

COMMITTEE FOR UNDERREPRESENTED ETHNIC AND RACIAL GROUPS
(CUERG) DISTINGUISHED SCHOLAR-LEADER AWARD

Chair: Leo Guardado, Fordham University
Committee
Members: Byron Wratee, Loyola University Baltimore
Andrew Massena, Loras College

During the 2025 CUERG Luncheon, the Committee for Underrepresented Ethnic and Racial Groups presented the second annual CUERG Distinguished Scholar-Leader Award. This year's recipient was Dr. Kathleen Dorsey Bellow. In presenting her the award, the following citation was read:

Siblings in Christ, let us bless the Lord God, the Source of all goodness, the Savior and Sustainer of all things, for guiding every event and inspiring the faithful to bless and praise all human works. Let us bless the Lord for the life, work, scholarship, mentorship, and witness of the recipient of the 2025 CUERG Distinguished Scholar-Leader Award: Dr. Kathleen Dorsey Bellow.

Dr. Dorsey Bellow, a Baltimore native, grew up near the US's first Black Catholic parish, the oldest operating Black Catholic school, the first successful Black Catholic women's religious order, and the first and only religious order dedicated to the evangelization of African Americans. The historically Black Catholic parish of St. Cecilia served as her first ecclesial community, teaching her to center her life, ministry, and scholarship around the Black Catholic community.

Dr. Dorsey Bellow earned her first degrees in Spanish and business. As a member of the first class of women to complete a full four years at Baltimore's Loyola College, she was one of the first Black women to graduate from Loyola in 1975. In many respects, she was ideally positioned to break barriers, being the firstborn of Charles Dorsey, Jr., who desegregated Loyola in 1949 as its first full-time Black student. After graduating, she worked as a translator in the Social Security Administration's Division of International Operations and also taught at Holy Angels Catholic School in Chicago.

In 1977, she married Paul L. Bellow, a marine engineer, and moved to Lake Charles, Louisiana, where she earned her Master of Business Administration from McNeese State University in 1987. She then worked as a business counselor at the local Small Business Development Center, managed a consulting firm specializing in small business planning, and served as president of the Lake Charles North Redevelopment Authority Board. As an active member of Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish in Lake Charles, Louisiana, she has participated in parish, diocesan, regional, and national ministries. She is a former principal of Sacred Heart/Saint Katharine Drexel Catholic School in Lake Charles, Louisiana. In addition to her roles in various ministries for the Diocese of Lafayette and the Diocese of Lake Charles, she also served as a team member of the North American Forum on the Catechumenate.

Encouraged by her pastor, she started the master's degree program at the Institute for Black Catholic Studies (IBCS), a school of theology that meets during the summer at Xavier University of Louisiana. Since the summer of 1989, she has rarely missed a session at the IBCS, which she lovingly calls her spiritual home. After earning her Master of Theology degree from the IBCS, she went on to earn a Doctor of Ministry

in Liturgical Studies at the Catholic Theological Union, a post-Vatican II seminary for twenty-one religious communities and lay students focused on intercultural and ecumenical partnerships. Her research focuses on how Vatican II's liturgical theology has been received and on the role of the laity's full, active participation in Black Catholic parishes.

"I never meant to be a professor," Dorsey Bellows once said. "Academia felt too stuffy—I've always been a grassroots, 'people-in-the-pew' kind of person." Yet love has a way of calling us where we least expect. Drawn by a deep devotion to the Institute for Black Catholic Studies, Dr. Dorsey Bellows remained rooted in the life of historically Black colleges and the Black Catholic theological tradition. Over the years, she served the IBCS in many roles—volunteer, staff assistant, and associate director. Then, in 2019, providence and irony met. Dr. Dorsey Bellow now holds the Drexel Society Endowed Professorship in Black Catholic Studies in Xavier's Theology Department and serves as the Director of the IBCS. In addition to her work at Xavier, Dr. Bellows has served as a past convener of the Black Catholic Theological Symposium (BCTS), the nation's only theological society in the Black Catholic tradition.

Dr. Kathleen Dorsey Bellows is not only a guiding light within the IBCS and BCTS—she is also a vital presence in the Catholic Theological Society of America (CTSA). One nominator for the CUERG Distinguished Scholar-Leader Award put it best: Dr. Bellows is widely known for her "long-time dedication to support and promote the theological endeavors of underrepresented and underrecognized scholars." The CTSA, they noted, has been deeply enriched by her commitment to Black Catholic Studies and her bridge-building across marginalized communities.

Together with her friend and colleague, Dr. C. Vanessa White, she has supported CUERG's work and has worked tirelessly to keep Black liberation and Black Catholic theology at the heart of CTSA discourse. In addition to convening the Black Catholic Theology Consultation, she has spearheaded an invited session and a three-year interest group focusing on the liberating theology of James Hal Cone. For the 2024 CTSA gathering in Baltimore, she convened a timely and powerful session titled "Baltimore and the Black Catholic Experience," spotlighting the struggles and hopes of Black Catholic parishes through the voices of lay catechists, organizers, and legal advocates.

Her influence extends beyond the CTSA's annual convention. Dr. Bellows has mentored almost every CTSA early career scholar and doctoral student—Catholic or Protestant—who researches Black Catholic experiences. She has created opportunities for them at the IBCS by offering adjunct teaching roles that help emerging scholars connect their theology to the lived faith of Black Catholic communities. As one recommender so rightly said, "As a theologian, Dr. Bellow is shaping the future of the guild, Catholic higher education, and the church."

Dear CUERG colleagues and friends, please join me in praising God for Dr. Kathleen Dorsey Bellow and warmly welcoming her as she accepts the 2025 CUERG Distinguished Scholar-Leader Award.

LEO GUARDADO
Fordham University
Bronx, New York