

Ready to lead:

African-American Catholics in ministry earn certificates

By ARLENE EDMONDS
SPECIAL TO THE CS&T

A festive spirit of reunion took hold at St. Charles Borromeo Seminary recently. Those who earned their Ministry to African American Catholics (MAAC) certificates over the past decade were out in full force to support this year's graduates.

The 2008 graduating class was draped in kente cloth and included Jeanette Demby-Carrenard, Pamela A. Curry, Katherine English and Sherry Reid.

Amelia Sheen also earned her master's degree in religious studies.

The MAAC certificate equips its graduates to fill leadership roles in predominantly African American parishes in the Philadelphia Archdiocese, according to Joyce Ramsey and Charlene Cornish. Both received their MAAC certificates two years ago.

Among the hats Ramsey now wears at St. Charles Borromeo Parish are coordinating the altar servers, teaching religion and counting the Sunday collection. Cornish, who converted to Catholicism 30 years

ago, said she has been better able to evangelize as a member of the parish pastoral council of St. Benedict Parish.

"This program really gives you the knowledge about what it means to be black and Catholic," said Mildred Travis, a 2005 MAAC graduate who currently teaches young people in the religious education program in St. Benedict Parish. "I learned that there had been a black pope, the history of black Catholics in the United States, and things about

the Catechism and the Bible which I never knew before. Now I can share it with young people. I hope more of them take advantage of the MAAC program."

This year's graduates are ready to continue the legacy of

leadership of former MAAC alumni. Just ask Reid, a member of St. Ignatius Parish in West Philadelphia. "I now have a deeper understand and awareness of my faith," she said. "I now would like to teach religion, so I plan to study systematic theology in the master's program. The program has just taught me so much about the

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(Photos by Joanna Lightner)

(L to r) Sherry Reid, Jeanette Demby-Carrenard, Katherine English and Pamela Annette Curry earned certificates in Pastoral Ministry to African American Catholics on Thursday, May 22.

Scriptures."

Curry envisions that eventually she will start a youth initiative to encourage younger African American Catholics to explore the religious studies programs at the seminary. She said that through the MAAC program she now has the fluency to articulate the tenets of her faith in order to reach that population.

Among those present at the MAAC commencement gala were

Valerie Washington, executive director of the Baltimore-based National Black Catholic Congress; J. Keith White, administrator of the St. Peter Claver Center for Evangelization; Carmina Chapp, academic dean of the seminary's religious studies division; Carolyn Jenkins, the new director of the Camden Office of Black Catholic Ministry; and Sylvia Royster, the executive director of the Martin de Porres Foundation. Royster earned her MAAC certificate in 2000.

Father Stephen D. Thorne, director of the Office for Black Catholics and adjunct profes-

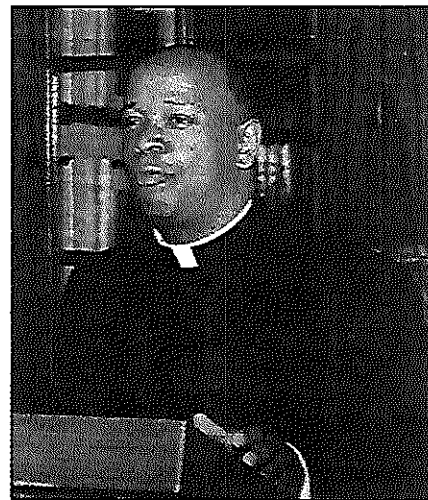
sor for the MAAC program, said this year's graduating class was a blessing. He recognized Matthew H. McCloskey Jr. for spearheading the Martin de Porres Foundation in 1948, as well as Cathy Hamilton, the current foundation president, and past president Ann Reimel.

The foundation underwrites the cost of pursuing the MAAC certificate at the seminary and subsidizes the St. Peter Claver Center.

"We can see the evidence of those who are well trained and equipped to lead our parishes through this program," Father Thorne said. "To whom much is given much is

expected. We look forward to you doing great things."

The MAAC program is an initiative of the archdiocesan Office



FATHER STEPHEN D. THORNE

for Black Catholics. The 24-credit undergraduate certificate program fosters and supports the development of lay leadership in African American parishes. It is sponsored by the religious studies division of St. Charles Borromeo Seminary.

For more information, contact Marion Corbin, MAAC administrator, at (215) 587-3587.

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