



BLACK HISTORY MONTH



MMS Associate Selena Wilson, OP is pictured above in the front row on the far right, along with the rest of the PCGMC.

The Philadelphia Catholic Gospel Mass Choir (PCGMC) is a group of women and men, mostly African American and mostly age fifty-five and above. The choir director is Ms. Tonya Taylor Dorsey, also African American, born in Birmingham, AL and raised in Philadelphia, PA. Ms. Dorsey is an accomplished musician, singer-songwriter and poet, among many other talents and gifts. For years Tonya has worked with youth of various ages as a talent scout encouraging young people to explore their gifts in the performing arts, especially voice.

Recently, in February of 2023, Saint Hubert's High School for Girls in Holmsburg section of Philadelphia experienced some racial unrest whereas a St. Hubert's student and three other young women from neighboring schools created a blackface video filled with racist slurs directed towards African Americans and posted on social media. When Saint Hubert school officials discovered what happened, they, being an organization with a zero tolerance for racism or hate in any form, expelled the St. Hubert student involved with the incident. As part of the healing process from this event the

principal of St. Hubert's school enlisted the Archdiocese of Philadelphia's Anti-Racism training program to assist the school with ways for the girls to move on from this unfortunate occurrence.

One of the actions taken by the Archdiocesan Anti-Racism program was an invitation from Fr. Stephen Thorne, Chairperson of the Archbishop's Commission on Racial Healing, asking Tonya Taylor Dorsey the Director of the PCGMC (Philadelphia Catholic Gospel Mass Choir) to do a gospel music workshop as a means of educating the students about racial harmony and love of neighbor.

A handful of the PCGMC members (myself included) went to St. Hubert's twice in February shortly after the racism incident. The first time we arrived we went to several of the students' music classrooms and taught the students some of our Black gospel songs and encouraged the students to sing with us when we returned the following week to do a mini concert for the entire school. We returned a week later to do the concert and indeed some of the girls joined us on stage to sing with us as part of the choir. The entire assembly of more the four hundred students and faculty however, joined us in our "Call and Response" style of song choices. The students and faculty enjoyed a wonderful hour or more of Black Gospel music and very excitedly invited us back for encore performances in the future.

- MMS Associate Selena Wilson, O.P.



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