RELIGION

With Much Gratitude

Dear Mr. Washington:

It is with much gratitude that we send this letter of thank you for your response to our request for you to participate in the Morning Star Missionary Baptist Church Annual Christmas Banquet.

This gala affair has touched many lives in terms of future aspirations leading many young people to aspire for positive citizenship. Guest speakers have challenged us to become batons of hope: speakers such as Quaford Coleman, Black Journalist for Gospel Today Magazine and Benjamin Hooks, former president of the NAACP, just to name a few.

Very truly yours

Ms. Karen Smith
Banquet Chairperson
Rev. A. Wayne Johnson, Pastor
Morning Star Missionary Baptist Church

Bishop Wilton Gregory Elected Vice President Of Bishops' Conference

The Catholic Bishops of the United States elected Bishop Wilton D. Gregory of Belleville, Illinois to a three-year term as vice President of the National Conference, of Catholic Bishops and United States Catholic Conference (NCCB/USCC).

Bishop Gregory, 50, is the first Black to be elected Vice President of the Conferences. He succeeds Bishop Joseph A. Fiorenza of Galveston-Houston who was elected president.

Wilton D. Gregory was born December 7, 1947, in Chicago, the son of Wilton and Ethel Duncan Gregory. He attended Carthage Grammar School, Quigley Preparatory Seminary South, Niles College of Loyola, and St. Mary of the Lake Seminary. Three years after his ordination to the priesthood he began graduate studies at the Pontifical Liturgical Institute (Sant' Anselmo) in Rome. It was there that he earned his doctorate in Sacred Liturgy in 1980.

Bishop Gregory was ordained a priest of the Archdiocese of Chicago on May 9, 1973. He was ordained a Bishop on December 13, 1983, after having served as an associate pastor at Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish in Glenview, as a member of the faculty at Saint Mary of the Lake Seminary in Mundelein, and as a Master of Ceremonies to Cardinals Cody and Bernardin. Bishop Gregory was installed as the Seventh Bishop of Belleville on February 10, 1994, following ten years as Auxiliary Bishop of Chicago.

As a member of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, he served one term as Chairman of the bishops' committee on the Liturgy. He is currently a member of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops Committee on Doctrine, Committee on the Third Millennium/Jubilee Year 2000, and Ad Hoc Committee on Sexual Abuse, as well as the United States Catholic Conference Committee on International Policy.

He has written extensively on the subject of liturgy, particularly in the African-American community, for a variety of publications.

RAMADAN

By DEREK RASHEED

Allah (God) revealed the Qur'an, a book for mankind offering clear proofs of divine guidance with a criterion for right and wrong.

Muslims fast during the month of Ramadan. It is one of the five pillars of Islam and is a obligation of every Muslim to practice unless they are ill or on a journey. If any day of the month that the practice missed, they can make it up by feeding the hungry or by prolonging their fast.

Fasting is a source of self-restraint, piety and receiving God Consciousness. It was prescribed by Allah (God) for the Prophets before Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). In the Qur'an verses, Allah has pointed out its goal or purpose: "Fasting is a shield from the Hell-fire like one of your shields used in fighting."

Ramadan also comes as an intercessor on the Day of Judgement. The Prophet (pbuh) has said, "the fast and the Qur'an shall come as intercessors on the Day of Resurrection." The person fasting shall say. 'O Lord, I prevented him from his food and drink during the day, so let me intercede for him.' The Qur'an says, 'I kept him from sleep during the night, so let me intercede for him.' Then they will be allowed to intercede." It is an act that demonstrates one's sincerity to Allah. Only Allah (God) is aware if a person truly fasted or not. No one can know if he secretly broke his fast. Therefore, Allah has a special reward for those who fast.

Allah has said, "He leaves his food, drink and desires because of me. Fasting is for my sake and I shall reward it and every good deed shall be rewarded ten fold." By Allah's grace and mercy, if a person fasts the month of Ramadan with faith in Allah and hoping for its reward, Allah will forgive all of his previous minor sins.

The purpose of fasting is to release the spirit of man from the clutches of desire and moderation prevailed in his carnal self. And through it, he can realize the goal of purification and everlasting felicity. It is aimed at curtailing the intensity of desire and lust by means of hunger and thirst to induce him to realize how many were there in the world like him who had to go even without a small quantity of food - at making it difficult for the Devil to deceive him and at restraining his organs from turning towards things in which there was the loss of both worlds. Fasting, thus, is the bridle of the God-fearing, the shield of the crusaders and the discipline of the virtuous.

Ramadan starts on the sighting of the new moon and runs thirty days after the first ten days of seeking Allah (God) and Mercy, the second ten days of our seeking Allah (God) for forgiveness and the last ten days of our seeking freedom from the Hell fire in the hereafter.

Ramadan brings spiritual uplifting to its observer. It has been reported that Allah's Messenger (pbuh) has said, "When Ramadan begins, the gates of Paradise are open, the gates of hell are locked and devils are chained." Fasting in Islam involves abstinence from the three primal physical needs of human beings – food, drink and sexual intercourse from dawn (approximately 1 ½ hours before sunrise to sunset) with the intention of fasting. There are however, no restrictions regarding these physical needs during the night time.

May Allah bless all of you with success in completing this holy month.