

The National Center of the Haitian Apostolate



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JoAnn Perou

JoAnn Perou, a young adult, is one of the shining stars of our community. She is steadfast in her commitment, service, and leadership to her faith, family, ministry and community. As a national program coordinator of the Ambassadors of the Word National Youth Organization she has designed and coordinated national youth programs with an emphasis on community outreach, cultural competency, and leadership development in accordance the organization's longstanding commitment to empower youth and nurture their to pursuit of qualitative life styles. Her endeavors include national programs such as the YOUTH J.A.M. (Jesus Anointed Missionary or Jesus Appointed Mission) FOR JESUS and the Sankofa Youth & Family Summit. As a project management professional she has assumed various distinct appointments and executive leadership roles in her career in the field of public health. She has worked as a special assistant to the chief of staff of one of the strongest and largest labor-management funds in the nation where she manages variety of member benefit and pension programs. She has also been engaged in field research for an independent national health care research organization. Former positions she has held include her role as a project administrator to a national technical assistance center for quality improvement of HIV/AIDS care and services funded by the Ryan White Care Act of 1990. She bears a Master of Arts in Health Care Management from Stony Brook University. JoAnn has generously agreed to answer some questions for the column "Religion and Society" of the newspaper Haiti Observateur and for the friends of The National Center of the Haitian Apostolate.

Good morning, JoAnn. Blessings Br. Tob

Can you start by telling us about your childhood?

As far as I am concerned my childhood has been an awesome landscape, well integrated with educational opportunity, culture enrichment, faith foundation, and social progress. I am the daughter of parents, native born to the Republic of Haiti. I was born here in the United States, on a fall day in the early 70's in Brooklyn, New York. I am the first of four siblings. I preceded my two brothers and my sister who is the youngest among us. My childhood has been a wonderful experience that has largely served to make me the woman that I am today. I consider myself thankful for my childhood and the blessings as well as the challenges I have encountered through out life's journey. Our parents are genuine and hard working people. They have always set that as a standard for what defines our characters both as individuals and as a family. To this day they are devout in their commitment to each other as spouses and to us as their children. My siblings and I are definitely their "Love Children" as they say. Essentially they imparted to us a relevant family value system and a firm code of integrity that is deeply rooted in faith, respect, self-determination, and love. Then of course at the heart of our family and a pillar in our lives is my grandmother. She is my hero and my best friend. Her love for God, her service to His people, and her "*Joi de Vive*" translation "*her zeal for living*", has always been her greatest example to me. I firmly believe that these are the standards that have enabled our working class family to see it through all of life's ups, downs, upside downs, and inside outs. Last but not is least is the active network of extended family and close friends, who is what I call "my village." My village has always been there to love, encourage, and lend support to my parents in their exemplary efforts to raise a family of four children in New York. We were not rich and it was never about keeping up with the "Jones' or "Vive pou fe moun we." Our family life and my childhood was simply about putting our best foot forward in good faith and being thankful for what we had.

Can you tell us about a pivotal event or events in your life that have shaped your understanding of yourself as a Haitian and an American?

I would say that my understanding of self is as a black woman, who is Haitian-American of African Ancestry, born in the United States. My self identity is entirely based on my upbringing as a child of a Haitian family, my physical wellness, my spiritual values, as well as my academic, civic, and social education. The pivotal events in my life that served to shape my understanding of myself include the receipt of my sacraments from the Catholic Church, becoming a juvenile diabetic during the course of my adolescence and the pursuits of various personal and career goals. As a Charismatic, Catholic, Christian, which are terms I use interchangeably because they all frame the elements of my spiritual identity, I was baptized in St. Gregory the Great Church in Brooklyn. I received my First Holy Communion and Confirmation in Holy Innocent Church in Brooklyn. What is most remarkable about the sacramental events in my life is that they are among many teachable moments where I have always been able to encounter Christ in my life. The person of Christ is someone who I have encountered in the dedication and sacrifice of my parents to their call in matrimony and parenthood. The person of Christ has always been present to me in the catechetical formation I received from catholic school. The priest, nuns as well as other believers, Christians (non-catholic) teachers and non-Christians, mentors, guides and allies of the faith have always made the examples of Christ very present and real to me.

The person of Christ who is my savior is the person I have always wanted to be like when it comes to “loving my neighbor as myself.” That being said this path has not always been easy. Early in the course of this life’s journey I have experienced my share of growing pains. When I became diabetic, I was traumatized because it was such a potent injection of change and challenges for me to handle as an adolescent. For the most part I was a good student and a pretty amiable personality. So I completed elementary school at Holy Innocent Catholic School in Brooklyn. At the same time becoming diagnosed with a body condition even while undergoing my transformation from girlhood to womanhood, was quite the challenge. I had self-esteem issues, I had to eat differently than everybody else, and I had to contend with symptoms through out my daily living activities. On top of that I thought it was my fault and started to question whether or not I was a defect or a disappointment to God, my family, and myself. The good news is that I was never left to face these challenges alone. God and my village showed themselves to be present and attentive especially in those moments where I thought I could loose my faith altogether. Ultimately, I graduated from John Dewy High School in Brooklyn. After high school, I enrolled in the State University of New York at Stony Brook and earned a Bachelor Degree in Social and Behavioral Science.

As an undergraduate, I had been faced with financial as well as health obstacles, which at times also had a significant impact on my past academic performance. In light of the inherent personal financial support that could only be funded in part by my financial aid package awarded, I was continuously faced with the challenge of maintaining a part-time to a full-time work schedule in tandem with my fulltime academic credit load. Likewise, I was actively engaged in developing the balance required to manage my health condition as a Type I diabetic, with little to no access to full health insurance coverage. Despite the rigorous combination of financial and health circumstances presented to me, I was able to rise to the occasion and complete my graduate degree. I hold a Masters Degree in Health Care Management from Stony Brook University. Ultimately, I continue to draw from the resilience honed during my past experiences and apply the lessons learned in order to live a conducive and constructive work life balance as a seasoned health care professional.

Can you tell us something about a woman who has been a role model for you?

I have been blessed to have many women who have faithfully served as role models to me both directly and indirectly. Among my collection of ***SHE***roes, my fabulous favorites include my mother, my grandmother, my late god mother, Harriet Tubbman, and Katherine Dunham. My mom is the queen I aspire to be in life. She has always taught me to be grounded in who I am and directed in anything I do. She is the still water that runs deep in my life. Now grandma is the village Queen mother. She is not only an inspiration to me but a living testimony of her love for God and to people. She is a breath of fresh air when it comes to her unyielding faith, her witty sense of humor and her compassion in service to others. She has taught our family the value and potency of fervent prayer, and performing acts of mercy towards one another. My late godmother was this take charge “no nonsense”, woman of exceptionally good taste. She always encouraged me to be the best at whatever I do and to be certain that I looked the part at all times.

I first learned about Harriet Tubman in my elementary school years. Her legacy imparted, to me and others, is her vigilance and her steadfast commitment to freedom during one the darkest times faced by people of African ancestry in human history. She held an

extraordinary measure of accountability to liberation that is still required of us today. Katherine Dunham is to me is a guiding principle for what it means to be a phenomenal woman. She was an African-American dancer, choreographer, songwriter, author, educator and activist trained as an anthropologist. Her mastery of body movement and her intuitive approach towards life, culture, dance, community activism, and personal insight is an example I have always believed that I have been destined to follow.

What can you tell us about your education? Why did you choose to focus on the field of health care management for your master's degree?

At 4 years old I thought I wanted to be a veterinarian, I just loved animals that much. Then at the age of 6 years old I decided I would like to help children in the same way my pediatricians had always seem to come through for me. Now I have to admit that part of it was simply because one of my pediatricians in particular always kept these tasty vitamin c lollipops where I could reach them during an office visit. I thought that was cool but even then, I have had a deeply rooted desire to become a doctor, especially to help children. Life's journey has carved out an interesting path in order for me to move towards attaining my goals in the health care field. So while I am not yet a clinical provider per se, I continue to aspire to reach my final career destination. My Masters degree in Health Care Management is a valued means toward that end.

On the subject of health care, what can our country do for the 47 million people, including many members of racial and ethnic minorities, who have no health insurance?

The political and economic end to this question is the tangible development and execution of a universal health care plan for the people of the United States. When it comes to health care, this country needs to undergo a vital shift in its current paradigm where by facets such as holistic health, comprehensive service delivery, wellness, and preventive medicine are given equal priority to existing funding provisions made for emergency care, surgery care, critical care, and infectious disease control. It is not just about improving the quality of existing care and service delivery systems which in a number of cases are still not equitably accessible or seamless for the average income families in the US. The arching challenges that we face as a nation include: competing opportunistic interests of for profit stakeholders in health care; shrinking resources due to a destabilized economy; the negative impact of racial disparities that exist in access to healthcare benefits and services; and the inherent adverse effects of "Global Warming."

It goes to follow that we cannot just continue to look at health care as just a vigorous opportunity for policy makers to debate but approach this issue with a vigilance that warrants taking action now. As a nation we must come to the table, agree on a plan that is based on comprehensive strategy that fosters stakeholder collaboration, and make concrete steps towards investing the resources necessary to make healthcare more affordable and accessible to all people living in the United States.

What can you tell us about the work with the Ambassadors of the Word National Youth Organization and how you came to be involved in it? What are its goals and its

mission? Tells about national programs like YOUTH J.A.M. FOR JESUS and Sankofa Youth Summit?

I always take care to preface an account of how this part of my life's journey came to be by reminding people to be careful about what you pray for. Every thing to this day I have been able to do as a youth minister, at large, started with a simple and unassuming prayer. I received my youth ministry training and certification in the Diocese of Brooklyn. Over the years my youth ministry work has been integrated to include service and collaboration with Offices of youth ministry and black Catholics among the auspices of Diocese of Rockville Centre, Diocese of Brooklyn, and the Archdiocese of New York. I have met a great deal of fulfillment, serving as a youth minister locally, nationally and as an emissary to the Bowman Francis Ministry Project over the last ten years. Ambassadors of the Word (AOW) is a nationally and internationally based youth mentorship organization that implements rites of passage programs addressing the overarching issues impacting youth of African Ancestry's development and transformation by responding to the need to engage the youth in spiritual education, alternative conflict resolution, and leadership training. As the AOW National Program coordinator, core projects I spear head include **YOUTH J.A.M. FOR JESUS and the Sankofa Summit program.**

The mission of the **YOUTH J.A.M. FOR JESUS, as a heritage awareness program,** is designed to commemorate the values of racial, social, and economic harmony rooted in the vision of the late Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King as well other visionaries of African Ancestry through history of human kind. It is a youth and young adult centered exposition of talent, liturgical, and fellowship celebration that serves as an authentic medium of African American cultural and spiritual expression in worship and praise. Youths, families, and adults that work with youth are invited to participate. The liturgical celebration is preceded by a worship and praise session where by various groups of youth liturgical ministers of music, dance, poetry, and scripture, representative of parish members and families from the Arch Diocese of New York, the Dioceses of Brooklyn, Queens, and Rockville Centre are called to prayer during a ritual of libation and water blessing. An emphasis is placed on the essence of what is meant by the acronym **J.A.M.** which stands for **J**esus **A**nointed **M**issionary or **J**esus **A**ppointed **M**ission.

The mission of the **Sankofa Youth and Family Summit, as a leadership development program,** is to respond to the educational, psychological, and spiritual needs of African, African American, and Caribbean American Diaspora. The Sankofa Summit emphasizes an urban and Africentric approach in addressing the needs of urban youths and families. The Summit is a valuable spiritual experience directed to meet the critical skill building needs of youth ministers, pastors, ministers, Christian educators, teachers, parents, and teen leaders striving for excellence in their ministry to urban youth. The primary goal of the Sankofa Youth Summit is to culminate the leadership development precepts and training objectives rooted in the integrity, communal values, and cultural enrichment of youth, families, and community through out the African, African American and Caribbean American Diaspora. This is an annual program that is hosted in a different city each year. This coming year, our annual national Sankofa Summit is scheduled to take place in New York on June 25-28, 2009.

As a young person with a good education, can you give us any insights into the relationship between today's young people and the generation of their parents?

Today young people and their parents need to spend more quality time together in a real parent-child context. In light of the modern society's dismal social, economic and political state of affairs, all too frequently parents and children are caused to miss out on critical time needed to nurture their relationships with each other. Quality time lost among families can be lost because parents find themselves juggling competing priorities such as increasing career or work demands, extraneous financial burdens, and relational family tensions. Unfortunately, homes may be severely broken due to infidelity, incarceration substance abuse, or domestic violence. Parents and children find themselves having to negotiate their daily survival rather than being able to make quality of life style choices that would include more constructive time spent with each other.

Parents need to be parents and realize that materials and the attainment of "perceived social status" is not what it takes to raise a child. Parents are trying to befriend or bargain for their children's love, respect, and attention with material goods. At the heart of any successful parent-child relationship is one where families are actively engaged in the comings and goings of their children's lives. Imparting the time, direction, and good counsel to their children with a holistic application of discipline, structure, a safe space for dialogue and navigation through the real everyday circumstances presented by life. In all fairness to parents and guardians who champion the vital cause of raising children, youth, and young adults in the United States, I will always tip my hats off to them.

What can youth leaders do to help young people who are struggling or even in jail?

We can pray with them and for them with fervor. As a faith community we can also lend our support and assistance to incarcerated youth and their families that enables them to traverse the complexities of the legal justice system to which they find themselves bound. As individuals we can perform our civic obligation to be involved with mentoring youth in and out of prison. We can volunteer in organizations the conduct outreach activities and provide support services to foster the rehabilitation, reparation, and restoration of incarcerated youth to functional citizenship.

Can youth leaders communicate effectively with troubled youth in ways that perhaps their parents cannot?

The key to youth leaders effectively communicating to trouble youth is to provide a safe, confidential, a mutually respectful environment and facilitate a consistent pathway for communication between teens and their parents. Youth leaders must always bear in mind that they cannot override or undermine the parental or guardian authority. Youth leaders, however, can act as facilitators when necessary or where possible among youth and their parents. It is certain that, youth leaders can mentor a youth and model for them an example in discipleship, which can translate what it means to be living in modern realities and contexts.

Tell us a little bit about how you approach Black History Month and what its significance is for you.

I consider Black history month as a climax to a year long celebration of the joy it is to be human, female, and black in the United States. It is a way for us as a people to commemorate our heritage with recognition, pride, accountability and a renewal of courage to forge ahead. It earmarks the importance of remaining connected with the themes of liberation, social justice, cooperative economics, family values, and ecological responsibility that serve to characterize focal points of interests in building a communal wellness agenda throughout the rest of the year.

What can the Catholic Church do, beyond liturgy and celebration, to have a practical impact on the lives of young people and draw them closer to Jesus?

As a young adult I strive to live out my faith daily, not just practice my religion as matter of obligation to tradition. I perceive going beyond liturgy and celebration as a major religious and social issue of insurmountable importance. In our church there is an increasing need for more open and widely supported cross generational leadership and cultural inclusion to be actualized and affirmed. Young people (of all ages) who are frequently coined by church leaders as “ the future of the church” must be unconditionally invited, genuinely engaged, and thoroughly encouraged to be counted as valued disciples of Christ, in the present.

Young people must be trained, mentored, and treated as accountable agents of evangelization. As such youth and young adult must be included in steering the processes that implement liturgical activities, sacred scripture study, and community service. In this way the church can evolve into a collaborative model that upholds a sincere ethic of inclusion. Thus, striving continuously to meet the critical responsibility we all have as Christians (*meaning to be Christ like consistently*). It is my earnest conviction that we are called collectively to embrace the great gift of cultural and cross generational diversity as a divinely meaningful function of our human experience, sacramental lives, community development, and spiritual enlightenment.

What can the leaders of the black Catholic community do to bring about greater unity in the whole community, including both youth and adults?

We need to be willing to come together with an openness to accept each other in the fullness of who we are in the Diaspora of people of African Ancestry. We have a responsibility to resume our ancestral precepts to communal wellness and spiritual integrity. It is essential that we play an active role in evangelizing each other through praying, renewing our commitment to reading sacred scripture and applying the wisdom of its lessons to our modern day collective as well as individual circumstances, together as a body of believers.

What are the opportunities and challenges that face Haitian youth in the Diaspora? How can you use your position of influence, especially among young people, to help the people of Haiti and Haitians living in the Diaspora?

Haitian Youth in the Diaspora face a number of challenges. I would like to reference not only my own personal experience but that of Dr. Millery Polyné who recalls his experience of growing up in the U.S. city of Boston, “In the 1970s and 80s, many Haitians were seen as

refugees, low wage earners, vodou practicing people. The black and white American communities, as is typical in most places, tend to marginalize new ethnic groups on the block. Kids are picked on. Mothers and fathers are insulted. Employers relegate them to certain jobs.” (Backer, Alice E. “*Second Generation Nation: Mill Polyné PhD on Growing up Haitian in America*”, [Kiskéacity](#) 11/2005) Accordingly Alice Backer, founder of [Global Voices Lingua](#), relates to the view point of reknowned artists of this generation such as Wyclef Jean, she states “In his song [Lavi New York](#) (*Life in New York*) he talks in Creole about being attacked and beaten up in public school. He says "Male lekòl/ Ameriken te atakem, panikem, maltretem/ Fe saw vle, ou pakab dechoukem/...Respekte Ayisyen natif natal" ("I went to school/ Only to be beaten up/ However much you tried you couldn't uproot us/... Better learn to respect us Haitians.")” (et al., Backer, 11/2005)

Experts examining the affects of post traumatic stress among at risk Haitian youth immigrants have found that, “Conditions of poverty, unemployment, and underemployment have persisted in South Florida's Haitian population despite the notable willingness of these newcomers to spend additional energy acquiring schooling that had not been available in Haiti.” *J Ethn Subst Abuse*. 2005; 4(2): 115–138. Albeit, immigrant Haitian youth as well as U.S. born Haitian-American youth often share in some of the coarse circumstances described. Overall an account of their diasporic experience would not be accurately illustrated without my acknowledging the resilience of their ability to overcome these odds. A resilience that can be directly attributed to the staples of core cultural values we maintain as a Haitian people. As I commented earlier in our conversation, it has been my experience that core values such as diligence, self-determination, and an sense of cultural prestige are fundamental elements of my own upbringing as a black woman, who is Haitian-American of African Ancestry, born in the United States. The importance of education and perseverance remain the cornerstones of my own beaten path to meeting success and achieving my personal, spiritual, as well as professional aspirations. As such it is my firmest conviction to remain true to myself, to be willing to take the responsibility that is required of us all to set the a good example for young people, by upholding the principle that in fact I am my brothers keeper.

From June 20 to June 22, The National Center will have its 26^h Annual Convention, with powerful speakers for young people. Can you offer any advice on how to attract more young people to attend this important gathering?

It is important to assure young people that they are the central focus of why the gathering is taking place. Peer youth leaders and organizers must take the time out to invite, and get young people involved in the planning process as well as to participate in the event. Likewise, in advance of the gathering we should hold some preliminary focus groups with young people to survey the topics and issues relevant to them. We must seize every opportunity we can to engage youth and young adults in dialogue, decision making and training activities that relate to their modern day circumstances. This spirit of inclusion and the validated input of youth and young adults always proves effective when convening them at faith encounters such as the Annual Convention.

On February 14, we celebrate the feast of St. Valentine. This day has come to be about flowers and greeting cards and gifts. What do you see as the real meaning of the day?

Valentine's Day is a day to celebrate romantic love. Being that I am one "my parents' love children" I have countless examples of what makes love, even in a romantic context very meaningful. Of course by far the greatest model of love I have ever encountered spiritually is in God our Creator, who is Love Eternal and Christ the son, who is our Savior. In my own love relationships I do not wait on Valentines Day to remind me to give or receive flowers, cards, or gifts. I am well contented with participating in sincere acts and activities of the heart all year round.

What is your advice for young people trying to be good Christians in this culture?

As a Christian growing up the best advice I ever received was "Seek ye God first." Later as a teenage Christian I was often told to "keep it real" and "keep it moving." As an adult Christian, I realize that in a forward motion I have always been called to be self actualized in my faith. Today, young people may say "bring it" and in the past they may have said to one another "Bring it on." In the media the connotation of what "It" means is some kind of confrontation, provocation, or agitation. Well in the grander scheme of things I do challenge youth and young adults, especially Christians, to "bring it", "bring it on", in kreyol "pote l vini." The "It" I am referring to means to bring on the Word of God incarnate as the Christ in you. We are called to bring God's light to this dark world and eradicate today's death culture perspective. Be yourselves which is the light, thrive on the application of God's Word that's our promise, and keep the faith to live as we have been destined by God's design. I dare to call the question, as I echo the sentiments of Marianne Williamson quoted by Pres. Nelson Mandela "...We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, handsome, talented and fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God."

What is your experience of being both black and Catholic in this society?

My experience is that there lies a tension when it comes to being black and catholic. This tension is a dual consciousness resulting from the social and institutional ills of past and present racist constructs in this society. I am a black woman of Haitian descent and African Ancestry. I am a native born US citizen and I am a believer, a cradle Catholic (universal) Christian (disciple of Christ). Intrinsicly all these are the very ingredients by which God forged my soul in His divine image and likeness. As such the affirmation of this intrinsic integration is an inconvenient reality for the dominant culture. As a black person who is catholic my sense of self then is manifest entirely by God's design. In life's daily strides to earn a living, build a career, pursue a quality of life existence and identify an amiable platform in the church where I can serve along side other disciples of Christ, the validity of my heritage is all too often misunderstood or ignored altogether. Underlying this misunderstanding or utter disregard, for that which it means to me to be black, Christian, and catholic, is the exploitation of the critical elements of my heritage rather than the promotion of a holistic acceptance of these elements. First, in the balance of being black and catholic, I find my best recourse is to be engaged in study of sacred scripture, worship, sacramental life, and ministry. Second, I remain steadfast and committed to serving youth, fellow young adults as well as my elders. Third, I work towards building and support

initiatives of evangelization that endeavor to fully and authentically embrace being black, Christian, and catholic.

What do you see as the future of the black Catholic community in this country?

Well that all depends on whether or not we are genuinely vested in the authorship of our own story and remain steadfast in the belief that God has our times. In this country today, members of the Black Catholic Community are faced with its blended share of challenges as well as promises. To that end I tend to agree with Dr. Christopher Ann Beasley regarding an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) approach. This is an organizational change model that promotes proactive self and communal examination. AI strives towards a constructive self-determination and sustainable communal wellness outcomes. It fosters the development of resource methods and materials that can well serve as a driving force of change within the Black Catholic Community. None the less we are also called to express our faith and avail our selves to reach beyond the surface of our faith norms. As a young adult lay leader it is my earnest hope that in our community there could be a greater effort made across generational lines such that laity and clergy, men and women, youth and elders to cooperatively respond to God's call upon us all to build His kingdom together. This is the promise of legacy that the generations before mine need to pass on and we in turn must empower and impart to the younger generations growing up now.

What do you think about the elevation of Bishop Guy Sansaricq as the first Haitian Catholic Bishop in this country? How can the leaders of our community use the rare opportunity presented by Bishop Sansaricq's elevation to advance the cause of our community in this country?

I think that Bishop Guy's appointment is merited and an office of distinction. Albeit, "To whom much is given much is required." It is, in my humble opinion, what makes Bishop Guy's appointment such a rare opportunity as presented by his elevation to the Office of Pastoral Vicar to Black Catholics in New York. The tenure of his priesthood resonates with his authentically Christ like approach to leadership. In the simplest terms I mean to say that as a leader he is willing to listen, be of service and provide guidance without burdening us with the airs of opportunism and conceit. As a community it behooves us to embrace this example at any capacity at which we are called to serve in leadership in the church and the community at large.

I understand you are involved in some upcoming programs planned for New York in 2009 future. What can you tell us about that?

Well as you know, in the last eight years Youth J.A.M. Jesus program has been collaboratively hosted by the Ambassadors of the Word and the auspices of the Dioceses of Downstate New York. We look forward to Youth JAM being celebrated within the Archdiocese of New York on January 24, 2009. Moreover, on the national front, the Ambassadors of the Word is also launching, the **Youth J.A.M. for Jesus "Freedom Series"** which is also being hosted by AOW affiliates in the U.S. As such Youth J.A.M for Jesus Celebrations will be taking place throughout the country in January of 2009.

I am also excited to announce that our annual national youth conference the **Sankofa**

Summit XII 2009, is scheduled to take place in New York on June 25-28, 2009. Our theme for this coming year's conference is ***"Generation Blessed Called Qualified."*** Our theme for this coming year is rooted in our conference motto which is ***"...New wine needs new wineskins."*** **Mark 2:22**. Featured highlights include a field trip to the UN, the AOW enrichment institute, our gospel concert "Kingdom Fest", and a high spirited Youth and Young adult liturgy. I am elated that we are all about the praise, for it will not be left to the rocks to cry out on our behalf.

Finally, can you give us an insight into your own spirituality?

God's gift of life is a journey that has afforded me the opportunity to taste and see God's amazing grace and enduring mercy through all my senses, intuitive intelligence, and faith encounters as a believer. The divine is very real to me. Charismatic Catholic Christian are terms I commonly use interchangeably and as such, these identifiers all frame the elements of my spiritual identity. Albeit my spirituality is rooted in the conviction that I am a spiritual being having a human experience. The person of Christ who is my savior is the person I have been wired to be like especially when it comes to "loving my neighbor as myself." The Holy Spirit is God's breath made tangible to me, infused into me, and sustaining my very existence. I count on God, God's Word, Grace and Mercy for everything as oppose to depending on my own strength or that of any human institution to define me, love me and deliver me. God's love for me has not and will not ever fail.

Thank you so much for agreeing to answer our questions, JoAnn. I thank you Br. Tob for interviewing me. Exclusive interview with JoAnn Perou, one of the shining stars in faithful and service to the community, by Frère Buteau (Brother Tob) for The National Center.