

Targeting youth: The Sister Thea Bowman Music Academy

BY DORIS BENAVIDES
Staff Writer

It's brainstorming time in a St. Bernadette School's classroom. Teacher Sheryl Lange throws a question.

"What are other things that could help communicate who we are and who is Sister Thea Bowman?"

A dozen or so young female students remain quiet and reflective during the May 19 morning session.

"Let's emphasize what Sister Thea Bowman did," adds Lange, "and relate it to our lives today. What would she be doing today?"

It is the first staff-and-students meeting of the newly founded Sister Thea Bowman Youth Music Academy at St. Bernadette School, convened to plan their next performance during Black Catholic History Month in November. The first performance, "Living Stations of the Cross," was offered on Good Friday, April 6.

A long awaited project, the Academy came to fruition thanks to a three-year grant from the Dorothy F. Coleman Foundation, according to Anderson Shaw, director of the archdiocesan African American Catholic Center for Evangelization. The center will oversee the new program designed for teenagers who can enroll for free with parental consent.

"This is all about evangelization," said Au-

drey Ina Shaw, the academy's program administrator, after showing a video of Sister Bowman's lectures throughout the country.

"Our mission is to keep these kids in the Church," she continued, "and Thea Bowman is a great example of how to communicate with others through music."

The idea is to follow in the footsteps of the late Franciscan Sister of Perpetual Adoration, a Catholic convert and former director of Black Catholic Studies at New Orleans' Xavier University. Sister Bowman (who died in 1990 at age 62) often illustrated her lectures — including those at the Los Angeles Religious Education Congress — with Old and New Testament stories adapted to music and skits.

Academy staff includes Eddie Hilley, program coordinator and veteran music director at St. Agatha Church; Chris Nuno, music director; musician Lauren Warner, and Lange and Debra Parson, dance coordinators.

The program is coordinated with parishes serving the African American community,



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ARTISTS — Members of the newly founded Sister Thea Bowman Youth Music Academy gather at St. Bernadette School May 19.

said Veronica Tatenco, a 15-year-old sophomore and longtime Holy Name parishioner. "This helps us grow in our faith and to become role models to other teenagers."

She and her friends, twins Angelica and Mahalia Chew, said that because of their involvement in parish choir, their peers look up to

them. Some, they added, have even sought their advice when confronted with use of drugs or other difficulties.

Brittany Blount, another Holy Name parishioner, said the new Academy provides an opportunity to "spend time together in faith" instead of "running around doing nothing. We all can see that there are others who actually care for you." **TD**

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such as Holy Name of Jesus and St. Bernadette whose pastors, Fathers Paul Spellman and Allan Roberts, respectively, have been "very supportive," said Shaw.

But participants do not necessarily have to attend a Catholic parish or be of African American descent.

"I came because I like acting," said newcomer Aeron Walker, 13, an eighth grader at Gardena Valley Christian School. "I thought this was very educational."

"It's important that other youth come to see what we do and make a difference,"

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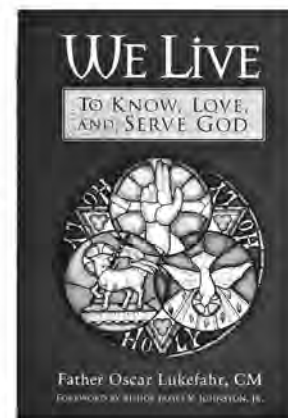
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