

Standing in the Need of Prayer Prof. Michael Howard's Reflection on 2024 Lyke Conference



(L to R) Fr. Msgr. Raymond East, Charlene Howard, MA Prof. Michael Howard, MACS, (LMU) and Fr. Tony Ricard, M. Th., M. Div.

For five days, from June 18th to June 22nd, 2024, a vibrant community of Black Catholics and their allies gathered at the Lyke Conference 2024 in Grapevine, Texas. The conference theme, *Standing in the Need of Prayer—Reclaiming Our Black Catholic Liturgy*, resonated with all of us. It was a time of unity and collaboration, where Loyola Marymount University (LMU) and Pax Christi USA shared a table to exchange materials about our respective organizations.

As the Lead Faculty and Course Designer for the *Presence of Black Catholics in the Church Today and Tomorrow*, I was deeply inspired by the Lyke Conference 2024. The themes of resistance and intentionality that emerged at the conference were not just observations, but integral to our mission at LMU. They were a testament to the value and importance of our work.



Fr. Joseph Brown, SJ, Ph.D.

Fr. Joseph Brown, in his workshop titled, *The Validity and Power of Black Catholic Liturgies: Defining the Terms by Which We Pray*, reflected on how Black Catholics can feel confident and secure in developing worship opportunities that are inclusive and welcoming. Although this workshop concentrated on liturgical planning, Fr. Brown astutely commented on Black Catholic spirituality, noting that we "can never forget resistance, we can never forget oppression and trauma. You simply cannot forget it because [liturgy] cannot be therapeutic if you don't start where the pain is."

In many of our course Zoom discussions on the life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Sr. Dr. Thea Bowman, we recognize the spiritual impetus in these two great leaders when conversing about Black Catholic spirituality. Dr. King never forgot the pain of the three evils of this nation: racism, economics, and war. He was confident that these three evils were destructive not only for Black families but for families everywhere. Dr. Bowman joined the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration as a young lady. She faced evil words

from white sisters in formation. Resisting the thought of giving up, these prophetic leaders stood for justice. Dr. King and Dr. Bowman told their story of pain through singing and preaching. They knew that there was a Balm in Gilead to heal the sin-sick soul. Their messages were therapeutic.

Christian Baily, the Director of Communications at St. Joseph Catholic Church, Alexandria, Va., gave a workshop titled *Harmony in Diversity: The Voices of Tomorrow*. Baily highlighted the need for Black Catholics in their parishes to be intentional. You must be confident in inviting a youth to join a ministry even if it takes away your opportunity to lector on that Sunday morning. One key issue for many youth is that we need to talk to the youth. Our youth have many gifts that seem to get discovered when they join another denomination.

Recently, in our course titled *Black Catholics' Spiritual Call: Using Theological Reflections (TR)*, we learned that TR is a spiritual movement summoning an individual or group to recognize God's presence in all occurrences in life. We do this through a chart that asks specific questions to mark steps in one's spiritual calling. In this course, students must be intentional and ask a youth several questions about their relationship with God. This intentional step is a major move towards harmony and seeing the spirituality of our youth by engaging in a meaningful conversation--and with some ice cream on the side.

The Lyke Conference experience revealed that as Black Catholics, we are standing in the need of prayer. A prayer that will ignite the spiritual flame in our Black Catholic liturgies and help refill our pews. Why are our pews empty? Why are vocations down? Why are so many parishes merging? Have we remembered our stories of resistance? Are we sedating ourselves with false

hope? Where are our children that we baptized and laid hands on? Are our children feeling churchless because they are never talked to?

In our courses on Black Catholic spirituality at LMU, we are committed to reclaiming and living the truth of our heritage. We will never forget the trauma that was meant to make Black Catholics feel like outcasts. Our stories, our songs, our drums, our tears, our joy, our shouts, our dance, and our theological reflections will always heal our communities. The Church can be cold, but they will never quiet our souls. Join us this fall as we reclaim and live the truth, there is a Balm in Gilead to heal the sin sick and tired soul. Registration is open now. Visit [Black Catholic Spirituality - Loyola Marymount University \(lmu.edu\)](https://www.lmu.edu/black-catholic-spirituality) for more information about our courses on Black Catholic Spirituality.