Kujenga leadership retreats develop strong African American Catholic youth leaders in dioceses around the country. In the Diocese of Birmingham, Kujenga is incorporated into Confirmation formation during Lent. It has been instrumental for healing the young church in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. While some dioceses maintained a continuous program, others rebooted Kujenga after a hiatus through the commitment of Kujengans (alums) who went to college, established careers and families, but never forgot the transformative encounter they had as teenagers.

Several alums like Thomessia Moore-Lawson became seasoned youth ministers and leaders in their parishes and communities. As she recalled, “Kujenga was a magical once-in-a-lifetime experience. We participated in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, Mass (with drums); wore African headdress, had African poetry and healthy conversation about the Church’s positions on race relations. We also learned about influential African American Catholics. We were an elite group of proud Catholic African Americans who discussed how to defend our faith - armed with knowledge of who we were, where we came from and to whom we belonged.”

Kujengan Shaniqua Wilson from the Diocese of Brooklyn, formerly from Rockville Centre, recalls that through Kujenga she traveled to Rome. She met Sr. Thea Bowman FSPA, Most Reverend Emerson Moore, who confirmed her, and twin priests Charles and Chester Smith as seminarians.

Begun in Chicago in the 1970s as the vision of Fr. Martin Carter SA (Franciscan Friar of the Atonement), today many desire to update and bring the Kujenga experience to a national platform. James Watts, Director of Black Catholic Ministry in Birmingham is proud of alums who became leaders in the movement and continue serving the diocese well. He beams as they pass the torch to the next generation.
Stepping outside comfort zones to spend days in a rustic environment, youth from different geographic areas meet at the intersection of Catholic Faith and African American culture. Here they enjoy enriching activities, impressive talks and bonding with other youth. The testimony of Kujenga is that emerging leaders gain confidence to accept new roles as servant leaders wherever they land. Think of Kujenga as Christ Kwanzaa year-round.

206. Ministry has to be synodal; it should involve a “journeying together” that values “the charisms that the Spirit bestows in accordance with the vocation and role of each of the Church’s members, through a process of co-responsibility... Motivated by this spirit, we can move towards a participatory and co-responsible Church, one capable of appreciating its own rich variety, gratefully accepting the contributions of the lay faithful, including young people and women, consecrated persons, as well as groups, associations and movements. No one should be excluded or exclude themselves.” —Pope Francis, Christus Vivit