



The Roman Catholic  
Archdiocese of Washington

## ***Celebrating Black Catholic History Month – November 2024***

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November is a significant month for honoring the contributions and heritage of Black Catholics in the United States. The observance was designated as **Black Catholic History Month** by the National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus on July 24, 1990. In November, we celebrate the feasts of All Saints and All Souls in loving remembrance, it is the birth month of St. Augustine, and when we celebrate the feast of St. Martin de Porres, the first Black saint of the Americas. The focus provides an opportunity for reflection, learning, and celebration, as parishes and ministries are encouraged to incorporate the lessons and legacy of Black Catholics into their spiritual life, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation within the community.

### **2024 Commemoration of Black Catholic History Month**

Join us to commemorate Black Catholic History Month by participating in *Pilgrimage to Black Catholic 'Roots' in Southern Maryland* on Saturday, November 16, 2024. St. Peter Claver Catholic Church, in St. Inigoes, Maryland. We invite everyone to come together on this journey to explore and celebrate the rich history that unites us as a Catholic community. The St. Peter Claver Catholic Church complex is a significant landmark of African American history in St. Mary's County, Maryland. The pilgrimage will begin with a welcome and historical overview followed by a guided walking tour of the historical grounds. This is a wonderful opportunity to deepen our understanding and appreciation of Black Catholic heritage in Southern Maryland. The pilgrimage will culminate with the Black Catholic History Month Mass at St. Peter Claver Catholic Church, celebrated by Archdiocese of Washington Auxiliary Bishop Roy E. Campbell, Jr., followed by a reception.

### **Ways to Celebrate**

It's a time for unity, learning, and honoring the diverse tapestry of faith within the Church. Parishes and ministries can use this month to explore the rich traditions, struggles, and achievements of Black Catholics. This can be done through educational programs, special liturgies, and community activities that foster understanding and appreciation. Engage your parish's intercultural committee or others to plan and participate. Please contact Karen Fowler of the Office of Cultural Diversity and Outreach at [fowlerk@adw.org](mailto:fowlerk@adw.org) for assistance with liturgical resources

### **A Place at the Table – Documentary Film Screening**

Parishes and ministries are invited to host a screening of the documentary film, *A Place at the Table*, which tells the story of the lives of the first six Black Americans on the path to Catholic sainthood. Learn more about these outstanding men and women and hear of their lives of faith. We can make a difference by sharing their stories, contributions, and impact on so many people's lives. Please click [here](#) for additional information and to schedule a date for a screening.

## Making Disciples Of All Nations

Share the stories of these Black Catholics who ministered in the United States and support their canonization causes. For additional information on the lives of these remarkable individuals, visit their websites. Click on the links provided below:

- 1. Venerable Father Augustus Tolton (April 1, 1854 – July 9, 1897)**  
When he was ordained in 1886, Augustus Tolton was the first Roman Catholic priest in the United States officially known to be Black. *See*, [Augustus Tolton website](#)
- 2. Venerable Pierre Toussaint (June 27, 1766 – June 20, 1853)**  
Pierre Toussaint was born into slavery in Haiti. He became a freeman, successful businessman and philanthropist in New York City. *See*, [Pierre Toussaint website](#)
- 3. Venerable Henriette Delille (March 11, 1813 – Nov. 17, 1862)**  
Henriette Delille was born in New Orleans, Louisiana, where she lived all her life. In 1842, she founded the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Family. *See*, [Henriette Delille website](#).
- 4. Venerable Mother Mary Elizabeth Lange (1784 – Feb. 3, 1882)**  
Mother Mary Elizabeth Lange was the founder and first Superior General of the Oblate Sisters of Providence *See*, [Mother Mary Elizabeth Lange website](#).
- 5. Servant of God Julia Greeley (1833-1848 – June 7, 1918)**  
Julia Greeley was born into slavery, at Hannibal, Missouri, sometime between 1833 and 1848. Freed by Missouri's Emancipation Act in 1865, she joined the Secular Franciscan Order in 1901 and was active in it until her death in 1918. *See*, [Julia Greeley website](#).
- 6. Servant of God Sister Thea Bowman, FSPA (Dec. 29, 1937 – March 30, 1990)**  
Sister Thea Bowman was born in 1937 and reared in Canton, Mississippi. As a child, she converted to Catholicism. She joined the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration. *See*, [Sister Thea Bowman website](#)

## Additional Celebration Ideas

- All parishes are invited to plan a special liturgy to celebrate the rich cultural expression of Black Catholics in the Church and our country. Engage your parish's intercultural committee or others to plan and participate. Please contact Karen Fowler of the Office of Cultural Diversity and Outreach at [fowlerk@adw.org](mailto:fowlerk@adw.org) for assistance with liturgical resources.
- Host a gathering to invite an ambassador from one of the guilds supporting their sainthood causes to give a presentation on the life of one of the "Holy Six" Black Catholics on the path to canonization. Please contact the Office of Cultural Diversity and Outreach at [culturaldiversity@adw.org](mailto:culturaldiversity@adw.org) for more information.
- Storytelling is a wonderful way to share history and build relationships in parish communities. Identify and invite member(s) of your parish community who have expertise and experience about, or as, a Black Catholic to tell their story.

- *What We Have Seen and Heard – A Pastoral Letter on Evangelization* from the Black Bishops of the United States (1984). Commemorate the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary by hosting prayer services, and study sessions to revisit this significant milestone. Please see the resource links below:
  - [A Video Reflection from Cardinal Gregory](#)
  - [Pastoral Letter](#)
  - [Study Guide](#)
  - [WWHSH Prayer Card](#)
  
- Black Catholics have a rich history and dedication to social action. Learn about the resources to assist in addressing issues and concerns that affect Black Catholics. The National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry has developed a variety of resources to address racism and discrimination. [Explore the resources here.](#)
  
- Black Catholics have a rich history of faith and culture through musical ministry. Share the gift of music by inviting musicians from the diaspora to perform music from their cultural traditions during the Mass or consider having your own parishes’ music ministries perform representative selections from “Lead Me, Guide Me: The African American Catholic Hymnal.” Please contact the Office of Cultural Diversity and Outreach at [culturaldiversity@adw.org](mailto:culturaldiversity@adw.org) for more information.
  
- Plan a family pilgrimage to visit the Black Catholic roots of Southern Maryland. See link for several sites listed to plan your visit. <https://www.visitstmarysmd.com/explore/museums-history/african-american/>

## Additional Resources

- The Story of the St. Inigoes Mission 1634-1994 by Fr. Francis Michael Walsh published by the Maryland Historical Society. Fr Walsh served as Pastor of St. Peter Claver Catholic Church in St. Inigoes from 1977-1986. His book is available from the St. Mary’s County Historical society at [www.stmaryshistory.org](http://www.stmaryshistory.org).
  
- **Catholic Standard articles:**

Maryland State Historic Marker commemorates history of St. Peter Claver Catholic Church complex in St. Inigoes  
<https://www.cathstan.org/local/maryland-state-historic-marker-commemorates-history-of-st-peter-claver-catholic-church-complex-in-st-inigoes>

At St. Peter Claver cemetery, Cardinal Gregory blesses marker honoring unknown enslaved people buried there, connecting parish’s past to its present  
<https://www.cathstan.org/faith/at-st-peter-claver-cemetery-cardinal-gregory-blesses-marker-honoring-unknown-enslaved-people-buried-there-connecting-parish-s-past-to-its-present>

## WAYS TO ENHANCE CELEBRATIONS:

- Exhibit symbols that reflect African American Culture: Pictures, religious symbols, kente cloth, Bible enthronements Ex: Jesus Mafa (posters of Black Biblical scenes)
- Host a gathering to highlight essays and poetry, or present plays about Black Catholics
- Create/Develop/Design Liturgy Celebrations/Prayer Services
- Acknowledge the service of African American Religious orders that serve African Catholics by hosting a virtual panel discussion or meeting with members of the Josephites, Oblate Sisters of Providence, and/or Sisters of the Holy Family. Please contact the Office of Cultural Diversity and Outreach at [culturaldiversity@adw.org](mailto:culturaldiversity@adw.org) for more information.