News



Sr. Eva Marie Lumas, a Sister of Social Service, (left) accepts the National Black Sisters Conference's Harriet Tubman Award from National Black Sisters' Conference President Sr. Addie Lorraine Walker July 29, 2024, in Louisville. Looking on is Fr. Jeffery Ott. (GSR photo/Dan Stockman)



by Dan Stockman

View Author Profile
dstockman@ncronline.org

Join the Conversation

Louisville, Ky. — August 6, 2024

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

It began with mourning, but soon turned into dancing.

The joint conference of the National Black Sisters' Conference; the National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus, which includes Black male religious such as brothers and friars; the National Black Catholic Seminarians Association and the National Association of Black Catholic Deacons and wives had been planned for months, but was thrown into limbo by the sudden death of Fr. Norman Fischer, president of the Clergy Caucus, July 14. He was 50 years old.

Fischer had been deeply involved in the planning for the conference, which ran July 28-31, right up until his death, leaving many conference-goers even more shocked because they had spoken to him about the event just days before he died.

The entire schedule of the conference was rearranged so attendees could go to Fischer's funeral 80 miles away in Lexington on July 29.

Sr. Addie Lorraine Walker, a School Sister of Notre Dame* and the outgoing National Black Sisters' Conference president, opened the conference by saying it was a time of both joy and sorrow, a feeling that continued over the four days as conference goers embraced the past and also looked with joy toward the future.

At the conference's Harambee Banquet, the National Black Sisters' Conference presented its Harriet Tubman Award to Sr. Eva Marie Lumas, of the Sisters of Social Service. The Harriet Tubman Award is given to a National Black Sisters' Conference member who answered the call, like Tubman, to be a Moses to her people.

> 'I believe it is time for another Sr. Thea Bowman moment to remind the bishops of what we have to offer.'
> —Fr. Patrick Winbush
>
> Tweet this

Lumas has been the co-founder and co-director of numerous organizations, was a professor of faith and culture at the Franciscan School of Theology in Berkeley, California, the co-interim director of the Institute for Black Catholic Studies at Xavier University of Louisiana, and has been a member of the National Black Sisters'

Conference for 46 years.

Lumas, after accepting the award, told a story from her childhood where she learned to be proud of who she is after a white boy called her and her sister the n-word.

"My parents told me, hold your head up not because you need to show him who you are, but to show yourself who you are," she said.

The joint conference presented its Fr. Al McKnight Award to Sr. Barbara Moore of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, where she was the first woman of color to join the congregation, which then had 1,800 sisters, and one of two African American nuns to join the historic march for voting rights in Selma, Alabama — chosen for her ability to keep calm under pressure.

Moore coordinated the perinatal care program at a health center in Kansas City and later was project director at the city's Healthy Start Program, focused on reducing infant morbidity and mortality, and traveled to Uganda to work on a micro-financing project to give economic opportunities to single mothers and families.



Fr. Norman Fischer speaks at Lexington Catholic High School in this undated photo. Lexington, Kentucky, Bishop John Stowe presided at Fischer's funeral July 29. The priest, who was president of the National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus, died July 14 at age 50. (OSV News/Courtesy of Aaron Perkins, Lexington Catholic High School)

Lexington Bishop John Stowe, who presided at Fischer's funeral and attended the banquet, told attendees they are the future of the church. Louisville Archbishop Shelton Fabre was traveling.

"When I see the gifts and the talent in this room, I know the church is in great hands," Stowe said. "Not everybody knows that yet."

That message was repeated July 30 at the conference's Jubilee Mass, also presided over by Stowe, and held at the historic Black church in Louisville, St. Martin de Porres parish.

"We all have seen the video of the great Sr. Thea Bowman and her famous address to the bishops in 1989," Fr. Patrick Winbush said in his homily. "But it is now 2024, and I believe it is time for another Sr. Thea Bowman moment to remind the bishops of what we have to offer."

The Jubilee Mass celebrated the 50th jubilees of four sisters, the 65th jubilee of Sisters for Christian Community Sr. Gloria Rubio, and the 75th jubilee of Oblate Sisters of Providence Sr. Magdala Marie Gilbert.

Walker told the jubilarians they are an example for all Catholics.

"You give us an occasion to remember God's faithfulness, to remember all the Christian community's call to holiness," Walker said. "It is a time that you remind us to recommit ourselves to what we have been called to in our baptism and consecrated to in our lives."

Advertisement

During the conference, National Black Sisters' Conference members elected officers and board members. Sr. Barbara Spears, of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, and board chair of the African Sisters Education Collaborative, was

elected president, while Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur Sr. Josita Colbert was elected vice president.

Sr. LaKesha Church, of the Sisters of the Precious Blood, was elected secretary, while Mercy Sr. Jacqueline Nedd; Oldenburg Franciscans Sr. Jannette Pruitt; Sisters of St. Joseph of Philadelphia Sr. Patty Ralph; Little Falls, Minnesota, Franciscan Sr. Callista Robinson; and Sisters for Christian Community Sr. Odessa Stanford were elected board members.

A treasurer and associate liaison will be appointed later.

**This story has been updated to correct Sr. Addie Lorraine Walker's congregation.*