

When one door closes, another opens

Sister Bea Eichten interviews Sister Callista Robinson

Life changed. Whereas before I could connect with people face-to-face with hugs and kisses—a way of being for Black people—now I need to wear a mask and keep my distance so as to stay safe enough so I can carry on my other responsibilities.ⁱ I needed to focus on other ways of connecting: phone, Zoom, email, letters. *I learned that when one door closes, another opens.*

Our offices at the Learning Center, for people acquiring a GED, lent themselves to staff keeping distance. I serve as assistant administrator/receptionist and greet students, take their temperature and settle them at a computer or with a tutor. Our director's computer skills enabled us to be one of few such centers to remain open with virtual and in-person teaching and tutoring. We learned that many preferred virtual learning because they didn't need to miss work or classes; we may continue this new way of working with students, both near and far. *COVID taught us a new way to serve our students!*

I also work with the Brother Booker Ashe Lay Ministry Program which has continued by Zoom. Through the funding provided by the Black and Indian Grant through the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, we are able to continue to strengthen lay ministry in our parishes.

The community life at our parish shifted greatly—no touching at the sign of peace or the Our Father, having a cantor and piano rather than our choir. We especially missed gathering after Mass for coffee and conversation. Still, people chimed in to help decorate for Christmas. They see what others need and reach out. Our food shelf, though limited, helps those facing food insecurity. *I learned that even when things seem hopeless, hope is there. God is an on-time God and will come through.*

Personally, I find myself singing my mother's favorite hymn:

I don't feel no ways tired,
I come too far from where I started from,
Nobody told me that the road would be easy,
I don't believe He brought me this far to leave me.

I've learned again to rely on the resilience of our people and open myself in prayer to others. I pray for you, you pray for me, and watch God change things.

ⁱI'm busier than ever with the Black Catholic Ministry Commission, Dr. Martin Luther King Prayer Service Committee, Brother Booker Ashe Lay Ministry Program, National Black Sisters Conference, chairing the Prayer and Worship Committee at St. Martin de Porres Parish and the Black Religious and Clergy of Wisconsin.

ⁱⁱThe Brother Booker Ashe Lay Ministry Program bears the name of the late Brother Booker Ashe, a Capuchin religious and founder of the House of Peace in Milwaukee. The Lay Ministry Program is a three-year course of study which forms students who are laity, religious and clergy in meaningful and effective ministry within the Black community and fosters new leadership among Black people.



Sister Callista, far right, participates in an orientation session for those interested in becoming students in the Brother Booker Ashe Lay Ministry Program.ⁱⁱ