

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Bridgett Demery Jackson Brister **COLLECTION:** 4700.0855

IDENTIFICATION: Bridgett D. J. Brister is a Baton Rouge, Louisiana native. She attended St. Francis Xavier Catholic School and has been a church member there for many years.

INTERVIEWER: Paula Jacobi, Shawnte Green

SERIES: McKinley High School Oral History Project - African American Churches

INTERVIEW DATE: June 16, 1997

FOCUS DATES: 1960 - 1997

ABSTRACT:

Tape 1229, Side A

Born in Baton Rouge, Louisiana; baptized and attended school through eighth grade at St. Francis Xavier; St. Francis bazaars were famous for home cooked food, games, and crafts; discussion of Creole versus Cajun food; explanation of the school and church grounds, where buildings were torn down, moved to or built; her early religious experiences were “more rote learning,” didn’t gain a full appreciation for mass until adulthood; involvement in church life increased as she got older; role of the church in her community; negative impact when Interstate 10 was built, her family and others forced to move; neighborhood and community were fractured; residents appealed to federal government to stop construction; began attending St. Paul Catholic Church after moving; mother encouraged her back to St. Francis years later; first African-American priest at St. Francis and his strong Afrocentric influence; to satisfy all church members, traditional and more Afrocentric masses are held at different times; says “traditional” forty-five minute mass is too short; attending church is about give and take; more participation in song, dance, and knowledge of the Bible, overall more involved in mass; congregation melds traditional Catholic elements and Afrocentric themes; role of women in the church is moving forward; women preaching on occasion, those knowledgeable of “the word and doctrine of the church”; The St. Francis Xavier name came from the first Josephite parish; individuals involved in building of the church and preservation of records and photos; Father Peter Hogan provided material for seventy-fifth anniversary booklet compiled by Brister; congregation mainly young families, parishioners come from many surrounding towns and parishes.

Tape 1229, Side B

Partnership between St. Francis Xavier (predominantly African-American) and St. Thomas More Catholic Church (predominantly white); joint masses twice a year and activities including an Undoing Racism Workshop with the People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond; discussing current events and the role of African-Americans in the Diocese of Baton Rouge; involvement in political activities independent of church affiliation; People’s Institute workshops include bonding activities followed by intense dialogue sessions; cultural differences between whites and

blacks; “a lot of times people don’t realize they are racist”; definition of redlining in predominantly black neighborhoods; one on one interaction makes a difference against racism; Brister’s service on many committees and organizations; perhaps moving to Saudi Arabia where husband works for Saudi Aramco; Bishop Alfred C. Hughes allowed an Afrocentric mass that attracted 2,000 people; discussion of her religious jewelry; recollection of the day John F. Kennedy was assassinated; book *Desegregating the Altar* written by a Josephite priest; St. Francis church built by its parishioners who scraped together resources; Catholic Church’s “open door policy” on black congregants.

TAPES: 1 (T1229)

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 1 hour 15 minutes

PAGES TRANSCRIPT: 36 pages

OTHER MATERIALS: Interviewer’s notes/word list, Interviewer comments (3 pages), Essay on interviewee by interviewer (8 pages), Interview data sheet, Correspondence (2 pages), Index (4 pages), Information on individuals mentioned in interview (3 pages)

RESTRICTIONS: None