dressed in a white garment as "the outward sign of your Christian dignity". The newly baptized person is then presented to the congregation who usually express their welcome with applause, and then Mass resumes. During the first Sunday Mass of the new year, we welcomed a new member into the Church community, Diamond Asha. This baby was not just entering the community at St. Peter Claver's, a community that insulates against racism, but the wider Roman Catholic community whose boundaries go beyond parochial American racism.

There are also Masses for special needs or occasions. These can include just a slight deviation from the usual as on Thanksgiving 1993. This Mass differed from the others in that at the Offertory we all came up to the altar to put in our offerings. We had been asked previously to bring "a token gift for the Liturgy, such as, canned tuna, fish, meat, soup, fruit, vegetables; boxed or packaged rice, macaroni, etc." Usually at this time we just sit in our seats and put money in the basket passed by the ushers.



Now, gifts began to fill the altar. There were also gifts of money mostly given by men, but not one parishioner only had one can of something; most brought shopping bags full of dried and canned foods. The Gospel Alleluia for this Mass was, "For all things give thanks to God, Because this is what he expects of you in Christ Jesus." The parishioners demonstrated that a concrete expression of thanks and praise to God, is to share your blessings.

Mass is a celebration where everyone plays a part but some have specific roles. In the next section some of the roles and the people who perform the duties of the role are presented. Each role group forms what could be called a religious club or society because they have meetings to plan and coordinate their activities.

Religious societies fall into two categories: those of which the main purpose is to ensure that the Sunday Masses and the parish run smoothly; and those that are designed for those who wish to participate in community prayers and devotions in addition to Sunday Mass. The first include the pastoral council, choir, ushers, Lectors, liturgy committee, and Eucharistic ministers. The pastoral council functions like a parish Board of Directors. The choir is meant to lead the worshippers in songs and liturgical responses. The ushers make sure everyone has a seat, assign people to take up the collection and the gifts (bread and wine), and pass out the parish bulletins. The liturgy committee is responsible for special liturgies and the flowers and for making sure the church decorations are appropriate for the liturgical season. Eucharistic ministers assist in giving out communion during Mass and also bring the Holy Communion to the sick and shut-ins of the parish.

### **The Choir**

It is no longer a choir's duty to do all the singing at Mass. They are to lead the congregation in song and responses. The Choir and the Liturgy Committee work

together to ensure that the songs chosen for Mass are compatible with the theme of the Mass for that day. At St. Peter Claver's the choir also tries to accommodate the various ethnic groups by selecting songs that are reflective of the various places of origin of the church-goers.

The organist is a native of Trinidad. He is currently a graduate student in music at Columbia University and a recent graduate of Hunter College. In addition to his studies and his work as the church organist, he maintains a part time job at a downtown Brooklyn department store. He says he may return to Trinidad when he has completed his education.

The choir director is "a very dedicated young man", says Clarissa Watson. "he lives near Westchester. And he's there every Sunday, ahead of anybody else" (Watson, 1993). His father, the church sexton<sup>1</sup>, is a long time member of Claver's. Clarissa (1993) says that he has directed choirs and choruses since his college days in Jamaica. He is a tall, handsome man of about fifty. He told me that he was raised in Brooklyn but returned to Jamaica to attend university.

Audrey is one of the newer members of the Choir. She has only been in Brooklyn for four years and is a native of Grenada. She and her husband have three sons and three daughters. Two of her sons and one daughter are still in Grenada. Audrey and her husband, Lusan, own their home and their remaining son and his daughter reside with them there.

Audrey is an extremely devout woman who attends Mass daily. I got to know Audrey through our attendance at the Wednesday Small Faith Community group. The purpose of the Small Faith Community groups was to bring people closer together and

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<sup>1</sup>. A sexton is church officer who takes care of church property.

to get closer to God by reading the Scriptures and sharing how the Word of God in the Bible was significant in our lives today. During our discussions, it became clear that she spent a lot of time in private prayer in addition to her daily church attendance. Audrey regarded Jesus, as her confidant as well as her Lord and Saviour.

Audrey's concentration on prayer and daily Mass attendance were outward indications of the central place that God occupies in her life. However, she is not pious to the exclusion of socializing. At the 1993 Fall Dinner and Dance, Audrey and Lusan danced and joined in the festive mood of the occasion. At the Children's Christmas Pageant, she and Lusan beamed with pride along with the other parents and grandparents as her granddaughter recited her part of a poem but especially at her part in the liturgical dance of the "Our Father" set to music.

### **The Celebrant and Servers**

The role of the Servers or "altar boys" is not as entailed as it was in Msgr. Rogers' time. Before Vatican II, the Servers had to learn enough Latin to respond to the priest during the Mass which was said in Latin in all Roman Catholic Churches. It was the role of the Servers to respond on behalf of the people as well as assist the priest at the altar and sanctuary. Since Vatican II, the Mass is said in the language of the people so that the whole assembly may respond and take an active part. The Servers' role as assistants to the priest remains intact. The three boys who served during the time of the research are members of the Claver Youth Club.

"Celebrant" is a misleading term because the whole church assembly celebrates the Mass and the term implies a uniquely sacral role (Stravinskis, 1991). However, it is still the term that is most frequently used to describe the priest who presides over the celebration of the Mass.

Fr. Athanase, who was acting Pastor during the time of the field research, is a native of St. Lucia and is stationed in Brooklyn for a few years. He is an intense young man who has only been a priest since 1987 but has wanted to be a priest since he was thirteen, he states:

I was brought up in a very Catholic family, my parents were very devoted to the Church. . . they took church serious[ly]. So we had no choice, we got good example and we tried to imitate it. Around age thirteen, I felt that deep in my heart that's what I wanted to do, to become a priest. My mother accepted it, my father never did, there were so many other things I could have done, why was I going to become a priest. . . . I continued my high school until age seventeen, at that stage things were really confusing, because you had teenage pressure mounting. I remember there was one occasion in biology class, before the lecturer came in, a student from the same area was saying to the class, "Do you see Athanase, it's a priest he wants to become? This man is in everything in Church." And I felt very embarrassed about these things because I didn't want anybody to know that I wanted to become a priest (Joseph, 1993).

Fr. Athanase was also a member of the Small Faith Community group that I attended on Wednesday mornings and seemed to show an interest in every aspect of the parish. As part of the Small Faith Community group, he was down to earth participant and shared honestly with us, including some of his insecurities as well as his joys and hopes. He even donned a Santa Claus hat to present the children who participated in the Children's Christmas Pageant with gifts.

Msgr. Hunt, the Pastor of St. Peter Claver's, left for St. Lucia a couple of days after my arrival in Brooklyn. However, one parishioner stated that he is from Astoria [Long Island] and has three married sisters. She went on to say,

He hasn't been away from his family since he was in the seminary. Every chance he gets, he goes out there. One [sister] lives in Stoneybrook [Long Island]. The others live, not far. . . . He asks a few people, now and then, his good workers, to come out and spend the day and go to their beach. . . . He grills steaks and we have dinner with

them. Then on the way back, he stops at the little stands and we buy vegetables and whatever. He's very sociable (Watson, 1993).

Msgr. Hunt received the 1993 Unity Award for founding, Neighbors For Racial Harmony, and organizing its activities among members of the Episcopal (Anglican), Methodist, Presbyterian, and Catholic churches in Bay Ridge and Bedford-Stuyvesant (NY Newsday, 1993). While St. Peter Claver's no longer runs the Little Flower Orphanage at Wading River, New York, Msgr. Hunt as pastor of St. Peter Claver's, serves on the Board of Directors. The Little Flower Orphanage which was founded by Msgr. Quinn, is now run by the State of New York with the pastor of St. Peter Claver's as a permanent board member.

### **The Lectors**

The Lectors are those who read the Scriptures at Mass that are not part of the four Gospels. Eleanor, one of St. Peter Claver's most active parishioners, is a lector, member of the Pastoral Council, an SPC Federal Credit Union Officer, and a member of the Forever Young Club. She also attends Mass every Monday and Wednesday. Eleanor also heads the Special Friends of Claver, who pledge \$150 each year to be used towards needs of the parish. One year their contributions bought the Clavermobile, a bus that is usually used to bring seniors to and from Church functions used to bring the seniors to outings as well as Church. In late 1993, Eleanor was appointed to the Diocesan Vocation Committee.

Eleanor was baptized at St. Peter Claver, and has lived in Brooklyn all her life, although she did not go to St. Peter Claver school. Her sister Hilda (now deceased), who became a nun, had attended St. Peter Claver's School. So, Eleanor like many of the children in the neighbourhood at that time was included in many of the activities at the school. She never married and worked for the federal government as a computer

programmer before taking early retirement. She now volunteers most of her time to the parish using her computer expertise in the office and her organizing skills in the activities already mentioned.

Eleanor is St. Peter Claver's delegate to the Office of Black Ministry for the Diocese of Brooklyn and Queens and attended the Seventh National Black Catholic Congress of the National Office of Black Ministry in New Orleans, held in the Summer of 1993. The Office of Black Ministry serves to advocate on behalf of Black Catholics in the Diocese by: (1) establishing and implementing programs designed to promote and strengthen all aspects of family life among Black Catholics; (2) encouraging the development of leadership among Black Catholic youth and their participation in the life of the Church; (3) creating an appreciation of Black spirituality by those who serve the Black Catholic community; (4) encouraging the development of liturgical celebrations and services that reflect the heritage of Black Catholics; (5) encouraging more insight and understanding in the Catholic Church of the needs and desires of Black Catholics; (6) assisting the Bishop in the implementation of the National Black Catholic Pastoral Plan; (7) organizing lay representation from Black parishes to assist in discerning the needs and in implementing programs at the parish and vicariate level (OBM AGM agenda, 1993).

After Mass on Sundays, Eleanor acts as one of the tellers of the SPC Federal Credit Union. The St. Peter Claver (SPC) Credit Union was founded to help people with whom the big financial institutions would not do business. People can obtain loans as small as five hundred dollars at a low interest rate. One informant told me, "I got a second loan from them because when you go to the bank they're not particular about giving you loans particularly when you get after a certain age." The SPC Credit Union operates on Sundays after Mass in the church basement. It has a Board of

Directors and is a grass-roots solution to some of the economic obstacles faced by African Americans regardless of their incomes.

Eleanor is one of ten women who comprise the Forever Young Club which meets every Wednesday and Sunday after Mass. Every Wednesday after the novena and Mass they have a potluck lunch and visit with each other. As may be ascertained from the name, the club is made up of senior citizens and they organize social functions for the other seniors of the parish. In 1993, they organized bus rides to the Ice Capades, Radio City Music Hall, Panorama Park, and Amish Country. Just before Christmas they also held a flea market and craft fair.

Eleanor, although involved in more activities than most, is typical of Claver parishioners moving commitment to the community, especially considering that most are married and have families. The parishioner described in the next section is an example of this commitment.

### **The Eucharistic Ministers**

Stan, in addition to his duties as a Eucharistic Minister, drives the Clavermobile, is a Lector, a member of the Holy Name Society, the Liturgy Committee, the Pastoral Council, and the St. Vincent de Paul Society. Stan and his wife, Anna have been married for thirty-two years and have two sons, Emmanuel and Paul.

The purpose of St. Vincent de Paul Society is to help people that are in need. These include prisoners in need of visitors. Stan's work for the St. Vincent de Paul Society is to visit the prisons. Stan has been going to the Brooklyn House of Detention for the past fifteen years and recently received an award plaque from the City of New York. Sr. Eleanor (1993) says of Stan, "We have a few other members that go but he's been very faithful to what he's been doing. He works all day too, but he gives the time to go out to visit the prisons [every Saturday]" (Woods, 1993).

Every Sunday before Mass, Stan picks up the parishioners who are senior citizens and need a ride to church in the Clavermobile, participates at Mass sometimes as a Lector and as a Eucharistic Minister, then drives them home after Mass. He drove rideless parishioners to the BEC Mayoral Accountability Session and drove a busload of parishioners home after the New Year's Eve service.

### **The Assembly**

A discussion of the assembly or congregation at St. Peter Claver's Church would be incomplete without the presentation of one of what the parishioners call, "The Big Families". During the course of the research, I was able to meet and speak with three sisters and one brother of one of these families. The Desjardins are one of the founding families of the parish. Eva, Florence, Olive, Stenna, Barbara, and George are the children of Joseph and Virginia Desjardins. Their parents and two of their sisters are deceased.

George and his wife are members of the Special Friends of Claver. Eva and Olive are quite active at the parish. Eva, a widow, is a member of the BEC and Special Friends of Claver. She has four children and four grandchildren. Florence has six children, five of whom attended St. Peter Claver School. She also has eight grandchildren.

Olive along with Eleanor (above) was appointed to serve as a representative of St. Peter Claver's on the Diocesan Vocation Committee. She also serves on the Pastoral Council, is a SPC Federal Credit Union officer, and is a member of the Forever Young Club. Olive now lives with her second husband. Olive had occasion to reflect on growing up in the area on the morning of the funeral of a life time friend.

Well, we lived just about four or five blocks from the church here. We lived on Classon Avenue between Dean and Pacific [Streets].



And it's so funny that after the funeral here on Monday, Vera and me and my two sisters, we went around to where we lived. The house is still there but it was boarded up, it was locked up but downstairs they still had a garage, a workroom. So we asked the person if he could open the door and let us see it. He said, "Oh, they've gutted out the house inside." So we said just open up the door and let us just look and see. So he opened up the door and we stepped where we used to run up and down, and up and down. Now, Vera, was born in that house and we lived on the top floor. Then he took us in the back yard to show us where we used to sit out on the fire escape. Now the fire escapes then were not like the fire escapes now. The fire escapes were like, rounded. It was really funny because we used to go up on the roof, we used to call that "Tar Beach".

Well, all of us sisters and brother went to St. Peter Claver Church and the school. Well, back and forth we walked from home to school. Our parents were always home when we got home from school. That was one thing that today's parents, you don't find too many parents home when their children get home from school. I can never remember coming home and not seeing my mother in the house, never. Except one time when she got sick and went to the hospital, (I mean we were just torn up after that), for a few days, she had pneumonia. But otherwise my parents were always there. My father was a hardworking man. We were on welfare because what my father was making wasn't enough to take care of all the children. So we were like on supplementary [income assistance], they used to help us with the rent and what not.

So we were quite happy. We were poor but we didn't know we were poor. We didn't consider ourselves poor because [when] we got home we had something to eat. We had a clean bed to sleep in. There were a lot of hand-me-downs because there were six girls and one boy. So all the dresses or whatever, when they got too small, the [next] one would get it. But we were always happy. When we got something new, the first place you wore it was to church. You never wore anything new out in the street other than to church.

I went to Prospect Heights High School and I went two years to Kingsborough College for Nursing, but I didn't continue. I just ended up a Nurses' Aide at Kings County [Hospital] for thirty-five years. Because at that time when I was working, I was working nights full-time then I had to go to school full-time and take care of the youngest boy and come home and cook and clean and study and try and help them, for two years. And I said no, because I don't want to have to be

paying those doctors because I've gone nuts. So I just stopped in 1974. I didn't continue but I'm glad my daughter is continuing. She works in the Emergency Room at Kings County [Hospital].

My six children went to the [St. Peter Claver's Parochial] school and graduated. My last boy was the only to have to pay tuition. He was in the six grade when they started this tuition, when Nativity [Parochial School] and St. Peter Claver's merged. That was only for two years. All of them graduated and the oldest went to Bishop Loughlin [High School], the oldest boy. The next boy went to Erasmus [High School]. My next daughter went to Bishop McDonnell [Memorial High School]. And my second daughter went to Prospect Heights [High School]. My third boy went to Boys High first then I transferred him down to George Westinghouse [High School] and from there I sent him down to the Virgin Islands with my first daughter because he was getting into terrible crowds. So I sent him down there to finish his high school which he did in 1972. And my baby boy graduated from Wingate [High School] and he went into the Marines and from there (he did four years), and then he took the test for deputy sheriff and that's what he is now in California.

Now I have fifteen grandchildren. I have one great grandchild. My baby daughter is working at Kings County [Hospital] as an LPN and the other daughter is living in Georgia. She does graphic arts and she is teaching that down there (Desjardins, 1993).

Olive also works every Wednesday afternoon in the Church office assisting Sr. Eleanor. Sr. Eleanor, the parish Pastoral Administrator, has been at the parish for twenty years and the 1993 Spring Dinner/Dance Journal was dedicated to her on the occasion of her twenty years with the parish. Sister Eleanor is a member of the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth and served as principal of St. Peter Claver School for three years until the consolidation of Nativity and St. Peter Claver's in 1974. Sr. Eleanor served for three years in Peru and speaks Spanish. It was for this reason that Fr. Kean, the pastor at that time, asked her to minister to the Spanish-speaking parishioners that became part of St. Peter Claver's from Nativity parish.

Sr. Eleanor's current work includes visiting seniors in nursing homes, the sick of the parish, co-managing Claver's youth group, and being available to those who just

come to the door for help. She is also involved in the BEC and the Neighbors for Racial Harmony.

The Neighbors for Racial Harmony is an ecumenical and inter-racial group composed of the members of four churches in the Bay Ridge section of Brooklyn and four churches in the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn. They take turns hosting get-togethers at each of the member churches on a rotating basis alternating between communities. Their goal is to get to know each other better, to break down barriers and to lessen fears of going into other neighborhoods. "We want to build racial harmony and to symbolize racial harmony in our communities. We also respond individually and collectively to incidents of racial violence or prejudice in our communities" (Parris and Summerville, 1993). A gathering of the Neighbors For Racial Harmony is shown Figure 3.6 (top) at the end of this chapter.

While speaking with Sr. Eleanor about the parishioners being involved in the community, she stated,

"We were talking about being involved in the community. If somebody's sick, if somebody's dying, you can't teach them religion. You're going to have to help the person first. We are in a poorer area here, how will we help to make life better? So you help, but people have to help themselves. And that's the whole idea about the organizations that we belong to, empowerment. One saint said, 'Pray as if everything depended on God and work as if everything depended on you' (Woods, 1993).

Before discussing how the St. Peter Claver community converts its concern for the youth of their community and the wider community into concrete responses, some of the other religious and social societies/clubs are described in brief.

### **Worship and Play**

As previously stated a significant feature about the parishioners of St. Peter Claver's Church is the number of activities in which they engage. These activities

usually are presided over by a society or club whose membership is completely voluntary. The minimum required participation of a Roman Catholic is attendance at Sunday Mass and the performance of the Easter Duty. The Easter Duty entails receiving the sacraments of Penance or Reconciliation and the Eucharist. Hence, the participation in the groups mentioned above and those to be described are above and beyond what is required by the Roman Catholic Church to be considered a "good practicing Catholic".

### **Ancillary Forms of Worship**

The Holy Name Society (men only), the League of the Sacred Heart and the Sodality of Our Lady are societies that are Church-wide, and any parish may have a chapter if there is sufficient interest. The members of the League of the Sacred Heart are the mainstay of the First Friday devotions:

. . . the practice of receiving Holy Communion on nine consecutive First Fridays in reparation to "the Heart that has loved men so and is loved so little in return" Among the graces Christ is said to have promised to those who are faithful to this devotion: final perseverance in the Catholic Faith, reception of the last sacraments and death in a state of grace, the consolation of the love of Christ's Sacred heart at the time of death (Stravinskis, 1991:406).

I attended the First Friday Devotions to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Mass that followed. I felt connected to the history of my mother and grandmother as I held in my hands the same hymn card that they might have held on First Fridays past. These same actual cards have been used every First Friday for the past sixty-one years, that is, since August 10th, 1932. That these cards are still in usable condition is indicative of the reverence with which this devotion and its accoutrements are held.

The Sodality of Our Lady is dedicated to devotion to Jesus through Mary and the members of this group are the leaders of the First Saturday devotions.

Those who practice this devotion are to receive Holy Communion on five consecutive first Saturdays, receive the Sacrament of Penance within an octave [eight days] before or after this reception, recite five decades of the Rosary and make a fifteen-minute meditation on one of the mysteries of the Rosary. . . .after the apparitions at Fatima in 1917 [ ] this devotion gained momentum, since Our Lady was said to have recommended it specifically, promising her intercession for final perseverance at the hour of death to all who were faithful to it (Stravinskis, 1991:407).

In addition to these there are the independent initiatives of parish staff and parishioners at St. Peter Claver's these take the form of Bible Study groups (which were "on hold" while Msgr. Hunt was on leave), Small Faith Communities, and a charismatic prayer group (which started after I left). I became a member of the Wednesday morning Small Faith Community group which was composed mostly of senior citizens due to the time it was held. There was another group on Sundays before Mass.

The purpose of Small Faith Community groups is to counteract the anonymity sometimes felt in large congregations and to bring parishioners closer together and closer to God by reading the Scriptures and sharing how the Word of God in the Bible was significant in their lives today. The group that I attended met on Wednesday mornings at 10:30 A.M. Three members of the group have already been discussed, Audrey, Fr. Athanase, and Sr. Eleanor. The other members of the group are Clarissa, Appoline, and Veronica.

Clarissa is a woman of seventy-one, a native New Yorker, has never been married, and has been a member of St. Peter Claver congregation since she was a child. During our interview, I asked Clarissa if her family was Catholic, she replied:

Yes. My father was from St. Croix, Virgin Islands. There are lots of Catholics there, Catholics and Lutheran, because it was a Danish Island. It was called the Danish West Indies then. My mother was from Santa Domingo. I was baptized in St. Mark's Church in Harlem. My

people lived in Harlem but I don't remember much of Harlem. They died young and then I became a foster child. My foster parents were members of Claver's, Mrs. Hosanna Moore, one of the old-time founders. Then she died and I came here with the Kings. Mrs. King went to Claver's (Watson, 1993).

Clarissa did not attend St. Peter Claver School but like many of the children of the neighbourhood was well acquainted with the School complex because the sports and other activities were for the whole neighbourhood. She is currently active as a choir member, a member of the Good and Welfare Committee, the Secretary for the SPC Federal Credit Union, a member of the Forever Young Club and the Neighbors for Racial Harmony. She is also active in the community at large and is on several home owner committees.

Appoline was very quiet in the beginning but began to open up as the group got to know each other better. Appoline is a widow and has two married sons and two granddaughters. All her family members are active in the parish. She is from Haiti and has been a member of the congregation for over twenty years.

Veronica, a native of Brooklyn, is a retired school teacher and was originally a member of Nativity parish which merged with St. Peter Claver's in 1974. Veronica is from one of Claver's large families but she never married. However Veronica, her brother, Julian, and his family are continuing the tradition of being an active Claver family. Her grand niece was one of the performers in the Children's Christmas Pageant of 1993.

She is also in the choir and accompanies Father and Sister Eleanor every week when they go to the local senior citizen's residence to say Mass. She leads the seniors in the hymns.

The disparities between the persons that made up the group were quite evident in the beginning. As the group continued to meet and share their faith, doubts, fears,

joys, and the day to day cares and concerns of everyday life, the members of the group grew closer together. Even Fr. Athanase and Sr. Eleanor were down-to-earth participants in the group and shared honestly with us including some of their insecurities. The disparities began to diminish or at least become unimportant as the members became a valued part of each other's lives. There was a certain intimacy and understanding that developed within the group that carried over in their relationships outside the group.

Relationships are enhanced at the parish by The Good and Welfare Committee and The Forever Young Club. The Forever Young club, as mentioned above, is composed of ten seniors who meet every Sunday and Wednesday. The Good and Welfare Committee is composed of twenty-four women who will cook for the bereaved when a family member has died. They visit the sick parishioners at home and in the hospital and generally help parishioners in their times of need. They also do the cooking for many of the parish functions such as the Feast Day Celebration.

The members of both the Good and Welfare Committee and the Forever Young Club lost two of their oldest friends this September. Imogene (Foster) Jandroep (1899 - 1993) was born in Barbados and came to Brooklyn as a child. She was one of the founding members who helped raise money to build St. Peter Claver Church. She married Mr. Jandroep, who lived across the street from the Church. She was born an Anglican but converted to Roman Catholicism in the United States. Msgr. Asip, who assisted at the Requiem Mass with Msgr. Hunt, knew Imogene during his long service and association with the parish. He came to the parish at the age of 24, and is now 81.

Gertrude Gwendolyn (Kenton) Ruiz, was born in 1907 and came to New York with her parents in 1923. She married Norberto Ruiz and had three children Rita,

Algon, and Gregory. Her children and their children still attend St. Peter Claver's Church.

Mrs. Ruiz and Mrs. Jandroep had been active members of the parish and had been good friends for over 65 years. Their funerals were held on the same day. Not only the priests and the choir but most of the congregation attended both funerals. This concern and closeness is begun and nurtured in co-participation in the religious activities and further enhanced by the recreational opportunities the parishioners create for themselves.

### **Together at Recreation**

St. Peter Claver's is more than a place of worship for many of its parishioners. It also provides many recreational occasions including annual events such as: Mardi Gras celebrations; Martin Luther King Day celebrations; Parish Feast Day celebrations; Parish Anniversary celebrations; and Spring and Fall dinner dances. The Spring and Fall dinner dances are both post-fundraising celebrations.

There are also recreational opportunities such as: tap dancing instruction for all ages; bus excursions to state parks and out-of-state shopping sprees; and pilgrimages. There were plans to engage the Rockaway Review for a performance in January 1994. The Rockaway Review consists of a group of senior citizen performing artists who perform all over the United States and Panama.

A committee is formed for each of these occasions. The committees provide an opportunity for people to work and plan the occasion together. In this way new friendships are formed or old friendships strengthened and older parishioners encourage the newer parishioners to become involved. Persuasion to participate is made easier by the fact that many events that take place at St. Peter Claver's are recorded in the



Annual Spring Dinner Dance Journal. Being a part of the ongoing making of St. Peter Claver's is a source of pride for the parishioners.

### **For the Record: Claver's Publications**

The Fall Dinner Dance is hosted by the Special Friends of Claver's after everyone who has joined Special Friends has paid their annual dues. The annual dues are used for special needs of the parish such as the Clavermobile.

The Spring Dinner Dance is in May each year. Each year parishioners are asked if they want to place an advertisement in the Dinner Dance Journal. These advertisements can be memorial announcements, graduation announcements, wedding, or anniversary announcements. Each year the journal also has a specific theme. The theme for 1993 was Sister Eleanor's twenty-year anniversary at St. Peter Claver's. Hence, an advertisement can also be a congratulatory note. The advertisements can be full page or smaller, and for those who don't want to place an ad and yet have their names in the journal there is a section called, "Boosters". The cost of the advertisement corresponds with size of the advertisement. The journal includes the significant events that have taken place at the parish and in the community during the past year. It also includes historical items about the parish which acquaints newcomers to the parish with the history of the parish.

The tradition of recording events at Claver's dates back to the height of popularity of the Little Flower novenas in the latter 1920s. At this time, Fr. Kean (1972) writes, "Many of the people developed the habit of writing to the Parish to tell of favors received through the intercession of the Little Flower. These letters became one of the regular features in a magazine developed by Fr. Joseph McGroarty entitled, *Stray Notes*" (Kean, 1972). Since that time, in addition to the annual journals there have been occasional booklets, *The Fiftieth Anniversary Jubilee Journal*, and

***Celebrating Our Restoration.*** *Celebrating Our Restoration* was published in 1991

the year, as Msgr. Hunt (1991) wrote:

"Claver celebrates a fullness of years, seventy, 1921-1991. Our present restoration of the building prepared and handed on to us is but an outward sign of the people of God who make up the Claver community. . . . May the restoration of our house of worship be marked with a restoration of each individual and the whole Claver Community" (Hunt, 1991).

These tangible segments of past parish history and parish history in progress serve to encourage people to become active participants in that history. One informant says,

There was something called, a spirit of Claver's. There is a certain spirit there. When I meet Bishop Daily [Bishop of Brooklyn and Queens], whenever we meet him we say, "Good morning Bishop, I'm from St. Peter Claver's". He [the Bishop] says people say that like they say their alma mater, like Notre Dame or something. St. Peter Claver, we're proud to say that we're from St. Peter Claver's (Watson, 1993).

### **Excursions Outside the United States**

In addition to these domestic activities, the parish organizes pilgrimages to places of interest to the parishioners and Roman Catholics in general, such as Lisieux (St. Theresa) and Orleans (Joan of Arc) in France and various places in Italy and Spain. In 1985, fifty-six parishioners, along with Sr. Eleanor and Msgr. Hunt, went to Cartagena in Columbia where St. Peter Claver ministered to the slaves. Clarissa recounts the trip as follows:

There is a priest there, who's from a rich family in Bogota, and he is a modern day Peter Claver. He ministers to them, he's put up schools, hospitals, and there are some nuns there. Well, we had never seen such, I never saw such skinny little burros before, everything was thin. Of course, it was dry season then too. And the people were emaciated and the children with big bellies, no clothes, and young women [with] no teeth, real sad. We had Mass and yet with all this poverty, there was such a joyful Mass. The children had little

decorations for that day, and they brought up the gifts and they danced, and they had little home-made drums, and it really was a joyous celebration. I'll never forget that. We all thoroughly enjoyed the trip. We stayed in fine hotels, we had gone to lovely restaurants, but everyone had this in mind, this sense of, it could have been any of us born there and lived there. There's not much jobs, anyway and they're not trained for anything. And even the natives, the half Hispanic natives, there's a lot of unemployment, there's nothing to do. In fact, we had to be guarded to go into the Basilica because they were robbing pocketbooks in the Church. So, we had a fellow, Alfred Reed, may he rest in peace, he stood in front and another man to the back and they watched and we single file went into the Church. And everyone had to be aware, in fact, one women caught one fellow with a hand in her bag. I guess it's poverty that causes this sort of thing, you know. They see a well dressed tourist coming there, they don't know that you saved all year to get money together for these trips, you look like you're rich. (Watson, 1993)

The story does not end with Clarissa's description of her trip. Sr. Eleanor informed me that the people who went on that trip in 1985 still send donations down to Fr. Geraldo, the priest referred to by Clarissa, who works in the Black missions that still exist in Cartagena. The next chapter discusses how parishioners reach outside the parish to the larger community.

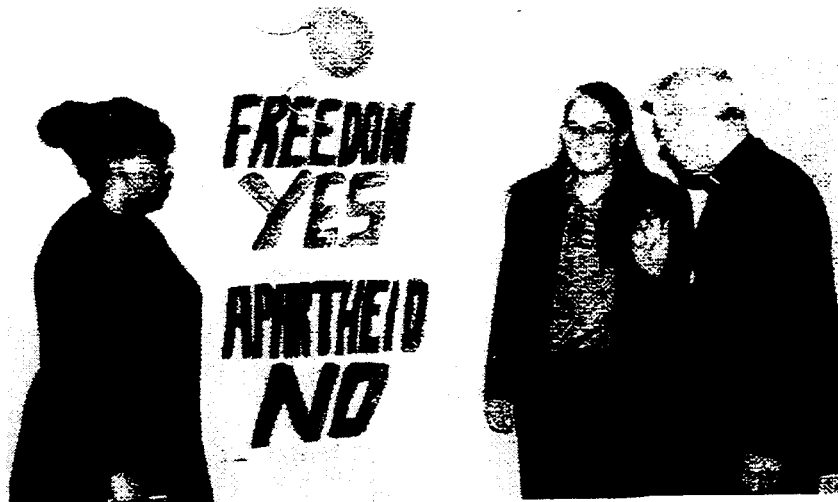
The pictures on the following pages present an example of photographic work included in the Annual Spring Dinner Dance Journals as well as furnishing a glimpse at some of the groups active at St. Peter Clavers. Figure 3.6 shows both the Neighbors For Racial Harmony (top) and St. Peter Claver's South Africa Committee (bottom). The men of the Holy Name Society are shown in Figure 3.7. The St. Peter Claver Dance and Journal Committee and the Good and Welfare Committee are shown in Figure 3.8. Scenes from the League of the Sacred Heart Tea held on April, 18, 1993 are shown in Figure 3.9. Figure 3.10 shows the blessing of the Clavermobile outside the church in December 1992. Sister Eleanor Woods graces the cover of the 17th Annual Spring Dinner-Dance Journal of 1993 shown in Figure 3.11.

NEIGHBORS FOR RACIAL HARMONY



Hortense Lopez, a force for unity from St. Andrew's Bay Ridge with our parishioners Frances Thomas and Tesa Thomas

FUND RAISER FOR SOUTH AFRICA, MARCH 21, 1993



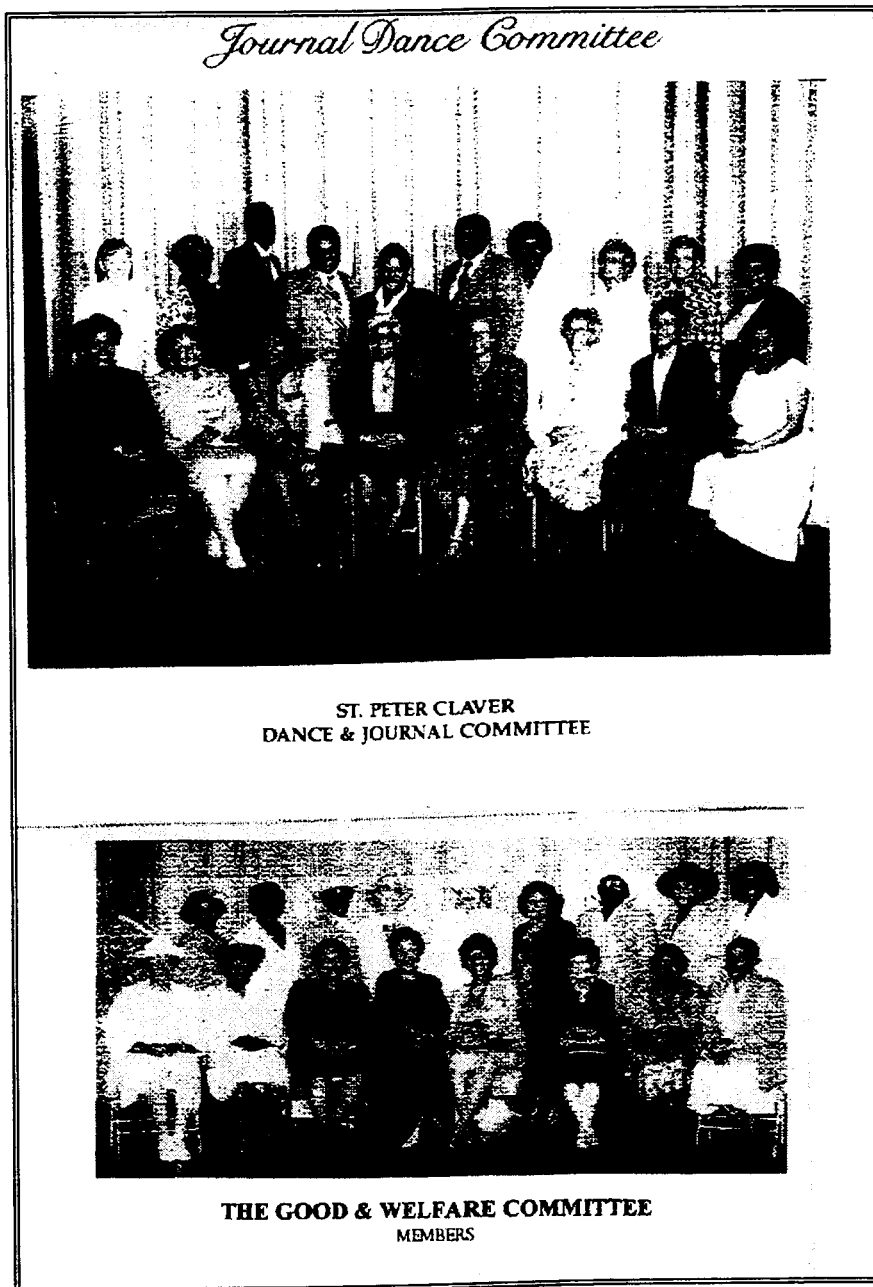
Barbara Williams, parish coordinator of South Africa Committee, guest speaker Paula Bower and our pastor

Figure 3.6: Neighbors For Racial Harmony (top) and St. Peter Claver's South Africa Committee (bottom) (Source: SPC 17th Annual Spring Dinner-Dance Journal, 1993)



*Holy Name Society*

**Figure 3.7:** The Holy Name Society  
(Source: SPC 15th Annual Spring Dinner-Dance Journal, 1991)



**Figure 3.8:** St. Peter Claver Dance & Journal Committee (top) and The Good & Welfare Committee members (bottom). (Source: SPC 17th Annual Spring Dinner-Dance Journal, 1993)

League of Sacred Heart Tea  
April 18, 1993



Sylvia Whiting, President of League of Sacred Heart with guest speaker Lillian Walls, guest performer Constance Moore and Leonora Lawrence and Clarissa Watson



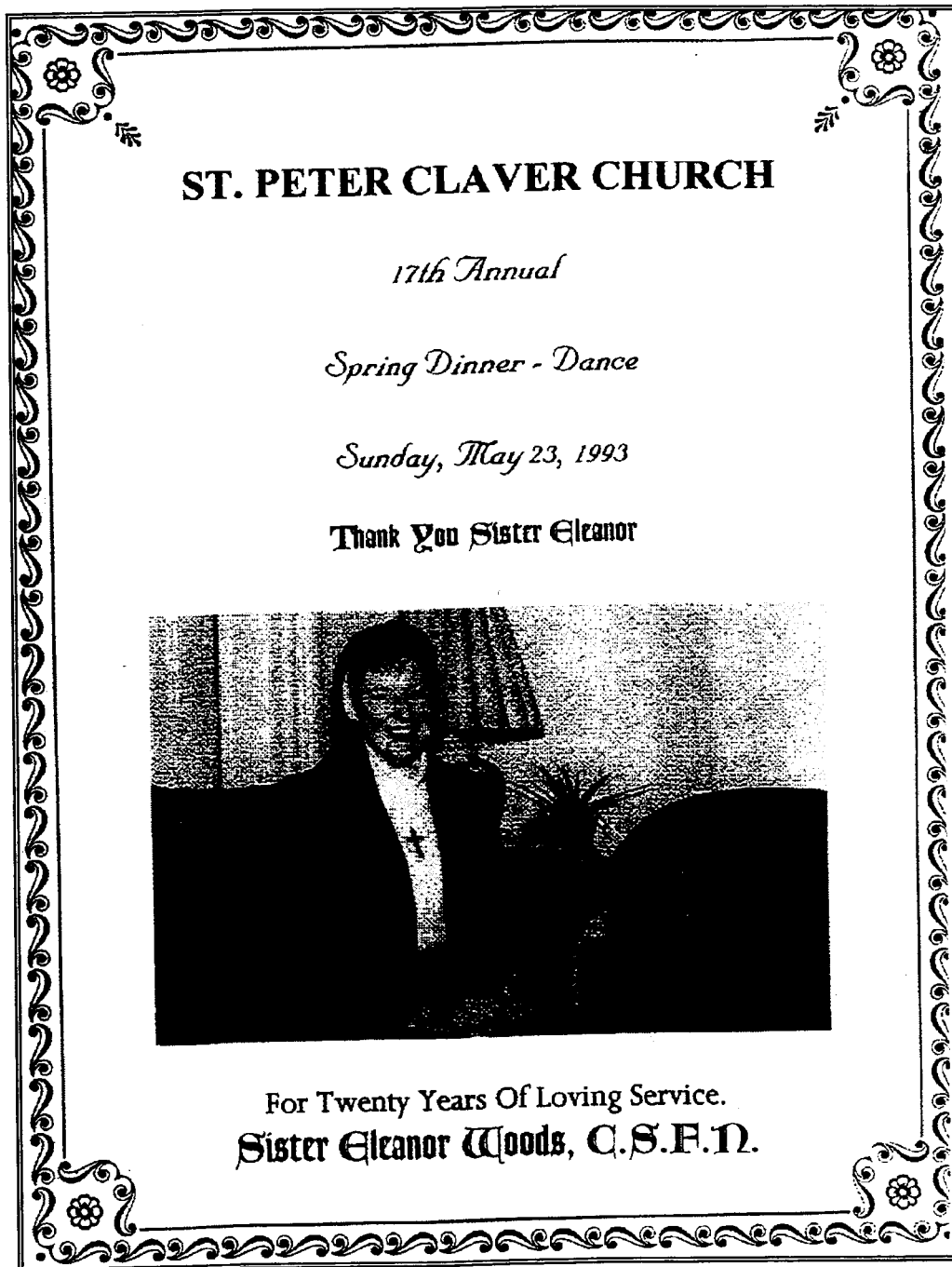
Guest speaker Lillian Walls tells our pastor how they do it in her parish- St. Joseph's in Harlem

**Figure 3.9:** League of [the] Sacred Heart Tea, April 18, 1993 (top). Guest speaker Lillian Walls tells our pastor [Msgr. James A. Hunt] how they do it in her parish, St. Joseph's in Harlem (bottom). (Source: SPC 17th Annual Dinner-Dance Journal, 1993)



**Figure 3.10:** St. Peter Claver - Blessing Our New Van - December 1992 (top and bottom). (Source: SPC 16th Annual Spring Dinner-Dance Journal, 1992)





**Figure 3.11:** The cover of the 1993 Annual Spring Dinner-Dance Journal. (Source: SPC 17th Annual Spring Dinner-Dance Journal, 1993)

**CHAPTER 4**

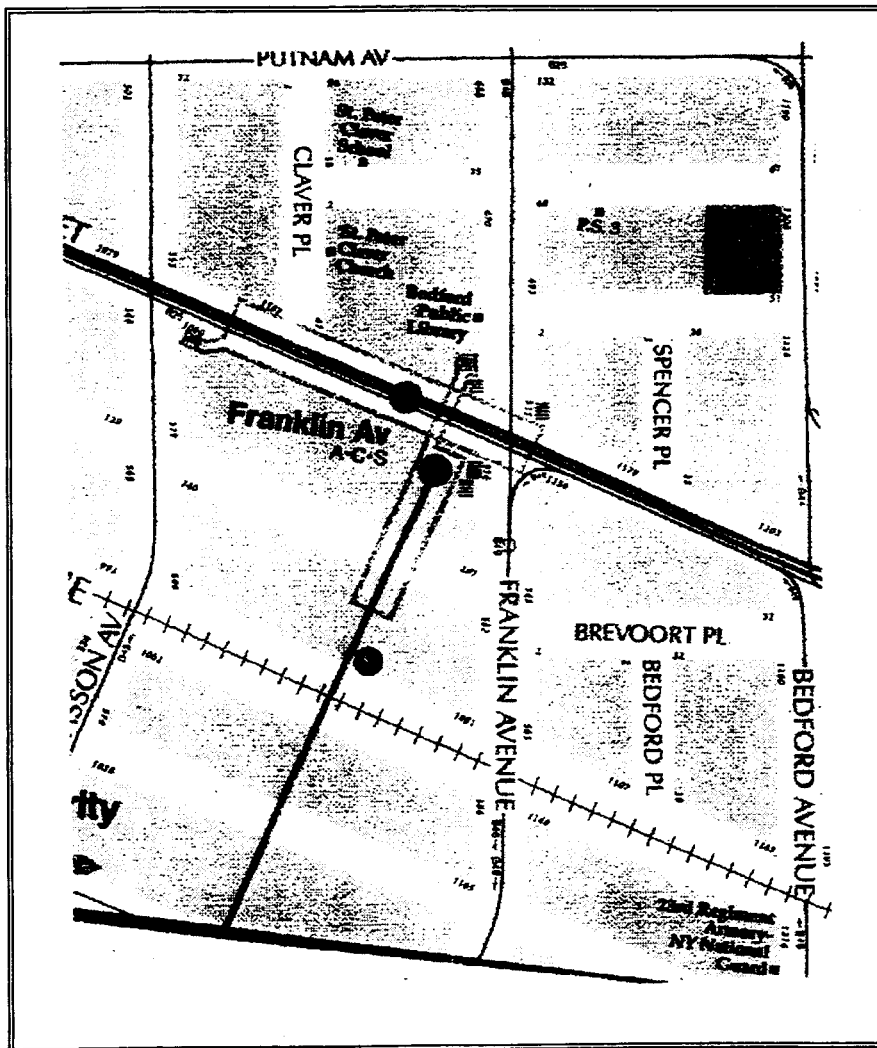
**CATHOLICISM AND SOCIAL ISSUES:  
NATIONAL, DIOCESAN, AND PAROCHIAL CONCERNS**

Like many church people today, the parishioners at St. Peter Claver's realize that it is not enough to pray for equality and justice but that they must be active agents in effecting changes in the church, community, society and the world. This chapter explores how some social issues and inequities are addressed by Roman Catholics, nationally and on the diocesan level. A description of the immediate area of St. Peter Claver's church is presented in one of the parishioners own words as a depiction of the conditions under which many of Claver's people live. Then the proceedings of a national gathering of Catholics and a meeting of a diocesan organization are presented. In recent years Roman Catholics have begun to work with other religions and religious denominations to achieve improvements in the quality of life of all people, globally and locally. The BEC is an example of this cooperation. The 1993 mayoral campaign provided the members of the BEC with an opportunity to acquaint the mayoral candidates with some of their concerns. A brief portrait of the character of the mayoral campaign is described as an introduction to the events of the Mayoral Accountability Session held by the BEC. This meeting illustrated how the parishioners and their fellow BEC members work together to address social and political issues. The chapter concludes with a description of some of the initiatives employed by the people of St. Peter Claver's parish to improve their conditions and those of their neighbours.

## One Woman's Reality: An Invitation To See, An Invitation To Do

Clarissa lives a short distance from St. Peter Claver's Church and in addition to her church activities is actively concerned about her neighbourhood, shown in Figure 4.1.

**Figure 4.1 The Immediate Neighbourhood of  
St. Peter Claver Church**  
(Source: NYC Metro Transit Authority)



Franklin Av: A = A-Train, C= C-Train, S=Shuttle

Clarissa states:

Our block association, we clean the grass, right now the grass needs [doing], we pay for it. I'm going to write to Cyrus, the head of the HPD Planning Board and I'm going to tell her that we're doing all this work. We have a good block association. We meet the second Tuesday of every month, [ ]the big building on the corner allows us to meet there. Before we used to meet at different peoples houses. We try to correct any conditions here. Two members of our Block Association are members of the Planning Board.

[Most of the city has had Planning Boards since Mayor Koch's time in office.] They take up a certain area and they meet and they try to deal with the problems of that area. If we want something big like sanitation. For example, they dump by the subway, they dump over by the Shuttle (see map above). Now there's nobody to clean that, sanitation doesn't come and clean that. We have to call the Planning Board and they speak to sanitation and they'll clean up all the bottles. Of course it doesn't last but a week or two. And they want to know why we're interested. Well, because we live there and we have to walk back and forth into all this junk. I clean this right now, I have to clean this [house at] number one. They throw clothes, they throw bottles. We spent three hundred dollars to extend that rail to keep them from jumping over because they make it a public toilet.

... There's a lot coming from the Armory<sup>1</sup>. Koch [the former mayor], this is what he did to us. He brought in these homeless, about five hundred of them in the Armory, without consulting Planning Board. Because it's on the border of two Planning Boards, Planning Boards Eight and Three. He didn't consult either one [and] moved all of these homeless men, many of them are from mental homes, most from jails and gave them a place, that Armory. They've had TB., they have fights, they have A.I.D.S., and a lot of them come through here [The Armory is only two blocks from Clarissa's home]. They walk through here in the morning and they drink and throw their bottles everywhere. Across the street from that Armory is Kings County Medical Library, a beautiful building too, it's a landmark. The doctors would come there for reference, look in the library. They stopped coming, they moved the books and everything to down state. I don't know what the building is used for [now] they're writing all over it.

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<sup>1</sup>. 23rd Regiment Armory-NY National Guard (see map).

Then there's a church around there, St. Bartholomew's, an Episcopal Church with lovely grounds like an English country church, and they don't come out because they have to pass this Armory, with all these men. These men are flopping all on people's steps. It's a terrible thing what they've done to these two landmarks, that library and that church. The minister says it's a good thing that he has an endowment because that is the only way that church can survive because not too many people go to it. That's what Mr. Koch wrought. . . .

. . . They had a house that used to be a little Episcopal Chapel here but the Episcopal Church had it for a boys' home. We call it the Boys' Home. . . . They're teenagers. They have about ten in a house, sometimes less. You should see these little street girls around. They go after the boys. One little boy said, "I don't have enough money." and the girl said, "Well let me see what you have?". They boy's counting out the pennies. They're like two dollar girls, three dollars girls, pitiful, young girls, really pathetic. Up and down, [ ] when I was getting the brownstone fixed, they were up and down trying to get the workman.

. . . Mainly, this is what they are hustling for, to get the dope. This crack doesn't cost much, two, three dollars. The house across the street, the man died. The man kept a lovely house, Number Eight. His brother lives in [New] Jersey and the nephew and some others have a business going on there. And they line up on the steps to get their crack and stuff early in the morning. And it doesn't seem to last long because in a half an hour they're back over there. And then they stand on the corner there and they light it, they have to light up this little thing. I sweep up crack vials all over the sidewalk, all different colors. I don't know what the different colors mean, must be the strength of, I don't know. Big treat isn't it, crack vials and condoms. I never knew they had all multi-colored condoms, green, red. I always have my gloves on, when I sweep I even wash my broom off after. All under the tree, I get to clean it up before the Department of Sanitation comes, Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday. So Friday, I'll usually clean whatever's there and put it in a bag. They won't take trash from that house because it has to be not from an abandoned house or empty house, it has to be from where there's a tenant. But we have good Sanitation men, I put it in bags and put the bag outside my house. It'll last for a couple of days . . . (Watson, 1993).

**Meetings: Meanings and Methods**

The above is one person's experiential reality but it is also a reflection on what is happening in U.S. inner cities. People are concerned and do care and are trying to address a number of social issues. As in the wider society Roman Catholics try to address problems on various levels, the national, the diocesan or city/town level, and the parish or local community level. To illustrate the meaning the different levels give to issues and their proposed methods of dealing with these issues, a description of the Call To Action (CTA) National Conference, the Annual General Meeting of the Office of Black Ministry for Brooklyn and Queens, and a special meeting of the BEC with the 1993 mayoral candidate. Although these three levels are concerned with spiritual and social well-being, the degrees to which each group is affected by social inequity is evident in the foci of their respective meetings. Also, because each of these groups are concerned with both the spiritual and social well-being there, prayer is always a part of the gathering.

The significance of presenting the proceedings at these meetings is to demonstrate how people are trying to put their other-worldly beliefs to practical use in this world. The three proceedings also show a progression from the abstract and theoretical to the more practical as the proximity of those involved go from the category of a "knowledge of" to a "lived" experience of situations.

**National: We Are Church**

For the past few years North American Catholics interested in reform in the church and in society have been meeting in Chicago at the Call To Action National Conference. The third annual Call To Action National Conference was held from the 29th to the 31st of October 1993. The theme of the conference was "We are church, what if we meant what we said?"

I arrived early enough on Friday afternoon to attend the pre-conference Small Faith Community sessions. I was looking forward to attending these with great expectation, especially because of my involvement with the St. Peter Claver's Small Faith Community. There were approximately three hundred people present at these sessions, much to my surprise and that of the organizers, who had anticipated only two hundred people. The presentation for the first session on small faith communities, "Why Community?: Seeing God in Others, Seeing God in Us" was given by Dick Westley. Mr. Westley began his presentation by giving his interpretation of the term "living in sin". According to him, living in sin is being concerned and living only for yourself and saving your own soul. "To be whole, to be saved", said Mr. Westley, "is to be able to be anywhere in the world with anyone in peace and in love. Small Faith Communities are the novitiate for the real agenda and force us to give heed to our lives." Mr. Westley went on to what he sees as the prerequisites, obstacles, and benefits of community.

In order to form a small faith community it is essential to have people who hunger for community and respond to the invitation. Those who respond are the ones the Lord has made ready. It is necessary to discover what is the thing where you really need Jesus' aid, where people need liberation on a gut issue, something real, where you need Jesus' liberation from slavery of any kind. Some of the obstacles to community are the culture of consumerism, self-centeredness, and the Roman Catholic theology of self (solo) salvation. Mr. Westley makes the distinction between lifestyle enclave and community. In a lifestyle enclave people retain the right to pull out when they want to. In community people are committed to each other and nurture each other evening during times of conflict. "Part of our gift to one another is "the sandpaper of our honest abrasiveness." Regarding self salvation, Mr. Westley reiterates, "To be saved is to be

able to be anywhere in the world with anyone in peace and in love, to be saved is to be in the community of the blessed." This leads into the benefits one of which is that we find our greatest selves in community with other spiritual companions.

The second session was presented by Dorothy Monikowski on, "The Dark Side of Community: Growth through Sacrifice". Sr. Monikowski's presentation dealt with conflict and its causes, the differing perceptions of roles: **role expectation** which is what others think your job is and how you should do it; **role conception** which is what you think the job is and how you have been taught to do it; **role acceptance**, what you say you are willing to do; and finally, **role behaviour**, what you actually do. Sr. Monikowski suggests that we agree on what to do, but the when and how bring out personality clashes which is the major cause of conflict. However since, conflict is a part of our lived experience which challenges the status quo and stimulates innovation, and is an opportunity for creativity, how conflicts are handled become extremely important. "I pray for the gift of being able to celebrate not suppress our diversity" and "In dealing with conflict, we must become the change that we seek", were the two thoughts Sr. Monikowski imparted to us in closing.

The seating in the room in which the opening ceremony took place was arranged by state, territory, and country. All the states were represented, there were people from most of the provinces, and from as far away as Europe and Australia. Liz McAlister was the speaker for the focus session that followed the opening ceremony entitled, "*Doing Peace and Justice in a Small Faith Community, Reading the Newspaper in the Light of Scripture*". Instead of giving us a talk, Liz decided that we should do a Small Faith Community prayer meeting. The Scripture reading chosen was **Acts 10:1 - 11:4**, the story of Peter and Cornelius which I shall summarize with Acts 10:34-35, 11:17:



Peter began to speak: "I now realize that it is true that God treats everyone on the same basis. Whoever fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him, no matter what race he belongs to . . . It is clear that God gave those Gentiles the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ; who was I, then, to try to stop God!"

Liz McAlister interpreted the reading in terms of events today by stating, "Bosnia-H, Somalia, Haiti, South Africa! all demonstrate the progression taboos take from forbidden foods to forbidden humans (enemy). In light of the Gospel we should, "Think globally, and act locally", to eradicate injustices and oppression" (McAlister, 1993). Liz McAlister lives her convictions. She and her husband Philip Berrigan live in community in an inner-city section of Baltimore and work for social justice and peace.

The session then proceeded to a question and answer period. There were a few questions on how to get to know others (Blacks, Hispanics, "The Poor"). "The Poor", in white middle class American conceptions always has a non-white face. Conversely, continuing in this conceptualization non-whites are mono-class consisting of those who live in ghettos.

The next session is one of the two that moved me the most. It was given by Dr. Greer Gordon and entitled, "*Black America and The Church: Can the Church Influence the Polity?*". She gives a brief history of Black America and the Church, touching on the long history of Catholicism in Africa and the Americas among Blacks, the fact that the church condoned slavery even to the point of the Jesuits of Maryland owning slaves, various tactics used to exclude Black women from becoming religious, including using being born out of wedlock, as a criterion for exclusion, and the late arrival of the church in the civil rights movement. However, Dr. Gordon did not wallow in a litany of these injustices, instead, after giving a brief history of Black Saints and the importance of Blacks in the early church, she went on to describe how African American Catholics thrived despite the odds. Now, our numbers afford us the

opportunity to be a force in shaping our future in the church and in the larger society. Along with this hopeful note Dr. Gordon also issued the admonition that the continued closing of inner city Catholic schools is a direct threat to the future life chances for Black Catholic children and youth. She urged that people leave the conference with the determination to persuade the hierarchy in our home parishes and dioceses to keep inner city Catholic schools open.

The fifth and final session that I attended was, "America's Original Sin: Racism", given by Lisa January. The presentation began with what Sr. January called a "meditation" which is an historical collage of an African American woman from the shores of Africa, the slave ship journey, slavery, and in "so called" freedom. She then proceeds to define some terms explaining to her audience the power component that has to be in place for racism to exist. She contrasts the term "our police" used by white Americans with the fear many African Americans have of the police, including law-abiding African Americans. She talks of how America is in denial about racism and how that denial causes the people who bear the brunt of racism to be named as the causes of social ills. January (1993) states that during Bush's presidential campaign the single, unwed, African American woman was seen as the cause of the nation's economic decline and not all the money stolen from the savings and loan institutions. Although the presentation focused on African American women, the overall topic is applicable wherever there is scapegoating.

### **Diocesan: The Annual General Meeting of the Office of Black Ministry**

Eleanor (the Lector) and I attended the AGM together. Registration for the meeting consisted of signing in and deciding whether one was on the board of directors, a delegate, a member-at-large, staff, a liaison officer, or some combination of the above. No one who was there was an observer. Although Eleanor was not an

official delegate or liaison person, and I was not a registered member of any parish in the Diocese of Brooklyn and Queens, we were both given member-at-large status. This was a concrete example the inclusive nature of the Office of Black Ministry and of St. Peter Claver's being a personal parish<sup>2</sup>. We were given a voice and a vote in the proceedings because as African Americans, Eleanor was a member of the organization and I had membership in St. Peter Claver Parish.

Some of the prayers at the AGM are presented here because they are an example of the syncretism of African ancestor worship with traditional Catholicism, that is, the melding of the pagan and the Christian. The ancestor worship of Africa is synthesized into a reverence for the ancestors as saints. This is an example of Vatican II's directive that allows for cultural expression in Roman Catholic Worship to include more than just the saying of the Mass in the vernacular.

The opening prayer service began and ended in song. The prayer included a symbolic remembrance of our ancestors by the pouring of water from a wooden cup into a libation bowl as each person present recalled a loved one, family member, or anyone who had passed away that had inspired us. The prayer went as follows:

Today we celebrate UJIMA (collective work and responsibility). We are committed to build and maintain our community together and to make our brother's and sister's problems our problems and to solve them together. With God's help, we shall indeed become our brothers and sisters keepers.

Let us unite ourselves with all the disciples of Christ who have left this earth, and are now resting from their tiredness at God's side. Let us unite ourselves with all who, even though they had not known Christ in their lifetime,

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<sup>2</sup>. In general, parishes are territorial in nature. Canon law also allows for the establishment of parishes based upon rite, nationality or language. Such parishes are often called personal parishes, since they are composed not of all persons in a territory but of persons having some similar quality. For example, at St. Peter Claver Parish, the similar quality is race.

have, however, sought God with a sincere heart. With God's help, they have accomplished His will and are now with Him.

The meeting was called to order a few minutes early because the opening prayers were said punctually as most of the people had arrived on time. The members of the present Board of Directors were introduced and the focus of the meeting was explained, to elect five new board members. These members were to be nominated and elected on the merits of how well they could and would address the concerns that arose from the vicariate meetings to be held later that morning.

Next on the agenda was the "Roll Call of Parishes". Representatives of twelve parishes had to be present in order to have the required number for a quorum. There were seventeen parishes represented at the time of the role call. Representatives from three more parishes arrived during the vicariate meetings. At this time the 1st Vice-Chair, Anita, explained the proceeding of the Vicariate Meetings: we were to identify the needs and concerns of our parishes; identify who would like to serve on the Board; and a Board member would be available at each vicariate meeting as a resource person to answer questions. Anyone who wished to serve on the Board should state what they would bring to the Board and give concrete examples of how they would serve the diocese of Brooklyn and Queens and the Office of Black Ministry.

Because there were only seventeen out of the fifty-seven member parishes represented at the start of the vicariate meetings, Brooklyn East and West combined into one meeting group and Queens North and South formed another group. Normally each vicariate would have formed its own group for the purpose of the vicariate meetings. The first person to volunteer himself as a candidate was an elderly gentleman, Pat. He stated that he is from Venezuela, speaks two languages, has fundraising expertise and likes to travel, which he feels is important because a Board member should be willing to visit the parishes.

Georgianne spoke of the Rites of Passage program for youth that she is trying to institute in her parish. This program is a spiritually based program of leadership, etiquette, career training to help youth on the path to becoming contributing citizens. The loss of a generation of youth was the primary concern of most of the participants. Georgianne also mentioned expanding Kujenga<sup>3</sup> to a year round program as a possible help. ". . . but the problem of youth or saving our youth, must become an ongoing concern" stated Anderson, another member of our group. Georgianne stated that, "We need an "I" attitude to initiate things, and the "WE" attitude to get and keep them going".

We attend meetings but do not take back anything or get involved. We need to get them (youth) involved in church as lectors and so on. We have to listen to our kids and guide them, we have a lot to learn from them. We need to step back a little bit and say, "here, take it and run. Here, it's yours, work with it, and I'll work with you" (John).

Elaine stated that at the Seventh National Black Congress, out of the 25 delegates from our diocese, there were no youth. The delegation from New Orleans had youths as half of their delegation: "We need to empower the youth, even if it means some of us adults have to step aside".

Being Catholic in talk is not enough we have to live our Christianity. Our faith should make us different in the way we live our lives. "We should live from Gospel to life and from life to Gospel. People should be able to say, "Hey, that's a Black Catholic walking down the street. It is our responsibility to teach our children the faith and the

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<sup>3</sup>. Kujenga, the Swahili word for leadership, is a program that was developed in the Archdiocese of Chicago in the late 1970s by lay people, deacons, nuns, and priests to meet the pastoral needs of African-American youth and their families. Kujenga is an intensive retreat program and its purpose is to develop leadership skills among African American Catholic youth and their families, with Christ at the center of their lives.

responsibility of the church to support us in that with the sacraments from birth to death" (Georgeanne).

Prior to the nominations, questions about the duties of Board members were asked and answered. Besides the question about the time and frequency of meetings the most pressing question was, "Does the Bishop have to approve those elected? If so, why?" The reply was that as a diocesan organization, its Board must be approved by the Bishop. The Bishop usually approves the choices of the organizations, unless the person in question is an avowed communist or openly endorses abortion. At this point the two groups rejoined and nominations were taken from the floor.

Nominations were closed after the selection of twelve candidates, each had two minutes precisely to present her or himself to the membership. After the candidates self-presentations there was a break for lunch. Lunch consisted of salad, various fruits, curried goat, chicken, rice and beans, cakes, donuts, (hot sauce - optional). When the meeting was again called to order we voted for the candidates and the various board reports were read.

Fr. Carter gave his director's report, the main focus of which was the importance to the National Office of Black Ministry for the Brooklyn and Queens Office of Black Ministry to show their strength in numbers at functions such as the National Congress of Black Catholics. The Diocese of Brooklyn and Queens have the largest number of Black Catholics of any in the country. Hence, Fr. Carter stressed, "Unless we put our bodies, where our mouths are, we will not be heard (or seen)".

The Chair's Report was given by the outgoing chairperson, Andre. The highlights of his report were that parish meetings were to be instituted by the Board using the liaisons as facilitators. The Board and the Office of Black Ministry must build on the strengths in the diversity of Black Catholics which is rich in experience. They

intend to work with the parishes on a Rites of Passage program that is not just for youth but a life program from the cradle to the grave. The way Andre explained the Rites of Passage program, it sounds very much like age-grades. He also stated that we must *educate pastors* and educate parishioners - empowering Black Catholics, empowering each other.

After the Board reports were read, the new Board members were presented to the assembly. The National Black Congress prayer was used as part of the closing prayer service before the meeting was adjourned

O Lord our God, under the shadow of your wings we have found refuge, strength and hope. We know that you are with us today, just as you were present with those gone before us, upon whose shoulders we now stand.

You were with our ancestors as they journeyed to this land; their strength they gained from you. You were with past generations, who sojourned through tough times and rough places; their hope they gained from you.

Lord, we call upon you to do for us today, what you did for others in the past: lead us, your people, through this new place and time in history. Bless the work of the National Black Catholic Congress. Level the mountains of oppression we still face, and make the crooked place straight.

Guide our feet to where you want us to be, and unite us in our struggle, that we may be strengthened in our faith and secure in your promise that "the lame shall walk, the blind shall see and the oppressed shall be set free."

This we ask in the name of Jesus our Lord. Amen. (Handout, Praise Him VII, 1993)

The Office of Black Ministry sponsored Praise Him VII, a Black Catholic Liturgy Workshop in November 1993. By attending Praise Him VII, I was able to get a sense of some of the ways in which the Office of Black Ministry interacts with the parishes. In this case it was a sharing of knowledge and resources to enhance the

liturgical celebrations of the parishes. Present at the workshop were experts in music, dance, and liturgical planning. Among other activities that were held for the year (1993) were parish liaison member meetings, a Mass of Thanksgiving during Black History Month, a Kujenga Retreat for youth, Family Day, an Annual Caribbean Mass, Pastoral Advisory Council meetings, promoting Kwanza celebrations, publishing the OBM Observer Newsletter, Revivals, participation in the Diocesan Migration Mass and Rites-Of-Passage which is:

a model for the positive development of Black people in the context of community. These rites-of-passage apply to people of African descent of all age groups. The young people who have experienced Kujenga will be a group which the Office of Black Ministry will begin to develop leadership skills with the main focus on community development (Violet, 1993).

### **Beyond Kujenga**

Kujenga and a follow-up program from the Seventh National Black Catholic Congress which was held in New Orleans in the summer of 1993, called "Rise Up and Be Self-Determined: Kujichagulia", aims towards developing a "chain for change" within our families, within our Church and within our communities" (National Black Catholic Congress, 1993). Kujichagulia, self-determination, encourages African Americans "to define ourselves, name ourselves, create for ourselves, and speak for ourselves instead of being defined, named, created for spoken for by others" and to ask the question, "Am I all that I ought to be?". The question is meant to motivate self-determined individuals to social action, to see for ourselves, think for ourselves, and act collaboratively for the benefit of our community and our people (National Black Catholic Congress, 1993).

Kujenga (a recurring program for youth) and Kujichagulia (a Lenten program for 1993) have been suggested by the Board of the Office of Black Ministry as



programs that should be extended to encourage African American Catholic families in fostering self-determination within the family and the community at large. The Office of Black Ministry of the Diocese of Brooklyn and Queens is part of the network of Offices of Black Ministries which sponsors the National Black Catholic Congress annually. Eleanor (the Lector) was the delegate from St. Peter Claver's Church to the Seventh National Black Catholic Congress which was held in New Orleans in the summer of 1993.

### **Racial Polarization Fed By The Mayoral Race of 1993**

This section presents a brief portrayal of the 1993 New York City mayoral campaign to give context to the events of the Mayoral Accountability Session held by the BEC. This meeting illustrated how the parishioners and their fellow BEC members work together to address social and political issues.

Crown Heights is the scene of ongoing conflict between Hasidic Jews (10% of the Crown Heights population) on one side and African and Caribbean Americans (80%) on the other. The latest conflict was triggered by a traffic accident, which occurred in August 1991, that killed a Guyanese child, Gavin Cato, and injured his sister which in turn sparked a four-day riot in which Yankel Rosenbaum, a visiting Australian Hasidic scholar, was killed. Although there is also a Crown Heights Coalition that has been meeting for two years which is "dedicated to an ongoing process of positive peaceful change" by teaching their children the importance of mutual respect because the "lack of it is at the root of 99.9% of our problems" (Connections, 1993), those who are working for improved race relations are frequently omitted in the discussion. An example of this was the frequency with which the incident was used in the mayoral race between Mayor Dinkins and Rudolph Giuliani. Giuliani supporters were publicly accusing the then-Mayor Dinkins of incompetence

because he had not responded quickly enough and with enough force to quell the riot in Crown Heights and his handling of the Black boycott of Korean stores in Flatbush. The Korean boycott went back to an incident which occurred in January 1990. Dinkins supporters were accusing the Giuliani camp of being "crypto-fascists" and denouncing the injustice in the handling of the case in which white youths in Bensonhurst (Brooklyn) shot and killed a black youth. Supporters of both candidates made race appear a major issue and in some instances the political banter became quite ludicrous. For example, the head of an African-American police group accused one of Giuliani's running mates of betraying his Hispanic heritage by marrying a Jewish woman. The running mate retaliated by pointing out that one of Dinkins "African American" supporters is "half- Puerto Rican" (Taylor, 1993) and others grumbled that another of Dinkins' Jewish running mates is married to a Catholic. During the mayoral campaign there was an atmosphere of impending racial doom for whites if Dinkins won and for Blacks if Giuliani won. Newspapers carried polls that were cut along racial lines and articles which portrayed Giuliani as "tough" on crime and Dinkins as having been "soft" on crime. Crime is interpreted as Black. Gourevitch (1993) who, in his article intended to expose Black "anti-Semitism", at least acknowledges that during the Crown Heights riots:

At least as often as a black person came up to me to denounce Jews and justify the riots that August, another would come up to me to express neighborly feelings for the Jews and to denounce the riots. These working- and middle-class blacks were every bit as terrified as their Jewish neighbors by what was going on in the streets. They had homes and families and jobs; they had their heritage and their religion. Yet every time they picked up a newspaper or turned on the TV, or just looked out their window, they saw the "black" identified with the forces of lawlessness and hate. Nobody was offering an equally powerful alternative voice to those forces, . . . (Gourevitch, 1993)

## **Alternative Voices - Brooklyn Ecumenical Cooperatives**

The Brooklyn Ecumenical Cooperatives (BEC) is a civil and economic empowerment organization that serves the communities of Central (Bedford-Stuyvesant), Downtown and South Brooklyn. The BEC is interfaith and intercultural. It is comprised of 43 member organizations which include Roman Catholic, Protestant, Unitarian, Jewish, and African Orthodox congregations, an Ethical Culture Society, a Faith-based hospital, three religious schools, and two residents associations from buildings constructed by the BEC.

As mentioned above, there was a New York City mayoral campaign and election taking place at the time of the study. True to its civic empowerment mandate, the BEC was poised to take the necessary steps to obtain for its members the opportunity to gain an informed political opinion on the candidates. For this purpose, the BEC held a special meeting called a Mayoral Accountability Session, and instructed its member groups to encourage the participation of as many of their members as possible to attend. Mr. Leslie McFarlane was the contact person for St. Peter Claver's Church.

Mr. McFarlane, originally an Anglican, became a Roman Catholic in 1946 in order to marry his wife, Patricia. Their only child, a daughter, went to St. Peter Claver school and later to Bishop McDonnell Memorial High School, and on to Hunter College. After college their daughter worked in New York for a while, was then transferred to California, before moving to Norway, where she still resides with her second husband and six year old daughter.

In January, 1993, Mr. McFarlane became the business manager for the parish which entails being the accountant, putting out the church bulletin, and collecting the

rents from the organizations utilizing the school and convent properties. This is in addition to his membership in the Holy Name Society, BEC, his duties as a Lector, and the Pastoral Council.

Mr. McFarlane informed the congregation of the upcoming meeting during the announcements at Mass and asked that people put their names on the list of those planning to attend. He stressed the fact that we should have at least fifty people at the meeting from St. Peter Claver's. The meeting was not just an impromptu affair, those who signed up and were also members of the BEC were required to attend strategy meetings prior to the event. The meeting took place on October 24th, 1993.

Those who didn't have rides were driven to the meeting in the Clavermobile. There were already many Claverites present when we arrived at St. John the Baptist RC Church where the meeting was held. There appeared to be more than the fifty Claverites that Leslie McFarlane had asked for in attendance. There were 900 people at the meeting by the time it began. The bilingual (English and Spanish) meeting began with songs and a prayer. The upcoming Winter Leadership Institute was announced to the assembly reiterating that the heart of the work of the BEC is building power and developing leadership through the Leadership Institutes.

The purpose of the BEC Mayoral Accountability Session was to obtain a commitment from the mayoral candidate, Rudolph Giuliani, on the four items on the BEC agenda: public housing; re-investment; Project Zion; and access. The public housing item had to deal with policing and quality of life issues. Re-investment had to do with geo-coding<sup>4</sup> for small businesses, meaning that "any bank which does not fill

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<sup>4</sup>. Geo-coding, means that areas of the city are given geographical codes and banks are supposed to indicate this code on the appropriate section of loan documentation facilitating the tracking of the destination of loan and investment money.

out the section of the questionnaire which requires geo-coding of small business loans will not get City deposits" Geo-coding assists the government in determining the areas of the city in which small businesses are being helped or overlooked by the banks for investments and/or loans. Project Zion, states a BEC flyer:

calls for 10,000 units of affordable housing, some new construction, some rehab, some ownership, some rental, clustered around BEC's member organizations. The idea is to strengthen the physical improvement of our geographic communities, so that we can deepen our "sense of place".

Access meant that the BEC would have regular meetings with City Commissioners. These commitments were also required from Mayor Dinkins who had canceled his appearance at the meeting but was to meet with a small delegation from the BEC on the following Wednesday, October 27th.

After the agenda was presented to the membership and adopted there was a briefing session on our discipline during the candidate's presence. We were not to applaud during his entrance but to stand in silence holding hands while a prayer was said by the BEC president. At the end of the prayer we were to applaud. The candidate was then to be asked for his commitment on each item and sub item on the agenda. If he committed we were to applaud, if he did not we were to chant, "NO, NO, NO . . . " .

All went as planned. During the "negotiations with Mr. Giuliani", he had to wait for his responses to be translated into Spanish, which also served to interrupt the rhythm of his self-presentation. After the agenda items had been discussed and before Mr. Giuliani had a chance to deliver his prepared campaign speech, we stood, joined hands, and the president said the closing prayer. The effect was identical to the candidate being dismissed. He looked perplexed at this room full of mostly Blacks and

Puerto Ricans, standing in silence with joined hands. At this point the president advised the assembly that the meeting wasn't over that we had to evaluate this proceeding and plan for the meeting with the mayor. It was also made clear before the adoption of the agenda that the purpose of the meeting was not to tell anyone how to vote, but to ascertain if these candidates were going to be accountable. The meeting presented Mr. Giuliani with an active voice of those concerned with issues that affect inner-city neighbourhoods.

### **Parochial Initiative, Empowerment, and Outreach**

The people of St. Peter Claver parish are not sitting idly waiting for their ships to come in, they are rowing out to meet them. Through their credit union, the Special Friends of Claver's, and their membership in the Brooklyn Ecumenical Cooperatives (BEC), the parishioners have empowered themselves economically. The BEC and membership in Neighbors for Racial Harmony empower them politically and connect them to other communities working for change. Their chapter of the St. Vincent de Paul Society and the South Africa Committee is how they express their outreach to others in need. In addition to those already mentioned, St. Peter Claver's is engaged in several other endeavours in and with the wider community. Everyone with whom I spoke was concerned about the legacy being left to the youth of the parish and community. Clarissa (1993) expressed that concern as follows:

As you get older you think of your treasures, the things that you care about and say well, "Who will be here to get them when you're gone?" And I think my greatest treasure is my church, my church and the people in the church. And I pray that there will be younger people to come up and to keep the church going. I really was worried about it, and then I start talking to myself, which is a habit you get after seventy one, and I said, "Watson, who are you to worry. Do what you always do, put things in God's hands." And this I was doing, praying that the young families will come, young members and young people come to sing in our choir (Watson, 1993).

As I watched the Children's' Christmas Pageant and saw the results of all those weeks of practice, it appeared the doubts about young members were without foundation. However, when weighed against the pull of the usual forces in any neighbourhood, such as drugs, one can see the parishioners' concern with making sure the children and youth receive a push in the right direction. In addition to the religious education classes held on Saturday and Sunday mornings, there is also a Claver Youth Group (see Figure 4.2 on page 104).

The Claver Youth group is in the hands of as described by a fellow parishioner is "a very dedicated man", Victor (Jr.) He travels from Queens every Friday evening to facilitate the youth activities in the gym. He is a member of an old Claver family. He and his wife, Josephine, have four children, Victor III, Amanda, Joseph, and Mary. Although Victor's wife is not a Catholic she attends Mass with him every Sunday.

Some activities that the youth group had in 1993 was a flower sale, a cake sale, a bus trip to the Great Adventure, and a Youth Group Retreat Day. The group also has sports events such as basketball games in which they play against other groups in the borough of Brooklyn. Clarissa (1993) says of the first Martin Luther King Day celebration which is now organized annually by Victor Jr. and the Claver Youth Group:

Oh yes!, we had a banquet! And usually they have children that do recitations and we have singers come in. This time it was the committee kids, down in the church basement, that had a program and recited. And to hear Victor recite, "I Had A Dream", you sit there and you cry, honestly. He did it so beautifully. (Watson, 1993)

The parish is involved in outreach locally and abroad. I have already mentioned Mr. Davis' faithful visits to the prisoners in the local jail each Saturday. Sr. Eleanor, Veronica, and Fr. Athanase (in Msgr. Hunt's absence) also visit the Concord Baptist Nursing Home every Friday. The priests of the parish have been saying Mass for the

residents for at least twenty years. Veronica comes every Friday to lead the singing at Mass.

The time that I accompanied this trio on their weekly visit, many of the residents seemed to be dozing during the Mass, however at communion time they were all lucid and received the sacrament. One lady was too ill to attend the Mass so Fr. Athanase, gave her Communion in her room.

People also come to the door of the Rectory, which is the priests' residence and the church office, asking for help. Clarissa, Sr. Eleanor, and Olive (1993) all tell of the door bell ringing all during the day. However, Clarissa (1993) expressed it as follows:

People come to Claver's all day. And sometimes when I work in the Rectory, the bell rings all the time. People come in for food, come in for carfare. Some really need it as some just want money for their drugs. But Sr. Eleanor says you don't know when someone is really hungry. One rang the bell one day, a woman, and said, "Sister, I'm hungry. I need something to eat." So Sister said, "We don't have anything much today. We have some cheese." And the woman said, "I can't eat that, that's high cholesterol." [We laughed.] (Watson, 1993).

All those that volunteer their time at the Rectory have similar stories and they all agree on one thing, "we do try to give help" by giving clothes, food, carfare, and sometimes a person just needs someone with whom to talk.

The church basement is used for Narcotics Anonymous (NA) meetings and Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meetings. As is well known, the anonymity of AA is a respected tradition, so comments made herein honour that tradition. The meeting I attended was well attended by over 200 people. Little is said in the literature both popular and academic about the efforts made to recover from addictions. There are three AA meetings a week in the church basement and three NA meetings.



The outreach that the parishioners extend abroad includes their informal contributions sent to the Propagation of the Faith earmarked especially for the parish of the poor Blacks that they visited in Cartagena. The St. Peter Claver's South Africa Committee raises money to send books, medicine, and clothes to South Africa.

### **One Woman's Reality and Groups Envisioning Changes**

The representation of a woman sweeping up crack vials and condoms off her street, the descriptions of the different groups' meetings and the parishioners involvement in their respective groups and committees at first appear quite disparate endeavours. However, all are trying in their fashion to eliminate the conditions that are the cause of "the street" being that way. National groups are trying to work towards community, diocesan groups are making strategies to reclaim the young people of their communities, and groups like the BEC are honing people's political voices. The local people's realization that prisoners return to the community and acting on that realization by taking an interest in them before they return to society is something that will benefit the community. Active involvement in one's own community, sharing as a group with each other, and as a group with other groups, help strengthen community ties while also broadening the perspectives and resources of those involved.

Figure 4.2 The Claver Teen Club



(Source: SPC 15th Annual Spring Dinner-Dance Journal, 1991)

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **CONCLUSION: NEITHER MISSION NOR WAY-STATION BUT HOME**

This chapter explores the terms "mission" and "way-station" briefly in light of the data presented in the previous chapters to demonstrate that the parishioners consider St. Peter Claver's their "home". Mission and way-station are presented as the "push" factors that contribute to the loyalty and adherence to the parish. The concept of "Claver's as home" is explored as the "pull" and pivotal factor that contributes to the continuing vibrancy of St. Peter Claver's as community and a part of the larger as well as the local communities.

#### **Mission or Way-Station?**

The term "mission" is commonly understood as a place where missionaries do the work of converting "pagans" to Christianity. The term also conjures up images of "primitive" societies unfamiliar with "civilized" society and of getting out the cheque book to give a donation to help the missionaries help the "heathens". It was shown in chapter two that St. Peter Claver's Church and parish did not fit this conception of mission. Although Fr. Quinn did convert many people to Catholicism, by his newspaper article he stated that there were already 4,000 Black Catholics in the diocese of Brooklyn in need of a place to worship. It would appear that instead of the "missionaries" trying to convert the people to Christianity, it was the people trying to convert the "missionaries" to the practice of Christian values, especially, "Love thy neighbour".

Although the Irish immigrants to New York formed their own parishes and according to Davis (1990) they were in competition with African Americans for the "lowest rung of the socio-economic ladder", these parishes were never referred to as "missions". Furthermore, as far back as 1820, when the area was known as Weeksville, the community was supporting more than one Christian church. When called to do so a century later, the Black Catholics met the challenge of supporting their new church monetarily and with loyalty and labour. Hence, the data plainly shows that the term "mission" is a misnomer.

The parish as 'way-station' has not happened as it has with many parishes that were mainly European immigrant or working class enclaves. The main reasons are the reality of social and residential segregation. In Brooklyn, whites and African Americans work together but they rarely socialize together and, as has been related, rarely live in the same areas or worship at the same churches.

The "way-station" concept can be explained as a stop in the journey of upward socio-economic mobility or a stage in the generational process of naturalization from the immigrant generation to their native born successors. For example, in Canadian and American cities there are areas known as European ethnic enclaves or ghettos. Manhattan, Brooklyn, Toronto, and Vancouver, all have areas in their cities known as Italian neighbourhoods. These areas are comfortable for the new immigrant and possibly, the second generation. However, as successive generations become more Canadianized or Americanized they tend to move away from their ghetto areas to more cosmopolitan and affluent areas of the city or metropolitan area.

This process is not applicable on the whole for Blacks. The opportunities for residential upward mobility seldom increase as their achievements in the socio-economic categories of education and income increase. This residential segregation of

the city has had the effect of creating more black parishes as white residents flee to the suburbs but also of making some of these black parishes Black ethnic enclaves. For example, in some parishes in Brooklyn which are now predominantly Black, the Mass is said in French because the majority of the parishioners are from Haiti or Martinique. Another result of residential segregation is the uncertainty of being welcome in a new parish if one moves to another section of the city which is predominantly non-Black. Claver's status as a personal parish ensures that it will remain a place where Blacks from anywhere are always welcome. However, even more significant than whether or not other parishes are welcoming is the fact that many Claverites feel that their road to successful careers and therefore upward mobility began at St. Peter Claver's School. This is true even of those who didn't particularly cherish their school days at Claver's. In retrospect they admit that the start given them at the school was instrumental in preparing them for life's future chances and challenges.

### **Home: Focal Point of Activity and Sharing**

Before starting this research, I considered the designation of St. Peter Claver's as a mission incorrect. After reviewing the literature, I was uncertain if the parish served as a way-station. However, I did discover during the research that all of the parishioners consider the parish as Home. I was also made to feel that it was the home to which I had always belonged and had returned after an absence because home can be perceived as a place where one is always welcome, a place where the door opens both ways. It is a place whose history is inextricably linked to one's own personal history, where one has "roots". A home also means so much more, if it has been built by oneself or one's antecedents to be handed down to one's descendants. All of these conceptions appropriately describe St. Peter Claver's Church and parish with the

addition of "home" as the place where one is with the "heavenly Father and/or Mother<sup>1</sup>" of the Catholic belief system.

Msgr. Quinn and the first parishioners, literally, built the church. The children sold "chances", the women had bake sales, the men contributed their money and their labour to build their church and later their school, and still later the orphanage at Wading River. From the beginning, the people at St. Peter Claver's were concerned with helping others.

Msgr. Hunt today finds his parishioners no less interest in preserving, restoring and improving the beauty of the church. This restoration and constant improvement of the edifice of the church is an outward and concrete sign of the determination to constant spiritual self-improvement and renewal of the people as church. These physical home improvements are supplemented by the dedication of the parishioners to the traditional devotions, the implementing of new devotions for spiritual growth, and the nurturing concern the parishioners share with other as evidenced in the Good and Welfare Committee. The fundraising activities described in chapter three, namely, of the Dinner Dance and Journal Committees and of the Special Friends of Claver's, demonstrate the parishioners are willingness to give financial as well as reverential support to their church.

In addition to the fundraising, the preceding chapters have demonstrated that the parish church is the hub of activity and sharing. To the people in this parish, the church's social and religious activities are central in their lives. Belonging to the different devotional and social clubs and committees afford parishioners to work and

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<sup>1</sup>. Both Roman Catholic and Protestant feminist theologians now challenge the patriarchal masculine conception of God, solely as Father, introducing the concepts of Mother God and God as combined Mother/Father.

socialize together with such frequency that many of the members think of themselves as extended family members to each other.

The South Africa Committee, twelve step groups, the St. Vincent de Paul Society, membership in the BEC, Neighbours for Racial Harmony, and the Office of Black Ministry are examples of the practical application of the religious values of the Catholic faith at work in and with the secular society among the parishioners of St. Peter Claver Church.

As previously stated, I was made to feel at home in the parish. It was the first time that I had not been the only Black or one of two or three at Mass and other Catholic functions. Once my family identity became known, I was no longer considered a newcomer. I was made to feel at home not just by invitations to participate but also by offers of transportation to and from events. For example, Eleanor made sure that I had transportation to the AGM of the Office of Black Ministry. The Fall Dinner Dance was not advertised in the parish bulletin, however, Eleanor made sure that I knew of it and had transportation home after everyone was dropped off back at the church by the chartered buses.

Outsider, does not seem to be a concept at St. Peter Claver's, one is either from an old Claver family or not, a visitor or a newcomer. This is true despite one's race, however, because of Claver's location, whites seldom attend. The one exception was a European American man who attended the Novena of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal every Wednesday, was welcomed by the congregation and appeared to feel at home.

## **Conclusion**

This study sought to discover how and why the people have sustained the parish as a vibrant part of the community over time. The exploration of the interaction and

relationships between the church and the community on local, diocesan and national levels yield insight into the adaptive strategies used by African Americans in pursuit of the practice of their religion as well as participation in the wider American society. This study demonstrates the collective action of the parish members in the past in contributing to building the parish, in the present by participating as a group within larger collectives and society, and over time by their dedication to the church and each other.

What the research revealed is that the key element in sustaining the parish is the amount of participation. The members of the St. Peter Claver community are active participants in their history. The founding members were active in building the parish. The current members encourage the next generation by demonstrating with their example, to have active and vibrant parish one must be active in the work of the parish. This example is reinforced by the written and pictorial records meticulously kept in the annual journals, anniversary, and celebratory journals. These journals record the ongoing living history of the people of St. Peter Claver's parish.

The interactions at the parochial, diocesan, and national levels of the Roman Catholic Church, while allowing a glimpse of the adaptive strategies used by African Americans in the pursuit of the practice of their religion, demonstrated that the racial dichotomy present in the wider society is also evident in the church. What was revealed was that in the U.S., the catholicity of the church is still in doubt and that there are virtually two churches under one umbrella. The minute number of non-whites at the Call to Action Conference in Chicago was startling, since the conference consisted mainly of groups working towards reform in the church. Does this imply that Black Catholics and other non-white Catholics are content with the status quo in the church? No, Black Catholics have the same concerns but have the added concerns of



the effects of racism and its accompanying consequences that are better dealt with at the National Black Catholic Congress.

This division is also apparent at the diocesan level, however, because of the virtual segregation by parish, it is more of practical necessity. The Black parishes and the Offices of Black Ministry work together and share expertise. This cooperation increases the pool of resources open to all the participants.

In addition to the unforeseen discovery of the church in the United States operating almost as two churches, the other unforeseen consequence of this endeavour was its impact on the researcher. Although I am a practicing Catholic, the parishioners infused me with the desire to become more involved, an effect which has lasted to date.

### **Implications**

The present situation within Anthropology and the study of Americans of African descent is what makes this study a work of Advocacy Anthropology. Most African Americans do not see themselves in the studies and reports that are most common in the social sciences simply because the majority of African Americans get very little attention from social scientists and the media. Many of us spend a lot of our time trying to either explain or to show that "we are not like that" because we do not recognize ourselves in the people the studies portray and most outsiders perceive as accurate and inclusive portrayals. Since the majority of African Americans receive the least attention, I see this work as a contribution to our representation that is overdue and as a call for further studies on "mainstream" African Americans *within the discipline of Anthropology*.

The study provides data from which to pose further more in-depth questions into the study of Catholicism in the United States, for example, the impact on the community of inner city parochial school closures. Other significant questions include:

how much has African spirituality, or the African American interpretation of African spirituality influenced the rituals of African American Catholics?

The implications for Anthropology include: possible future studies of: voluntary associations and organizations within cities that counterbalance the attributes that have been identified with urbanization, such as utilitarianism and crime; the "mainstream" elements in inner-city areas instead of focusing on poverty, deviance, and social problems; the ecumenical social justice activities of the churches and other religious institutions. There is an academic need for the ethnographic study of African Americans as part of American society as a whole. It is hoped that this study has been instrumental in laying the ground work for a later in-depth social history of the Bedford-Stuyvesant area of Brooklyn.

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS<sup>1</sup>

**Apostolate** - (synonym. charism) refers to work accomplished on the Lord's behalf, applied in a very specific sense to the work carried out by the non-ordained. The term may also apply to the specific work done by members of a religious order or congregation. Some priests do not belong to religious congregations so, as the term applies to Fr. Quinn, it is a synthesis of both meanings. Both meanings refer to work accomplished on the Lord's behalf.

**Ascension of Christ** - Refers to the ascending of Jesus' risen and glorified body into heaven, such that His person exists in corporeal form with God the Father outside time and space. "As he was blessing them, he departed from them and was taken up into heaven" (Luke, 24:51), "After saying this, he was taken up to heaven as they watched him, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They still had their eyes fixed on the sky as he went away, when two men dressed in white suddenly stood beside them and said, 'Galileans, why are you standing there looking up at the sky? This Jesus, who was taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way that you saw him go to heaven' " (Acts, 1:9-11)

**BEC or Brooklyn Ecumenical Cooperatives** - is a civil and economic empowerment organization that serves the communities of Central, Downtown, and South Brooklyn. The BEC is interfaith and intercultural.

**Blessed** - an official title conferred upon a Servant of God after the completion of the beatification stage of the process of canonization. Upon designation as a "blessed," public veneration of the Servant is permitted, though usually on a rather smaller scale than that permitted to the saints.

**Canonization** - is usually the final act of the lengthy process of declaring a saint that cannot be decreed (without special dispensation) until 50 years have

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<sup>1</sup>. Based on definitions in *Our Sunday Visitor's Catholic Encyclopedia*, edited by Reverend Peter M.J. Stravinskis, Ph. D., S.T.L.

elapsed since the claimant's death. The process that precedes the decree of canonization begins with proof of exemplary practice of the cardinal (prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude) virtues and the theological virtues (faith, hope, and charity). Once the candidate has been judged to have lived the cardinal and theological virtues over an extended period of time out of just and worthy service to an heroic degree, they are given the title "Venerable". This title may be given before the candidate is declared "blessed" or a saint.

The next step in the process is beatification. At this point, all that remains are the miracles. In cases of martyrs, sometimes the necessity of a miracle is waived by the Pope. . . . However, the miracles are of great importance and must be of major proportions and proven to be an intervention of the supernatural order into the natural order whereby natural causes offer no plausible explanation. For beatification one miracle is required.

The final stage, canonization, involves another investigation into a person's virtues, writings, reputation for holiness and miracles ascribed to the person's intercession since death. Again, miracles are not required for martyrs. The Pope alone can make the formal declaration of canonization. Canonization gives a sevenfold honor: (1) inscription of the name in the catalogue of saints and reception of public veneration; (2) invocation in the public prayers of the Church; (3) dedication of churches in the saint's honor; (4) celebration of Mass; (5) assignment of a day in the liturgical [church] calendar; (6) pictorial representations; (7) public veneration of relics.

**Charism (Charismata)** - refers to a "free gift". *Charismata* are special gifts which, as service directed to the Lord, manifest the work of God through the Holy Spirit, all for the common good of the body of believers, the Church. For example, the gift/charism of Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament was to minister to the Blacks and Indians in the U.S., the gift/charism of the Sisters of Providence is to minister to the sick. See "Apostolate".

**Chrism** - a mixture of oil and balsam, or balm, used for liturgical anointing: Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Orders, the blessing of an altar and in former days, the coronation of kings. Its symbolism is both royal and priestly, therefore fitting for both the royal priesthood of all Christians and the hierarchical priesthood of Orders.

- Diocese -** is composed of all the Catholics usually within the boundaries of a specific geographic territory. A diocese is always under the authority of a bishop. Dioceses are established by the Holy See when it is clear that the pastoral needs of the faithful in a given territory will be better served by a new diocese. The exceptions are dioceses for the faithful of the Oriental Rites and military dioceses.
- Holy See -** The moral and spiritual authority, jurisdiction and sovereignty exercised by the successor of St. Peter, the Pope, through the central government of the Catholic Church. The word "see" comes from the Latin word sedes, "chair", the ancient symbol of authority and as such, refers to the locus of every bishop's pastoral government over his diocese.
- Kujenga -** is the Swahili word for leadership, is a program that was developed in the Archdiocese of Chicago in the late 1970s by lay people, deacons, nuns, and priests to meet the pastoral needs of African-American youth and their families. Kujenga is an intensive retreat program and its purpose is to develop leadership skills among African American Catholic youth and their families with Christ at the center of their lives. This together with a follow-up program from the Seventh National Black Catholic Congress which was held in New Orleans in the summer of 1993, called "Rise Up and Be Self-Determined:
- Kujichagulia -** is the Swahili word and contains three concepts: self-love, self-esteem, and self-determination. The word was taken as the theme for the third part of the National Black Catholic Congress' Rise up and Re-Build program and centered around the Lenten season to encourage African American Catholic families to gather during lent to discuss, study and exhibit ways of fostering self-determination within the family and the community at large. The Kujichagulia Program was designed to be used as a follow-up to the seventh annual meeting of the National Black Catholic Congress: to provide suggestions and resources for Congress VII leaders and delegates to promote appreciation of and the development of self-determination among African American families as well as to offer suggestions to parish and diocesan organizations who may collaborate in promoting this family-based effort. (National Black Catholic Congress, 1993).
- Mission -** the work of evangelization in localities where the Gospel has never been preached, or the actual territory itself where this work is performed, or an extension of a parochial church or the work of preaching renewal to the Christian people (can be referred to as an apostolate).

- Novena** term used to describe a continuous praying of a formula for personal devotion, either on nine consecutive days or once a week for nine weeks. Most often these prayers are for a particular intention and are in honor of a particular intention and are in honor of a particular saint or aspect of Christ (e.g., St. Theresa, the Little Flower, or in honor of the Sacred Heart). The practice derives only from the seventeenth century, however, the number nine derives from the time Mary and the Apostles waited for the coming of the Holy Spirit between Ascension and Pentecost (the descent of the Holy Spirit on the assembled disciples in the appearance of "tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them" (Acts 2:3)).
- Parish -** a definite community of the faithful within a diocese. It is established on a permanent basis by the bishop and entrusted to a pastor. In general, parishes are territorial in nature. The [Canon] law also allows for the establishment of parishes based upon rite, nationality or language. Such parishes are often called personal parishes, since they are composed not of all persons in a territory but of persons having some similar quality. For example, at St. Peter Claver Parish, the similar quality is race.
- Patron Saints** - are acknowledged to be special protectors and intercessors for persons, churches, dioceses and the universal Church. The name taken at Baptism (and Confirmation) is most often that of a patron; the title of a parish church or diocesan cathedral is frequently that of a patron saint. Additional patrons for a diocese may be named, often in connection with the patron saint of a particular ethnic group in the diocese.
- RC** Roman Catholic
- RCC** Roman Catholic Church
- Relics, (Sacred)** - the term applies to bodies or portions of the bodies of the saints after death, clothing or articles they used in life, or articles such as bits of cloth that have touched their remains or tombs. They may not be bought or sold. Those of martyrs are placed in the altar stone at the consecration of an altar. There are three classes of relics: the first is part of the saint's body and is the type placed in the altar stone; the second is part of the clothing or anything used during the saint's life; the third is any other object such as a piece of cloth that has been touched to a first-class relic.

**Sacrament, Seven** - Although in the broadest sense any external sign of the action of God's grace in the life of a believer has a sacramental aspect, there are seven sacraments instituted by Christ which actually confer the grace they signify, namely: Baptism; Confirmation; the Eucharist; Penance, now called Reconciliation; Orders; Matrimony; and the Anointing of the Sick, formerly called Extreme Unction or Last Anointing.

**SPC** St. Peter Claver's Church and parish, Brooklyn, New York.

**Saints** - In the broader sense, a saint is anyone who attains a place in heaven. In the better known and stricter sense, saints are people whose lives were notable for holiness and heroic virtue. Through the process of beatification and canonization, the Church officially declares them saints. It means that these people are in heaven and may be publicly invoked for devotion. The invocation of saints is not worship of the saints but petitions to the saints to intercede for us to God.

**Vatican II or The Second Vatican Council** - was the 21st ecumenical council of the Catholic Church. It was convened on October 11, 1962 by Pope John XXIII whose objectives in calling the council were to seek the renewal of the Church and to modernize its forms and institutions. The Pope's overall hopes for the council was the fostering of unity among Christians.

## APPENDIX A

### New Year's Eve - Holy Hour

On New Year's Eve 1993 there was a special liturgy or Holy Hour with the Mass. The Holy Hour's theme was "A Blessing of Time". The service began with the hymn, *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*. Then during the Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, the displaying of a consecrated Host in a gold receptacle called a monstrance on the altar for all to see, *O Saving Victim* was sung. After this the following New Year's Prayer was said in unison:--

Father, let the gracious spirit of the Christ Child enter my life and bless it, so that duty be touched with beauty, and justice be forgotten in love.

Give me strength--not to do great things, but to do the small things graciously. Heal the wounds of misunderstanding that scar my heart, and let me accept kindness humbly.

As the old year ends and a new year begins, grant me peace with the world, and peace in my own heart. Amen.

The Reading was from the Old Testament, Ecclesiastes 3:1-3, The topic was, a season for all things. *O Little Town of Bethlehem* was sung. Fr. Athanase then led the people in the following prayer.

**Priest:** When we miss the beauty and the joy of earth's goodness . . .

*People: God, surprise us again.*

**Priest:** When we grow too accustomed to life's busyness . . .

*People: God, surprise us again*

**Priest:** When the goodness of others gets lost in the rush . . .

*People: God, surprise us again.*

**Priest:** When our frailty outruns our strength . . .

*People: God, surprise us again.*



- Priest:** When the hope in our hearts fades away . . .  
*People: God, surprise us again.*
- Priest:** When the call to serve others loses its flavor . . .  
*People: God, surprise us again.*
- Priest:** When we search for the way home to you . . .  
*People: God, surprise us again.*
- Priest:** When loneliness pursues us . . .  
*People: God, surprise us again.*
- Priest:** When it seems the darkness will never give way to the light...  
*People: God, surprise us again.*
- Priest:** When the ache of the world wears our compassion thin . . .  
*People: God, surprise us again.*
- Priest:** When the troubles of others seem more than we can carry. . .  
*People: God, surprise us again.*
- Priest:** When even you seem far away from us . . .  
*People: God, surprise us again.*

The second Reading was from the New Testament, Paul's Second letter to the Corinthians 5:17 - 6:2, which speaks of the "Acceptable Time" (which is now). The Scripture reading was followed by the hymn, *Go Tell It On The Mountain*, adapted for the season. The congregation then joined in the following prayer.

- Priest:** As we strive to live our lives well . . .  
*People: Walk closely with us, God.*
- Priest:** As we journey into the unknown territory of a new year . . .  
*People: Walk closely with us, God.*
- Priest:** As we learn to accept our weaknesses and strengths . . .  
*People: Walk closely with us, God.*
- Priest:** As we open our hearts to the messengers you send to us . . .  
*People: Walk closely with us, God.*
- Priest:** As we keep searching for the truth . . .  
*People: Walk closely with us, God.*
- Priest:** As we try to live in the heart of the scriptures . . .  
*People: Walk closely with us, God.*
- Priest:** As we accept your constant love for us . . .  
*People: Walk closely with us, God.*
- Priest and People:** God of this new year, we are walking into mystery. We face the future, not knowing what the days and months will bring to us or how we will respond. Be love in us as we journey. May we welcome all who come our way. Deepen our faith to see all of life through your eyes. Fill us with hope and an

abiding trust that you dwell in us amidst all our joys and sorrows. Thank you for the treasure of our faith life. Thank you for the gift of being able to rise each day with the assurance of your walking through the day with us. God of this new year, we praise you. AMEN.

In his Homily (sermon), Father Athanase said that he no longer made New Year's resolutions and said that each year would be for him a year of prayer, perseverance and hard work. He also stated that the only time of which we are sure is the present moment, right now and related it to the Reading, "Now is the acceptable time! Now is the day of salvation!" The Homily was followed by Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament followed by The Divine Praises.

The practice in which the Blessed Sacrament is put in a monstrance and placed on an altar lighted with at least two candles, after which it is incensed. There should be a time of silent prayer, while appropriate hymns and scriptural readings are recommended [omitted at this service]. Then after a prayer, the congregation is blessed by the celebrant . . . tracing the sign of the cross with the monstrance over the assembled congregation. Eucharistic hymns sung, most often O Salutaris Hostia and Tantum Ergo in Latin or in the vernacular. After the benediction, the Divine Praises may be said or sung.<sup>2</sup>

When The Divine Praises are said each complete line is said by the priest and then repeated by the congregation.

Blessed be God.

Blessed be his holy Name.

Blessed be Jesus Christ, true God and true Man.

Blessed be the Name of Jesus

Blessed be his most sacred Heart.

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<sup>2</sup> Stravinskas, Reverend Peter M.J., Ph.D., S.T.L. (ed.) *Our Sunday Visitor's Catholic Encyclopedia*. Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division 1991

Blessed be his most precious Blood.  
 Blessed be Jesus in the most holy Sacrament of the altar.  
 Blessed be the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete.  
 Blessed be the great Mother of God, Mary most holy.  
 Blessed be her holy and immaculate conception.  
 Blessed be her glorious assumption.  
 Blessed be the name of Mary, Virgin and Mother.  
 Blessed be St. Joseph, her most chaste spouse.  
 Blessed be God in his angels and in his saints.

This was followed by the hymn, *Let There Be Peace On Earth*. Father Athanase then returned the Blessed Sacrament to the tabernacle, went in the back to put on his stole for Mass.

During the Holy Hour people kept on arriving. By the time for Mass there were about one hundred and fifty people present. The New Year's Mass celebrates the Solemnity of Mary or Mary, Mother of God. The concept of Mary as the mother of God is not accepted by all Christians. Roman Catholics believe that-

She is the mother of Jesus as man, but since Jesus is both God and man, Mary deserves the title of "Mother of God," just as any woman deserves the title of "mother of a medical doctor" if her son is one.<sup>3</sup>

During the Offertory (collection) before the Prayer Over The Gifts (part of the Liturgy of the Eucharist) the congregation recited the following Act of Self-Dedication:-

Lord God, You know the secrets of our hearts,  
 come now and fill us with the spirit of sincerity as  
 we pledge ourselves to You and to the task of  
 building the Kingdom of Heaven this year.

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<sup>3</sup>.. *Sunday Missal*. New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co. 1986

Lord, we desire to serve you with all our hearts,  
with all our soul and with all our strength.

We surrender ourselves to Your Holy Plan as we  
seek to be perfect as You are perfect.

May our greatest possession be Your love and the  
love of those around us.

May we strive to be obedient and open to the  
Mystery of Your voice within us; willing to  
embrace whatever you ask of us.

Lord and Friend,

we re-dedicate ourselves to a life of prayer and  
worship of You.

We recommit ourselves to serve the needs of those  
around us and to the needs of the world.

May we find our salvation here at this time and in  
this place where we live.

Lord, we marvel that You, in your divine Wisdom,  
have chosen us to be an instrument of Your  
creative salvation.

May all the work of our hands, even our failings and  
stumblings be leaven to make that much desired  
Kingdom a reality.

Bless us now with your abounding love as we  
promise to be your friends and servants.

May we live this commitment fully throughout the  
year ahead in your name: Father, Son and Holy  
Spirit.

Amen.

Before Mass Sister Eleanor had brought up a small table and placed it in the Sanctuary. She put on a tablecloth and two clocks and two calendars. I thought this was a bit odd but then thought it was just for decoration in mind of the New Year. When we got our programs for the Holy Hour, it listed a, "Blessing of Clocks and Calendars". Well, it was at this point in the Mass that Father Athanase blessed the

clocks and calendars on that table with holy water. Then he went up the center aisle sprinkling holy water on the congregation and their watches. Not that anyone actually held up their watches to be blessed, people just made the sign of the cross as the holy water touched them (or was aimed their way).

This is an example of the Eucharistic Ritual (Mass) being enclosed within another ritual. Other forms of worship that are usually followed by Mass are novenas, small faith communities, and the devotions of religious societies. Participation in these forms of worship differ from Sunday Mass in that they along with attendance at weekday Mass are voluntary.

**APPENDIX B**  
**STATISTICS ON BLACK CATHOLICS**

The Graduate School and University Center  
of The City University of New York  
National Survey of Religious Identification  
Room 1520 GB  
Graduate Center: 33 West 42 St., New York, NY 10036-8099  
212-642-2176 Fax: 212-642-2141

TABLE 1

PERCENTAGE OF HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES (AGE 18+) AND  
COLLEGE GRADUATES (AGE 25+) BY RACE FOR  
SELECTED RELIGIOUS GROUPS

*Non-Hispanic*

	WHITE		BLACK	
	High school	College	High school	College
Baptist	66.9	11.3	67.8	11.4
Catholic	84.5	23.4	83.2	21.4
Episcopalian	92.7	41.9	90.4	40.5
Jehovah Witness	67.6	4.4	82.6	7.6
Methodist	82.1	22.6	69.7	17.2
Pentecostal	61.1	6.3	69.7	9.1
7th Day Adventist	65.0	16.8	81.9	23.7
None	81.7	27.8	80.5	18.7
U.S.	80.9	22.5	72.0	15.2

**Figure B.1** PERCENTAGE OF HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES (AGE 18+) AND COLLEGE GRADUATES (AGE 25+) BY RACE FOR SELECTED RELIGIOUS GROUPS.  
(Source: National Survey of Religious Identification)

The Graduate School and University Center  
of The City University of New York

National Survey of Religious Identification

Room 1520 CB

Graduate Center: 33 West 42 St., New York, NY 10036-8099  
212-642-2178 Fax: 212-642-2141

**BLACK CATHOLICS  
ADDITIONAL DATA**

This population, which comprises 5% of the total U.S. Catholic population and 9% of the total black population, is largely concentrated in a few states: New York (440 thousand), Illinois (240 thousand), California (240 thousand), Louisiana (190 thousand).

Compared with all U.S. Blacks, the adult black Catholic population is younger, more urban (92% v. 83%) and less Southern (35% v. 51%). It has more males (48%) than the black Protestant population (44%). It is more likely to be employed full time (66% v. 56% for all U.S. blacks). As a result it has more high income households (14% with incomes over \$50,000 a year v. 9%)

Surprisingly these socio-economic differences between black Catholics and the black population as a whole have very little effect on political party preference which is 7 to 1 Democrat to Republican compared with the national black ratio of 8 to 1.

In the age group 40 to 59 years the proportion of COLLEGE GRADUATES is for:

Black Catholics	26%
White Catholics	25%
All Blacks	15%
All Whites	24%

In the age group 25 to 39 years the proportion of HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES is for:

Black Catholics	89%
White Catholics	92%
All Blacks	85%
All Whites	88%

**Figure B.2 BLACK CATHOLICS ADDITIONAL DATA** (Source: National Survey of Religious Identification)



**APPENDIX C**

**1993 CALENDAR OF EVENTS**  
**FOR**  
**ST. PETER CLAVER'S CHURCH**

<u>MONTH</u>	<u>DAY</u>	<u>ACTIVITY OR EVENT</u>
Jan.	10	Mass in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King at St. James Cathedral, at 4:00 P.M. Bishop James Sullivan, Celebrant and Fr. Martin Carter, Homilist. All invited to attend
Jan.	17	Parish Tribute to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. will be Sunday, at noon. in Church Basement.
Jan.	17	League off Sacred Hearts meets.
Jan.	19	St. Joseph's Parish in Harlem and St. Joseph's Parish Yorkville (both in Manhattan) invite us to join them for the observance of Martin Luther King Day, Monday 10 to 2 P.M. at Harlem Church.
Jan.	23	Liturgy Committee after 9:30 AM Rosary Devotion
Jan.	24	South Africa Committee after 10:30 Mass, Church Basement
Jan.	30	Liturgy Committee meets, planning for Lent

Jan.	31	Propagation of the Faith - Membership Sunday
Jan.	31	Parish Forum (agenda - 1. Pastor's Report; 2. Role of Parish Business Manager, 3. Collection Envelopes; 4. Parish Membership Form
Feb.	05	Bus ride to Ice Capades at Nassau Coliseum sponsored by the Forever Young Club
Feb.	06	Pastoral Council meeting
Feb.	07	Office of Black Ministry conducts 8th Annual Black History Month celebration at St. James Cathedral at 3:00 PM. Bishop Thomas Daily will be main celebrant Dr. Lamuel Stanislaus, well known Caribbean-American lay leader, will receive the Father Norman Anthony Dukett Award, the Black Ministry Office's highest award for outstanding service to church and community.
Feb.	07	League of Sacred Heart meets after Mass.
Feb.	14	Black History Celebration - Our Lady of the Presentation Church, 1661 St. Marks Ave. 12:45. Main celebrant, Rev. Martin Carter, Diocesan Director of Office of Black Ministry.
Feb.	21	12th Annual Mardi Gras Celebration
Feb.	21	Collection for the Catholic Missions among Black and Indian People
Feb.	24	Dance Committee meeting
Feb.	27	Penance Service
Feb.	27	BEC Leaders' Meeting - 12 noon - Conference Room
Feb.	27	Liturgy Committee meeting 9 A.M. in Church
Feb.	28	South Africa Committee meeting - Conference Room - after Mass.
March	06	Pastoral Council meeting

March	07	League of Sacred Heart meeting
March	14	SPC Federal Credit Union meets, 12:30 PM - Church Basement
March	20	Sacred Heart Retreat Day
March	21	South Africa Brunch
March	27	Liturgy Committee meets- 9:30 AM in church
March	27	Lectors and Ushers Meeting - 10:30 AM
March	28	SPC Federal Credit Union meeting 12 noon, Church Basement
April	03	Good & Welfare Committee meets
April	18	Sacred Heart Tea
April	19	BEC Delegates Assembly - Housing - Public and Private, Present and Future.
April	25	Neighbors for Racial Harmony - Spring Pot Luck Dinner at St. Stephen and St. Martin Episcopal Church
May	01	Little Flower Foster Care Fair at Claver Auditorium
May	08	Flower sale by Youth Group before and after Mass
May	09	Flower sale by Youth Group before and after Mass
May	09	Holy Name Society hosting Mothers Day Breakfast for all biological and spiritual mothers of St. Peter Claver.
May	16	BEC Annual Convention at Loughlin
May	16	Cake Sale Day sponsored by Youth Group
May	21	Father Jervis will celebrate the 10th Anniversary of his Ordination to the Holy Priesthood.

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| May  | 22 | Father Jervis will celebrate a special Mass of Thanksgiving at St. Fortunata. All Claverites invited (Fr. Jervis is writing the book on Father Quinn, the founder of St. Peter Claver Church. |
| May  | 22 | Parents and godparents of the babies to be baptized on the Feast of Pentecost should attend this preliminary baptismal ceremony at 1:00 with babies to be baptized.                           |
| May  | 23 | South Africa Committee meets.   |
| May  | 23 | Annual Spring Dinner-Dance and Journal  |
| May  | 24 | Liturgy Committee meeting   |
| May  | 30 | Sacrament of Baptism will be administered on Feast of Pentecost, parents planning to have children baptized in that ceremony should register without delay.                                   |
| June | 05 | Good and Welfare Committee meet in the Church Basement  |
| June | 06 | League of Sacred Heart meet.  |
| June | 09 | Forever Young Club sponsoring bus ride to Radio City to see "Jesus Was His Name"  |
| June | 12 | Youth Group Bus trip to Great Adventure   |
| June | 13 | First Communion Sunday, Feast of Corpus Christi, procession with Blessed Sacrament after Mass   |
| June | 13 | Holy Name Brunch, after Mass and Procession. Special guest, Rev. Paul Matson, Pastor of Bethlehem Lutheran Church and BEC activist.   |
| June | 14 | Forever Young Club sponsoring bus ride to Pamona Park.  |
| June | 19 | Youth Group Retreat Day - Confirmation Candidates - House of Prayer, Riverhead, New York  |

June	27	Parish Anniversary and Sacrament of Confirmation. Bishop Valero, special guest. Street festival after Mass.
June	30	Lectors and Eucharistic ministers meeting in Church Basement
July	18	Neighbors for Racial Harmony meet at Bay Ridge United Methodist Church
July	25	Bus Outing to Wading River
Aug.	20	Bus ride to Robert Moses State Park
Aug.	16	Calendar Planning, Pastoral Council and Heads of Parish Groups, basement.
Aug.	20	Harbor Dinner Cruise along the East River and Hudson River, Upper New York Bay
Aug.	29	Holy Name Society Pilgrimage to Litchfield, Conn.
Aug.	31	Home Owners Conference - Informational meeting on what it takes to achieve ownership in one and two family homes. A representative from Chemical Bank will lead the seminar.
Sept.	11	Evening of prayerful preparation for our Pastoral Feast. Please sign up for this very important preparation for the success of this years celebration of St. Peter Claver: The Man and Our Parish.
Sept.	12	Celebration of Feast of St. Peter Claver, street festival to follow Mass.
Sept.	18	Lawn Festival, Monroe, Connecticut
Sept.	19	Parish Forum
Sept.	19	League of Sacred Heart Meeting
Sept.	19	Voter Registration

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|-------|----|--|
| Sept. | 26 | Diocesan Migration Day celebration at Regis Pacis Parish (multi-ethnic Mass celebration by Bishop Daily, followed by a reception and exhibit of the various Apostolates, ethnic groups and school children of the Diocese) |
| Oct.  | 02 | Pastoral Council Meeting in the Rectory  |
| Oct.  | 02 | Brooklyn Ecumenical Cooperatives (BEC) annual renewal meeting.   |
| Oct.  | 03 | Religious Education Classes Begin (Sundays)  |
| Oct.  | 03 | Sign up for BEC Mayoral Accountability Session   |
| Oct.  | 06 | Small Faith Community, Prayer Discussion Group begin meeting this week, Wednesday 10:30 AM and Sunday, 9:00 AM both in church  |
| Oct.  | 07 | Prep session for BEC Mayoral Accountability Session  |
| Oct.  | 08 | Claver Youth Group - registration and start  |
| Oct.  | 09 | Forever Young Club bus trip to Amish Country   |
| Oct.  | 09 | Confirmation Classes begin (Saturdays)   |
| Oct.  | 16 | Second annual meeting of the Office of African American Ministry   |
| Oct.  | 16 | Bed-Stuy Catholic Youth Rally at St. John the Baptist Church - 75 Lewis Avenue, (Willoughby & Hart) Brooklyn, 12:00 - 6:00 P.M.  |
| Oct.  | 17 | St. Peter Claver is hosts the Guyana Society. Today  |
| Oct.  | 17 | The children of the parish start preparing for the Christmas Pageant, Jennifer director.   |
| Oct.  | 17 | The Holy Name Society meets after Mass   |
| Oct.  | 22 | Tap dancing lessons available to all ages at 6:00 in the Gym. Ms. Betty, professional dancer is all set to go  |

- Oct. 24 BEC Mayoral Accountability Session at St. John The Baptist Church - 75 Lewis Avenue, (Willoughby & Hart) Brooklyn- agenda with Mayor Dinkins (confirmed) and Candidate Giuliani (not yet confirmed) includes: Project Zion - 1000 homes for our families; Re-Investment - dollars for small businesses; Public Housing - Police and quality of life issues; Access - regular meetings with City Commissioners.
- Oct. 24 South African Committee Meeting after Mass. Ms. Barbara will be walking in the Democracy for South Africa Walkathon on October 23rd.
- Oct. 27 Rockaway Review Committee meets in the Rectory.
- Oct. 31 Neighbors for Racial Harmony invites you to a Pot-Luck dinner here at St. Peter Claver Church from 2:30-5:00, beginning in church basement Delicious food, forum and worship.
- Nov. 02 Election Day. It's your right; it's your duty; VOTE
- Nov. 05 First Friday Mass - Sacred Heart Devotion (there is no Mass on other than first Fridays)
- Nov. 06 First Saturday Mass 8:30 AM, followed by Rosary (Except for first Saturdays, the Mass on Saturday at 5:00 PM is in lieu of Sunday Mass, so this is an extra Mass)
- Nov. 06 Workshop for Lectors - 9:30 AM - 12:30 PM at The Immaculate Conception Center, Douglaston.
- Nov. 07 24th Women's Day Anniversary of Members of Past Matron Conclave (of the Mechanics Organizations Lodge), who worshipped with us at 10:30 Mass.
- Nov. 09 Regional Catholic Charismatic Meeting at Our Lady of Victory Church at 7:30 PM. Meeting Place-- McGuinnis Hall Gymnasium - Entrance on MacDonough St.

- Nov. 13 SPC Brooklyn Federal C.U. bus trip - shopping spree to Redding, PA
- Nov. 13 Praise Him VII Workshop at the Immaculate Conception Center, Douglaston
- Nov. 14 Good and Welfare Committee meets after 10:30 AM Mass - in Conference Room
- Nov. 14 Revival '94 planning meeting - after 10:30 AM Mass in Little Flower Chapel
- Nov. 21 Rockaway Review Committee, meets after 10:30 AM Mass in Conference Room.
- Nov. 25 Thanksgiving Day Mass 9:30 AM - Please plan to join our Eucharist Celebration and bring a token gift for the Liturgy such as canned soup, fruit, vegetables, meat, tuna fish, boxed or packaged rice, macaroni, etc.
- Nov. 28 Parish Library: Fr. Athanase Joseph will bless our new Parish Library after 10:30 AM Mass. This Library is located in the Religious Education Office and is open for the use of our adult parishioners. To start, the Library will be open after 10:30 AM Mass for an hour. A big thank you to our teenagers who helped to put this Parish Library together. We need a few adult volunteers to help after Mass on Sundays for about an hour. See Sr. Eleanor.
- Nov. 28 South African Committee meets in the conference room in the basement.
- Dec. 03 First Friday - Mass and Devotions 5:00 PM
- Dec. 04 Morning of Prayers, Saturday 9-12:00 Noon. Pastoral council - Church Basement and Church
- Dec. 05 Flea Market by The Forever Young Club. This is after the 10:30 AM Mass and will be in the church basement. Lessons and Carols at 1:00 PM
- Dec. 05 Advent Vespers Service 1:00 PM - Church



- Dec. 08 Feast of the Immaculate Conception - Holy Day of Obligation. Special masses in honor of our Blessed Mother at 7:39 AM and Noon.
- Dec. 11 St. Columbia Council Columbiettes sponsors a **Shopping Spree** to Woodbury Commons, New York - Busses leave 7:00 AM from Nostrand Avenue and Lincoln Road. Donation \$25.00 please see Ms. Y.
- Dec. 17 Holy Family Novena starts. Each year the Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth, have as a highlight of the Christmas Season, the Feast of the Holy Family on Sunday, December 27th. Envelopes in the vestibule of the Church are available containing novena for your use as well as petition slips. The Sisters consider it a privilege to join you as they pray for the many needs of your family and the families of the world.
- Dec. 18 SACRAMENT OF PENANCE. As part of your preparation for Christmas you should receive the Sacrament of Penance (Reconciliation). Saturday, December 18, we will have a Reconciliation service in Church at 11:00 AM for adults and children.
- Dec. 18 Saturday. South African Committee will hold a Prayer Service in the Conference Room at 1:00 PM.
- Dec. 19 Sunday - Christmas Pageant after 10:30 AM Mass
- Dec. 24 Christmas Eve Mass 10:00 PM
- Dec. 25 Christmas Day Mass 10:30 AM
- Dec. 28 "School Break" Vision and Hearing Screening at The Manhattan Eye, Ear and Throat Hospital, 210 East 64th Street, NY Tel: (212) 555-5555, from 4:00 - 7:00 PM. Ages 6 - 16. To register call after Nov. 25th.
- Dec. 31 New Year's Eve - Holy Hour, 8-9:00 PM

- Dec. 31 Mass for New Year (Solemnity of Mary) - 9:00 PM  
The Solemnity of Mary is the celebration of Mary as the Mother of God.
- Jan. 01 Mass 10:30 AM
- Jan. 04 Forever Young Club will sponsor an outing to Radio City Music Hall to see the show. Christmas Spectacular. The cost is \$28.00 for transportation and ticket to the show. See Ms. Yvonne
- Jan. 08 Saturday. 2:00 PM - Meeting by Cruise Director, Pat - Church Basement. Also please make note of the date of the cruise Tropicale to the Southern Caribbean. It's the week of July 16-23, 1994.
- Jan. 08 Pastoral Council meets at 8:30 AM in the Rectory
- Jan. 08 The Holy Name Society will hold the SMOKER in the church basement immediately after the 5:00 PM Mass. Men are expected to attend Mass. Please do not forget your contribution to the Smoker.
- Jan. 08 Confirmation classes resume
- Jan. 09 Sunday school classes resume
- Jan. 09 Please Join Bishop Daily at Mass of Unity, celebrating the life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. at 4:00 PM at St. James Cathedral. Homilist, Rev. Chester P. Smith, S.V.D., Atlanta, Georgia. All are welcome.
- Jan. 15 St. Joseph of the Holy Family Church in Manhattan, invites us to attend special program for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday. Registration 11:00 AM; celebrating of Eucharist 12:00 PM followed by luncheon and workshop at school. If interested in participating see Ms. Clarissa, Mrs. Emily, and Ms. Geneva.
- Jan. 16 Parish tribute to Dr. Martin Luther King. If interested in participating see Mrs. Otelia.

- Jan. 17 Monday, 11:00 AM. A Brooklyn Tribute to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, 30 Lafayette Avenue, Brooklyn, NY. Keynote speaker, Paul Robeson, Jr. For details call 718-555-5555. First Come, First Served.
- Jan. 23 3:00 PM. The Church will be hosting a concert, Rockaway Revue, in the Auditorium. See Ms. Eleanor Mrs. Olive and Mrs. Marguerite in the church basement for tickets. Contribution \$10.00

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