

# Operation Faith Lift...

‘Stand Ready with Shoes to Announce the Good News!’

Some Baltimore parishes take their ‘marching orders’ to go out into the world and make new disciples literally. Known as ‘Operation Faith Lift,’ people from Catholic parishes take their evangelization message to the streets of their neighborhoods, and have been doing it since the program’s inception in the year 2000.

In year 2000 as the Church celebrated “The Jubilee Year”, Black Catholics were ready to share the good news of Jesus with their neighbors and anyone they met. They were inspired and faithfully formed through an evangelization initiative known as “Operation Faith Lift”.

Although most of the parishes involved (21 since 2005) reflect a predominantly Black Catholic membership, others such as St. Anthony/Most Precious Blood in Gardenville, reflect a greater diversity.

Fr. C. Lou Martin, former pastor of St. Anthony/Most Precious Blood, stated to the *Baltimore Catholic Review* in 2012, that this diversity is what led him to believe that it was time to reach out to the community surrounding his parish. “We want to give an invitation to people, especially those who are not connected with a church.” Fr. Martin continued, “We want to sell a relationship with God. I think we can really touch somebody through prayer needs, or just by making people aware of the services that the parish and the archdiocese provide.” Now, Fr. C. Lou Martin has a new parish, Holy Trinity, Crucifixion, and Good Shepherd, in Glen Burnie and is implementing “Operation Faith Lift”.

In addition to providing an organized efforts in evangelization with African American Catholics, “Operation Faith Lift” is a forum to address racism and to present Black Catholic men as leaders within the community. “‘Operation Faith Lift’ is a statement to the community – saying ‘we care about you, so much so that we want to share the one thing that is greater than gold, more valuable than silver. His name is Jesus Christ’ (*Jesus All Star team*, Office of African American Catholic Ministries, Archdiocese of Baltimore).”

The ‘why’ for implementing this outreach is easy to explain. First, having a relationship with Jesus, sharing the faith and gaining spiritual wisdom strengthens people. Secondly, according to Dr. Robert Hill, an American sociologist who advocates for African Americans involvement in institutions of faith states... “African Americans with strong religious orientation have higher social and economic attainment than those with little religious commitment.” By providing outreach and inviting our neighbors to take a closer walk with God, we are helping them to an increased quality of life and we are building a stronger family and a stronger church.

Therese Wilson-Favors is the former Director of the Office of African American Catholic Ministries for the Archdiocese of Baltimore, and Operation Faith Lift is the fruit of her desire to increase the ministry with Black Catholics as leaders in Baltimore. In a recent interview with Ms. Wilson-Favors, she outlined the program and best practices for implementation within parishes.

“It is important for the program to receive the support of the pastor,” said Wilson-Favors. This is essential since preparation for the Operation Faith Lift campaign begins with three months of study of holy scripture, including “The Acts of the Apostles,” and Church documents such as “Evangelization in the Modern World” – an apostolic exhortation by Pope Paul VI.

Then, after prayer and reflection on what they had learned, and armed with donated Bibles, the parishioners share the Good News of Jesus Christ with their neighbors. “There is so much excitement...I continue to be impressed and inspired by the energy, hope, and witness of all the people,” stated Wilson-Favors. “No one got tired!”

She went on to add, “Each parish did something different to identify the gifts and ministries of their parish. All of the parishes were creative in giving something personal to the people they talk to.” This might be something with the name of the Church and the address and phone number. At the end of the outreach, everyone meets to share their ideas of what worked and what could be improved.

Apparently, the program has met with enough success that it has received financial support in addition to material gift of the Bibles, from the American Bible Society. Said Wilson-Favors, “Bishop [Gordon] Bennett loved working with people. One day he asked me what I would like to do. I shared with him my idea for this door-to-door outreach, and Bishop [Bennett] secured the money to support this program. The parishes didn’t have to pay for anything!” Wilson-Favors added that a later bequest from a priest added even more financial support for this important initiative.

Wilson-Favors gives the credit to God for giving her the inspiration to bring this evangelization program to life, and for providing the funding to allow every parish to participate. “Jesus is still speaking,” said Wilson-Favors. “We’re trying to find the place we can listen!”

To implement this program in your diocese, please contact The Office of Black Catholic Ministries in the Archdiocese of Baltimore. The address is 320 Cathedral Street, Baltimore, MD 21201. You can also download a copy of the ‘Operation Faith Lift’ brochure that describes the program by clicking [here](#).

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**Therese Wilson Favors** is the former Director of the Office of African American Catholic Ministries for the Archdiocese of Baltimore. She has also served as the Coordinator of Elementary and Family Catechesis for the Archdiocese. From 1985- 1987, Therese served as the Planner for the 1987 National Black Catholic Congress. Shortly after this Congress, Therese was named the Executive Director for the National Black Catholic Congress. Prior to these positions, Therese served as Director of Evangelization and Community Outreach for Corpus Christi Church in Baltimore, Maryland. Mrs. Favors has extensive experience as an educator in both Catholic Schools and parish religious education programs. She served on the Advisory Board of the United States Catholic Conference- National Conference of Catholic Bishops from 1973-76 and as Adjunct Professor for the DeSales School of Theology and The Institute of Black Catholic Studies at Xavier University.