



WOMEN WITNESSES OF MERCY

CELEBRATING THE EXTRAORDINARY WITNESS
OF WOMEN DURING THE YEAR OF MERCY



Art by Marcy Hall

**"I am here
because
I am a Negro,
a nun,
a Catholic,
and
because
I want to bear
witness"**

-Sr. Antona Ebo

Sister Antona Ebo

"I'm Gonna Do What the Spirit Says Do"

On Sunday March 7, 1965, Alabama state troopers and local police beat and bloodied civil rights activists who had begun a 50-mile march from Selma to Montgomery, the state capital.

Immediately following the "Bloody Sunday" attack, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. issued a call for church leaders around the country to come to Selma and to join in the struggle for civil rights.

On March 10th, Sister Antona Ebo, a Franciscan Sister of Mary, took off from Saint Louis, Missouri to Selma on a chartered plane that she jokes had been pulled out of mothballs. On March 11th the cover of The New York Times featured a photo of Sister Antona marching alongside other protesters. That photo would become an iconic image of the struggle for voting rights.

Throughout her life -- before and after Selma -- Sister Ebo, now 91, has been a civil rights pioneer. She credits the Holy Spirit for guiding her throughout her life and often sings the black spiritual, "I'm Gonna Do What the Spirit Says Do" whenever she talks to audiences about her experience in Selma and the ongoing struggle for racial justice. Indeed, the guidance of the Holy Spirit, may be the only explanation for how Sister Antona ended up in Selma.

"Bap-tic" Heritage

The spiritual comes from what Ebo calls her "Bapt-tic" heritage -- a combination of Baptist and Catholic. Born in Bloomington, Illinois, Elizabeth Ebo was the daughter of Daniel and Louise Teal Ebo. Her grandfather was a Baptist minister and her family attended the local Baptist church.

When Ebo was just four years old, her mother died and her father lost his job as a library custodian soon after. When he could no longer afford to keep their house and Antona and her siblings, they went to live at the McLean County Home for Colored Children -- a fate shared by so many black children across the country during the Great Depression.

It was there, however, that Ebo says the Holy Spirit introduced her to Catholicism through a young boy who was Roman Catholic but had been barred from attending a Catholic church while he was at the home. When she was about nine years old, Ebo and the boy -- nicknamed "Bishop" (Bish for short) because of the Rosary beads he wore around his neck -- were sent to the bakery to pick up day-old bread. But on the way, Bish convinced his companion to go with him into a Catholic church.

There, as he knelt at the communion rail, Bish explained the Eucharist to her. Ebo, who became Catholic because of the Eucharist, says, "As

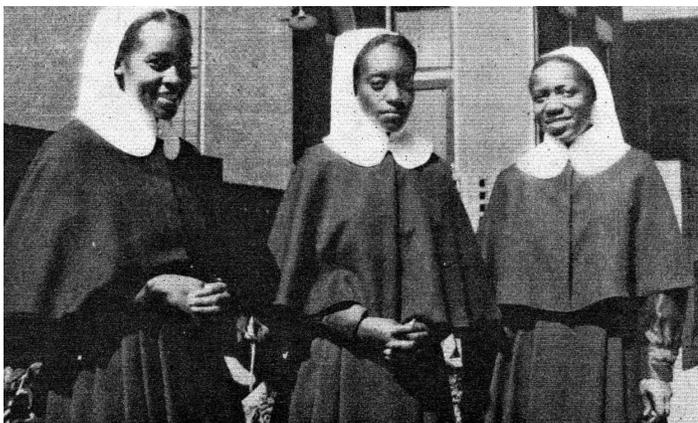
an adult, as I reflect on that story, I think we were on the way to pick up day-old bread for our body. And this child taught me about the bread of life that was on that altar."

"I lost the thumb and got religion"

A few years later, Ebo contracted tuberculosis and was in and out of the hospital. Her thumb would eventually become badly infected and need to be amputated. But her time spent in the hospital would provide her the opportunity to learn more about Catholicism and eventually convert. She jokes, "I lost the thumb and got religion."

While she was in the hospital, remembering the experience she had in the church with "Bish," she asked her nurse, Mary Southwick, to have the visiting priest come spend time with her. Soon the priest began teaching Ebo about Catholicism. Nurse Southwick and that same priest helped Ebo get into Holy Trinity Catholic High School. At the time, she was the school's only African American student and its first African American graduate.

There, she continued to learn about Catholicism and finally converted when she was 18 years old.



Left to Right: Ebo, Townsend, and Brickus -- the first three African-American women to join the Sisters of Mary (July 26, 1946)

A Nurse and Nun

Ebo had aspirations of becoming a nurse and after being rejected by numerous nursing schools, in 1942 she found herself at St. Mary's Infirmary a nursing school in St. Louis which was run by the Sisters of Mary (now the Franciscan Sisters of Mary). Soon after, in 1946, she and two other women – Pauline Townsend and Hilda Brickus -- became the first three African American postulants to join the order.

She took the name Sister Mary Antona from a Sinsinawa Dominican sister who had taught her math in

high school. "When I got finished with her, she gave up teaching and went to a cloister out in California!" she later joked with a reporter.

In the 1965, having earned degrees in medical records administration, Sr. Antona became the first director of the medical records department at St. Mary's and was in fact the first black supervisor in charge of any department at the hospital.

"God called my bluff"

On the morning of Monday, March 8, 1965 Sr. Antona listened as her employees told her of the events of the previous day, "Bloody Sunday." News reports of what had happened spread quickly because of television, and the employees recounted how protesters had been clubbed, beaten, bitten by police dogs and horsewhipped by authorities in Selma.

Sr. Antona remembers thinking and commenting, "If I didn't have this habit on, I would be down there with those people." Later she would remark, "It turned out that the habit was what got everyone's attention very quickly, because nuns had not been seen doing anything like that before."

On Tuesday evening she received a call from Sr. Eugene Marie, her superior and the hospital administrator, who asked her if she would be part of a 50-member interfaith delegation from St. Louis that included five other nuns, who were white. Archbishop Joseph Ritter had asked the human rights commission of the Archdiocese of St. Louis to respond to a plea from Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. for religious leaders to join the protests in Selma.

"God called my bluff," she later told a reporter. Sr. Antona was reluctant at first. "No, I wouldn't like to go to Selma," she first responded to Sister Eugene Marie. "I know I do a lot of fussing but I don't feel bad enough to want to go down there and be a martyr for somebody's voting rights," she continued. But eventually Sr. Antona decided she needed to "put up or shut up." The next morning she was on her way to Selma.

"You don't have to be white to be holy"

When the delegation from St. Louis arrived at Brown's Chapel AME Church, the headquarters for the Selma protesters, the six nuns were greeted warmly by one of the leaders, the Rev. Andrew Young, who asked the people to stand and acknowledge that "one of the great moral forces of the world has just walked in the door."



"I am Sister Mary Antona from St. Louis, Missouri...I might say that yesterday being Negro, I voted.

And I'd like to come here today and say that every citizen – Negro as well as white – should be given the right to vote.

That's why I am here today."

- Sr. Antona Ebo

Sr. Antona was the only black nun in the delegation that day and a new sight for many of the protesters.

The Rev. L.L. Anderson, pastor of Selma's Tabernacle Baptist Church remarked, "For the first time in my life, I am seeing a Negro nun." For him, Sr. Antona was living proof to the officials in Alabama and those who had beaten the protesters "that you don't have to be white to be holy." Sr. Antona remembers a young, black girl who ran up and embraced her saying that she knew sisters "but never had seen one like herself."

Sr. Antona's presence at the protest that day was certainly something to celebrate. But it also caused her tremendous fear. Looking around at the group that had gathered in the church she noted, "They had bandages on their heads, teeth were knocked out, crutches, casts on their arms. You could tell that they were freshly injured." She remembered hearing the story of one protester, the Rev. James Reeb, a white minister who had traveled to Selma from Boston and was chased and brutally beaten to death. "If they would beat a white minister to death on the streets of Selma, what are they going to do when I show up?" she wondered. She also knew that if she were arrested, she would be separated from the rest of the sisters since she would go to a segregated jail.

But Sr. Antona was inspired and emboldened by the crowds that packed the Church. "We're going to come on through like we always do!" they shouted. "They had already been through the battle ground, and they were still wanting to go back and go back and finish the job," Sr. Antona remembers.

Bearing Witness

"I just went to walk, not to talk," Ebo says. But being the only black nun drew the attention of both protest organizers and the press.

Organizers convinced her to speak to the crowd gathered in the Church. "I am here because I am a Negro, a nun, a Catholic, and because I want to bear witness," she said.

After addressing the crowd, Sr. Antona and the five other nuns led the group of protesters in a march. "They put the women in the front; all of the women were just the six of us," she recounts. The group was only able to march a short way that day before being met by a line of state troopers.

But Sr. Antona and the others began bearing witness to the press. When questioned about why she was there she responded, "We are here from St. Louis to demonstrate and to witness our love to our fellow citizens in Selma. We are here secondly, to protest the violation of rights."

She also told reporters that she was "Negro and very proud," adding, "I feel it a privilege to be here today. I am Sister Mary Antona from St. Louis, Missouri...I might say that yesterday being Negro, I voted. And I'd like to come here today and say that every citizen – Negro as well as white – should be given the right to vote. That's why I am here today."

By the end of the day, Sr. Antona and the rest of the delegation were on their way back to St. Louis, but they had made their mark. At home, Sr. Antona was an instant celebrity. Besides appearing on the front page of The New York Times, reporters from as far away as the Vatican were calling to speak with her.

From Selma to Ferguson

Sr. Antona has continued to bear witness since that day in Selma. In 1967 she became the executive director of St. Clare's Hospital in Baraboo, Wisconsin and the first African American woman to hold that position at a Catholic hospital in the United States. In 1968 she helped found the National Black Sisters' Conference and later served as its president.

Today, Sr. Antona continues to speak out, standing up for the dignity of African-Americans, women, and all of God's creation. "We are all made in the image and likeness of God, so there's more work to be done by every one of us," she says.

She lives just about eight miles from Ferguson, Missouri where the August 2014 fatal shooting of Michael Brown by police officer Darren Wilson sparked a national debate about modern-day racism, police training, the use of deadly force, and the relationship between law enforcement and African Americans.

Sr. Antona says that the protests in Ferguson and across the country are not unlike the marches held in Selma 50 years ago:

"When the young blacks in Ferguson speak, they are rabble-rousers, and that's what we were called when we went to Selma." She went on, "We were called rabble-rousers and dupes of the Communists because [then FBI director] J. Edgar Hoover was working so hard to prove that Martin Luther King was not a Christian but a Communist. People who had put their trust in J. Edgar Hoover rather than J.C., if only they would have put their trust in J.C., they would have been on the right side of this thing. It's the same kind of stuff that's happening now."

Speaking at various gatherings about the events in Ferguson and around the country, she reminds listeners that racism and injustice are ongoing problems, even

when there isn't unrest. "Every 20 years or so, we go through a new discontent," she reminds us. Convinced that people too often take the "easy route" out of such discontent, she says that the only way to solve the problem is through real dialogue between races and cultures: "Part of the problem is that we have not learned to listen to one another...not just someone talking up here at a podium, but taking the time to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit."

"How are we going to know each other as God's children if we have a group over here and a group over there?" she asks.

"We need to learn to listen to one another so that we understand the difference in culture, in our relationship and in the way we talk with one another – 'with' not 'at.'"

She challenges people to heed the example of the prophet Jeremiah who refused to remain silent regarding the sins of a people: "We've got to do what the Spirit says to do."

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Questions for Reflection & Discussion on the Witness of Sr. Antona Ebo



Art by Marcy Hall

What were your thoughts, feelings or reactions as you read Sr. Antona Ebo's story?

Sister Antona remembers that she initially used her work as an excuse not to go to Selma saying, "If I didn't have this habit on, I would be down there with those people." Have you found yourself making excuses for not getting involved in the work of justice? Did God "call your bluff"? How could your work, vocation, experience actually benefit the cause of justice?

Sister Antona urges greater cross-cultural and inter-racial dialogue: "'We need to learn to listen to one another so that we understand the difference in culture, in our relationship and in the way we talk with one another – 'with' not 'at.'" In what ways do you, your community, the Church, and society need to become better at talking 'with' and not 'at' one another?

In her public appearances and speeches, Sr. Antona often invokes the spiritual "I'm gonna do what the Spirit says do," challenging people to respond more fully to the call of the Spirit in their lives. How is the Spirit speaking to you through the witness of Sr. Antona? What is the Spirit calling you to do? How will you respond?



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More Black Catholic Women Witnesses of Mercy

Martha Jane Chisley Tolton

Martha Jane Chisley was born in February of 1834 to Augustine Chisley and Matilda Hurd, who were enslaved on a Kentucky farm. Her parents were baptized and instructed in the Catholic faith by John Manning, the owner of the farm and slaveholder, who himself was Catholic.

In 1849, at the age of 16, Martha was separated from her parents and moved to a farm in Ralls County, MO. She and Peter Paul Tolton were married at St. Peter's Catholic Church in Brush Creek, MO in the spring of 1851. According to the 1900 United States Census, Martha gave birth to seven children, but only three survived infancy (Charles, Augustus, and Anne). All the children were baptized and instructed in the Catholic faith.

According to accounts, in about 1861, Martha fled the farm with her three children to Quincy, Illinois. (Little information is known about what came of Martha's husband, Peter Paul. It is generally believed, however, that Peter escaped slavery sometime in 1861 with the intention of joining the Union army. The family later learned that he died at a hospital in St. Louis.)

In Quincy, Martha worked and struggled to put her children through school – including Catholic schools, where they faced discrimination, abuse, and ridicule before being forced out. In time, Martha's son Augustus began to discern a calling to the priesthood. Having been denied admission into seminaries in the U.S., Augustus studied in Rome and was ordained in 1886. He was the first Catholic priest in the United States of African descent to publicly identify as black.

Mother Mary (Elizabeth) Lange



Little is known about the early life of Mother Mary Lange, who would become the foundress of the Oblate Sisters of Providence, the first successful Roman Catholic sisterhood in the world established by women of African descent. Born in around 1794 in Cuba, Elizabeth Lange arrived in the United States in the early 1800s. By 1813, she had settled in Baltimore, MD where a large community of French-speaking Catholics from Haiti had been established.

At the time, there was no free public education for African American children in Maryland, and – having been well educated herself in Cuba – she recognized the need for the children of her fellow immigrants to receive a good education. And so, she and her friend, Marie Magdaleine Balas (who would later become Sister Frances) began operating a school in Lange's home for the children.

In 1829, Elizabeth and her friend accepted a proposal from Father James Hector Nicholas Joubert, a Sulpician priest, to start an order with the primary mission of teaching and caring for African American Children. After adding two more women, Rosine Boegue and Theresa Duchemin, they began studying to

become sisters and opened a Catholic school for girls, beginning St. Frances Academy, which is now the oldest continuously operating school for black Catholic Children in the United States.

On July 2, 1829 Elizabeth and the three other women professed their final vows and the Oblate Sisters of Providence became the first religious order of women of African descent. Taking the name Mary, Elizabeth became the order's first superior general and served in that role from 1829 to 1832 and again between 1835 and 1841. Mother Lange died in 1882.

The order grew over time and had reached over 300 by the 1950s. The sisters would go on to found schools in eighteen other states and missions in places like Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Costa Rica.

The order numbers approximately 80 women today and continues in Baltimore, Miami, Buffalo, and Alajuela and Siquirres, Costa Rica.

Mother Henriette DeLille



Henriette Delille was born in 1813, the youngest child of a French father, Jean Baptiste Delille, and a free woman of color, Josephine Diaz. Her mother, grandmother and great-grandmothers were all landowners, and Henriette's eventual inheritance of family property was to prove crucial to her mission. Her maternal forebears left another, even more valuable legacy. Their names are listed repeatedly in New Orleans baptismal registries as godmothers to many generations of black women (and some men), continuing the tradition of female religious instruction begun by their African foremothers.

At the age of 11, Henriette came under the tutelage of a French nun, Sr. St. Marthe Fontier. New Orleans' free people of color had given Fontier money to open a school for their daughters. Henriette proved to be an avid learner. With several friends she began to help Sr. St. Marthe in her work. By age sixteen Henriette and her friends were deeply absorbed in "visiting the sick and aged, feeding the indigent, teaching religion to the poor and the slave, and praying in church."

More and more, Henriette was drawn to her compassionate work among slaves. A defining moment came when her family registered as white in the 1830 census. Creoles of color, whose white complexion made their African heritage imperceptible, often crossed the color line to gain freedom from restrictive laws and to advance themselves. Henriette refused to follow them, choosing instead to continue her work at the school and her public association with slaves. She found a new "family" in lifelong friends and co-workers, Juliette Gaudin and Josephine Charles. Juliette and Josephine would eventually become co-founders of the Sisters of the Holy Family.

When Henriette came of age in 1835 she gained access to her inheritance, which she used to continue her work among the poor. She sold her property and, together with a zealous French woman, Marie-Jean Aliquot, as well as Juliette, Josephine and several other free women of color attempted to found a religious community of nuns called the Sisters of the Presentation. This community was to be short-lived however, because Aliquot was white and an 1830 law forbade interracial associations. The little group was forced to disband reinforcing the doubt that a female religious community of color would ever succeed in New Orleans.

In 1837 Henriette met Fr. Etienne Jean Francois Rousellon, a missionary from Lyons, France. He became deeply interested in the ministry of this small struggling community and worked to have them recognized.

In 1841, Rousellon managed to obtain ecclesiastical permission to attach the fledgling community to St. Augustine's Church. In 1842 they formally became a "religious association" and began to wear a plain blue dress as their religious garb. Racist opinions about the social status of black women were such that they were forbidden to wear a religious habit by the archbishop of New Orleans until 1872. The Sisters continue to wear a habit to this day believing they had "fought and suffered long enough to wear the veil and are not about to part with it."

In 1853, after courageously nursing New Orleans' poor through the yellow fever epidemic, the sisters finally gained the public affirmation that had so long eluded them. In gratitude for their unstinting care, the city

finally accepted the Sisters of the Holy Family as a black Catholic sisterhood.

Henriette and her sisters also bravely cared for the poor and wounded during and immediately after the Civil War. Worn out by work, Henriette died suddenly in 1862.

Today, the work of Henriette DeLille's descendants has spread to other parts of the United States as well as to Nigeria and Belize. In 1988 the Vatican found no obstacle to advancing her candidacy for sainthood, a cause now being pursued by her sisters and the Catholics of New Orleans.

Anna "Madre" Bates

Anna Bates was born on October 9, 1902 in the Port of Spain, Trinidad. During her childhood she moved to Montserrat in the Caribbean and later to Bermuda before arriving in Detroit, MI when she was 17 years old.

For years, Anna walked from her home to St. James Catholic Church and back – a trek of nearly 25 miles – to attend Mass. Over time the distance would become too much for her. It was about that time that her daughter-in-law says she set up shop in a store front to teach religious education to children.

Bates envisioned a parish and parish school in the West Eight Mile community since the closest Catholic church – Presentation – did not welcome African Americans. She was met with resistance from officials at the Archdiocese of Detroit who cited the low Catholic population in the area as the reason for not building a parish church and school in the neighborhood. Bates, however, saw the opportunities to grow the Catholic community in the heavily Protestant neighborhood and insisted that a parish be founded.

In the early 1940s, Bates reached out to the Immaculate Heart of Mary Sisters at Marygrove College and convinced them to run a summer school program for children in a nearby recreation center. The summer program was a huge success and soon parents were asking for a similar program for adults.

Based in large part to the overwhelming numbers of children and adults who attended these programs inspired by Bates, Archbishop Mooney asked the Franciscans of Cincinnati to open a neighborhood mission in the fall of 1943. Fr. Alvin Deem volunteered to take on the project and a storefront mission – Our Lady of Victory-- was started in 1943. The community's first Mass was celebrated later that year on the Feast Day of St. Francis.

Bates worked tirelessly to recruit new members and converts to the community and as the community grew, there was a need to build a parish Church and – later – school. Despite several missed opportunities for the Archdiocese to purchase land to build a parish church and school, construction began after a local merchant donated land for the development. The church building was completed in 1946 and the school eight years later in 1954.

"Madre" or "Mother" Bates as she would come to be known continued to be an active parishioner, recruiting converts and new members, and even teaching piano lessons to parish children until her death on May 23, 1983.

Sister Thea Bowman



When Bertha Bowman was born in 1937, she became part of a vibrant Black community that had a long history in the Delta country of Mississippi. Her mother and father, Mary and Esther and Theon Edward Bowman, were respected members of the Yazoo City black population.

Even though she was formally initiated into the Roman Catholic Church early in her life (1947) and entered the Franciscan Sisters' community a few years later (1953), she never disconnected herself from her deepest cultural heritage. The old women and men who taught her the Black Sacred Songs that she would use to inspire and challenge her listeners for nearly 30 years, became foundations for her demand that great respect be paid to the elders of our communities. What they did for her as a child, she called others to do for all children, everywhere.

From the beginning of her teaching career until the end of her public ministry, music was the substance

of Thea Bowman's witness to the world. Although her formal research for her doctoral degree dealt with Renaissance literature and philosophy, her enduring contribution to scholarship within the Roman Catholic Church and within the fields of Africana Studies, is her reliance on the wisdom and redemptive power of Black Sacred Song to teach, inspire, correct, challenge and transform all who would seek to "walk together" on the journey from here to heaven. Sr. Thea used her music to break down barriers of culture, class and condition.

At the time of her last great public performance – at the 1989 summer meeting of the National conference of Catholic Bishops – she began her remarks by singing, "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child." That song was her prophetic challenge to the rhetorical question, "what does it mean to be Black and Catholic?" But years earlier, in the landmark book she edited for those same bishops, she proclaimed her vision of the "beloved community" that drove her in all that she did. That book, *Families: Black and Catholic, Catholic and Black* (1985), she said: "assumes that the Black family is alive and well. It assumes further that we as a people need to find ways old and new to talk and talk together; to bond more surely; to extend family more widely and effectively, so that no one is fatherless, motherless, sisterless, or brotherless; so that no one lacks the life-sustaining human support of family."

Less than a year before her death on March 30, 1990, surrounded by friends and loved ones in her home church in Canton, Mississippi, The Bowman called a group of children to join her around her wheelchair, and she began to sing one of her songs. Her body and voice were tremendously weakened by radiation therapy, and her ability to speak – let alone sing – would have seemed to have been profoundly compromised. As she moved through the song, she changed the lyrics to suit the time, and she used her physical condition to teach a truth about the imperishable quality of "soul" that sustained her. She sang:

*Done made my vow to the Lord,
And I never will turn back,
Oh I will go, I shall go
to see what the end will be.*

There is no end to her witness. There is no end to her story. There is only the voice, the words, the humor, the resilience, There is no turning back. She calls her friends, still, to stay "on the journey." To be family.

Sister Martin de Porres Grey (Patricia Grey, Ph.D.)



Fourteen days after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., African-American Catholic clerics gathered in Detroit. More than 60 black clergy gathered to discuss the racial crisis. Collectively they criticized the Church for its failures and made a list of demands for the Church to be faithful to its mission to blacks and to restore the church within the black community. While women were not among the delegates to at the first National Black Clergy Caucus, Sister Martin de Porres Grey was there – the only woman to attend.

Sr. Martin de Porres was no stranger to the institutional racism which the clergy had called out. In 1960, she was denied admission into the Sisters of St. Joseph of Baden, Pennsylvania on the basis of race. Committed to her calling, however, she went on to desegregate the Pittsburgh chapter of the Religious Sisters of Mercy in 1961. Inspired and encouraged by the vision of the African American Catholic priests, she decided to call all black women religious together in a similar way. And so she wrote 600 letters to the superiors of religious communities in the U.S. to ask for their help and prayers. While only a third of the communities responded, Sr. Martin de Poress was and the first historic meeting was held over a week in the summer of 1968 at Mt. Mercy College (now Carlow College) in Pittsburgh with over 150 black Catholic women religious from 79 national and international congregations in attendance.

Of her dedication to the gathering, she told *Ebony Magazine*, "It was important that we get together so we could evaluate our roles as participants in the Church and come to a deeper understanding of our own people's position and the creative tension now circulating in the black communities. We also hope

to create ways of developing a living relationship between black and white. The core of the racial problem is basically spiritual and this is where the Church claims that the Creative power of God is effective." Confronting racism in the Church, which so many of the sisters had experienced in both overt and subtle ways, was one way of confronting racism in society.

Sr. Martin de Porres was convinced that education was the way forward, saying, "Since white racism is behind the race problem, then we, as black religious women, have to help white clergy and our white sisters understand white racism so they, in turn, can teach their people the truth."

What had been seen as a one-time event took on a life of its own and the gathering laid the groundwork for the formation of the National Black Sisters' Conference. Sister Martin de Porres was elected to serve as its first president, a board of directors was voted on, and plans were made for legal incorporation.

Today, NBSC is a national organization of more than 150 Black Catholic women religious and associates in the United States standing at the forefront in the struggle for justice, giving witness to the saving truth of the gospel and the mission of Christ's Church on earth.

Sister Cora Marie Billings



"My great-grandfather and I both have lived lives closely intertwined with religious orders. I have freely given my life to service through the Sisters of Mercy. My great-grandfather, on the other hand, had no choice regarding his service. He worked as a slave, owned by the Society of Jesus," writes Sister Cora Marie Billings in a July 2014 issue of America Magazine, which also featured her image on the cover. The magazine is run by the same order who held her great-grandfather as a slave.

In 1956, Sr. Cora Marie became Philadelphia's first black Religious Sister of Mercy and was no stranger to racism. "Once, in the third or fourth grade, I was kneeling at the altar rail to receive Communion alongside my classmates...but I was the only black student. When it came time for me to receive the Eucharist, the priest skipped me," she recalls in the same article. Despite those kinds of experiences,

Sister Cora was determined to be a force for change and justice in the Church and has been breaking race and religious barriers since.

In 1968, she and the only other black sister in her community at the time travelled to Pittsburgh to attend the first National Black Sisters' Conference there. A year later, she became the first African-American sister to teach in the secondary schools for the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. In 1981, when she became the campus minister at Virginia State University, she was the first African-American nun to hold such a position at a state university in the Bible Belt. In 1990, she became the first nation's first African American nun to serve as a pastoral coordinator when she was installed at St. Elizabeth's Catholic Church in North Richmond after the predominantly black parish had lost their pastor. She served in that position until 2004. Today, Sr. Cora continues to serve as a member of the Anti-racism Transformation Team for the Institute of the Sister of Mercy of the Americas.

Concluding her article for America, she writes, "I have hope in the future, because in my 75 years of life, I have seen how far we have progressed. I try to be patient. I try to put life in perspective. I know that our church and our world are not as they once were and they are not yet where I want them to be. But my hope is things will continue to get better. And I will always fight for that as long as I have energy. I will continue to live with the fulfillment of my convictions, and I will continue to move forward with the faith that God will help me to do what needs to be done."

Questions for Reflection and Discussion on the Next Page...



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Questions for Reflection & Discussion

What were your thoughts, feelings or reactions as you read the stories of these women?

Which woman's story was most compelling to you?
Why do you think it was so compelling for you?

What do you think God was trying to tell you through the lives and witnesses of these women? What do you think will be the lasting effect of their witness on you? the church? society?

Many of these women suffered terribly because of racism and discrimination -- even at the hands of the Church and other Catholics. How does racism and discrimination continue to impact the lives of Catholics and the life of the Church today?

When/in what ways have you been called to be a witness for racial harmony or justice? How did you respond? Having read the witnesses of these women would you respond differently in the future?



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OF WOMEN DURING THE YEAR OF MERCY

Black Catholic Sisters in the United States

A Historical Reflection by Shannen Dee Williams, Ph.D.



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is an award-winning historian of the black Catholic diaspora. She is currently writing a book entitled, "Subversive Habits: Black Nuns and the Struggle to Desegregate Catholic America after World I," which examines the hidden history of black nuns in the fight to dismantle racial and gender barriers in the U.S. Church. When completed, it will be the first historical monograph on black Catholic sisters in twentieth-century America.

Dr. Williams frequently lectures on the history of black Catholic nuns in the Atlantic world and publicly advocates for the revitalization of black female religious life in the United States. Her writings have appeared in Religion Dispatches, The Feminist Wire, the U.S. Catholic Blog, and Patheos.

Introduction

Long before there were black priests in the United States, there were black Catholic sisters. Since 1824, hundreds of black women and girls have professed the religious vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience in the U.S. Catholic Church. By consecrating themselves to God and dedicating their lives to educational and social uplift, black sisters renounced an outside world that deemed all black people immoral and provided a powerful refutation to the insidious racial and sexual stereotypes used by white supremacists to justify African-American exclusion from U.S. citizenship rights and the ranks of religious life in the Church. Though practically invisible in annals of American and Catholic history, black sisters also played critical, and oftentimes leading, roles in the fight to dismantle racial barriers in the U.S. Church.

As the earliest champions of black Catholic education and priests, black sisters forced an often-ambivalent white hierarchy to acknowledge their African-American constituency and adhere to canon law and the Church's creed of universal Christian brotherhood. In doing so, black sisters challenged the nation and the Church to live up to the full promises of democracy, Catholicism, and justice for all.

Black Sisters in the 19th Century

In 1824, black women became the first representatives of the African-American community to embrace the religious state in the U.S. Catholic Church. Barred from joining most white sisterhoods due to anti-black racism and racial exclusionary admissions policies, black women first entered religious life through the establishment of all-black congregations. Between 1824 and 1889, at least six all black sisterhoods were organized in the United States. They were the all-black Sisters of Loretto in Kentucky (1824-1824); the Oblate Sisters of Providence in Baltimore, Maryland (1829-present); the



Mother Mary Lange
Founder of the Oblate Sisters of Providence.



Mother Henriette DeLille
Founder of the Sisters of the Holy Family.



Mother Theodore Williams
Founder of the Franciscan Handmaids of the Most pure Heart of Mary.

Sisters of the Holy Family in New Orleans, Louisiana (1842-present); the Sisters of Our Lady of Lourdes in New Orleans, Louisiana (1883-l.1920s/e.1930s); the Sisters of the Third Order of Saint Francis in Convent, Louisiana (1888-1913); and the Sisters of the Third Order of Saint Francis in Savannah, Georgia (1889-1910). Of these six communities, all were founded in the South, where the vast majority of the nation's black Catholics lived and labored, and all were (or slated to be) teaching communities.

Though African-American entry into historically white Catholic sisterhoods was overwhelmingly restricted to the post-World War II era, there were some notable exceptions in the nineteenth century. Between 1824 and 1885, at least eighteen U.S.-born black women entered white congregations in and outside of the United States. The majority of these women were lightskinned and deliberately sought to pass for white. In three known nineteenth-century cases in which white orders admitted or assisted in the novitiate training of black women, who could not pass for white, those pioneering sisters, like the nation's first black priests, did not receive their spiritual training on American soil. Instead, Frederica Law of Savannah, Georgia, Frances Johnson of Baltimore, Maryland, and Mathilda Beasley of Savannah, Georgia (by way of New Orleans, Louisiana) all traveled to Europe to undergo their respective novitiate training in the early to mid-1880s.

Though black sisterhoods were among the earliest Catholic congregations founded in the United States, they were severely marginalized in the white-dominated, male-hierarchical Church. White religious authorities frequently referred to the existence of black sisters as a "profanation

of the habit." Religious authorities in New Orleans went so far as to prohibit the Holy Family Sisters from wearing a habit in public until 1872. Black sisters were also subjected to white supremacist terror and violence and as a rule ostracized by their white counterparts in religious life well into the twentieth century. Moreover, their numbers remained small for much of the nineteenth century. Nonetheless, by founding Catholic schools, orphanages, and nursing homes for African Americans and mentoring a significant portion of the nation's earliest generations of black priests, black sisters forced the U.S. hierarchy to acknowledge (if only nominally) the existence of its largely neglected African-American constituency and laid the critical groundwork for the creation and expansion of the African-American apostolate in the twentieth century.

Black Sisters in the 20th Century

By the turn of the twentieth century, the national population of black sisters began to increase substantially. During the first two decades, two additional black congregations were also established. They were the Franciscan Handmaids of the Most Heart of Mary of Savannah, Georgia and later Harlem, New York (1916- Present) and the all-black Good Shepherd Sisters (or Magdalens) of Baltimore, Maryland (1922 to 1960s). It would also be during the twentieth century that black sisters arguably made their most significant and enduring contributions to the fight for racial and educational justice.

After World War I, state legislatures began requiring the higher education and accreditation of private school teachers, placing the nation's black teaching sisterhoods in a precarious position.

Though canon law and church mandates dictated that all Catholics be educated in Catholic schools, the vast majority of the nation's Catholic colleges, universities, and normal institutes systematically excluded African Americans, including Catholic religious, from admission solely on the basis of race. Working secretly with a small cadre of prelates and white religious orders, black sisters, anchored by the African-American lay community, quietly began desegregating Catholic colleges and universities in order to secure accreditation and transform their schools into educational sanctuaries for African-American parents and children searching for alternatives to grossly under-funded or nonexistent public schools. Some notable Catholic institutions that black sisters desegregated during the Jim Crow era include: Saint Louis University, Villanova College (later University), the Catholic University of America, Loyola University of the South (later Loyola-New Orleans), Seton Hill College for Women (later University), and Spring Hill College in Mobile, Alabama.

After World War II, scores of young black Catholic women and girls began desegregating the nation's historically white sisterhoods. Prior to World War II, African-American challenges to these communities' whites-only admissions policies were routinely ignored. As a result, black women and girls seeking admission into white orders were often, though not always, tracked into the nation's black orders. An undetermined number of black female vocations were lost to the Church as a result of these discriminatory (and un-Catholic) policies. However, expanding calls for racial justice and increased Vatican pressure finally forced the leadership of the nation's all-white sisterhoods to reconsider their stance after World War II. As a result, a small number of white orders began to admit African-American candidates. However, obstacles remained for black sisters in white congregations. In fact, many later testified to enduring years of bullying, neglect, and other forms of racist abuse in their convents.

After Vatican II, black sisters entered the public fight for racial justice. In mid-August of 1968, 155 of the nation's ~1,000 black sisters, reeling from the assassination of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., gathered at Mount Mercy College (now Carlow University) for a weeklong

meeting to discuss for themselves their ongoing role in the changing black revolution. Organized by 25-year old Sister M. Martin de Porres (Patricia Muriel) Grey, Pittsburgh's first black Religious Sister of Mercy, the meeting marked the first time that black sisters had gathered on a national stage to protest racism in the Church. It culminated in the formation of the National Black Sisters' Conference (NBSC). In the coming years, the NBSC embarked on an ambitious campaign to rid the Church of racism and sexism, taking their fight all the way to the Holy See in 1971. They also launched a national campaign to stop the mass closings of Catholic schools in urban and predominantly black communities.

However, when most U.S. congregations proved unable or unwilling to make the changes needed to insure the retention and growth of all of their members, black sisters, like their white and male counterparts, began departing religious life at an alarming rate. From 1965 to 1975 alone, more than 200 black sisters defected from their communities. Many did so in willful and righteous protest against ongoing racial and gender discrimination and rising political conservatism in the Church. As the NBSC executive director ominously put it in 1975, "the future of the black Catholic nun is dubious."

Conclusion

By the turn of the twentieth first century, there were only about 300 African-American sisters left in the United States. Nonetheless, the contributions of black sisters in the fight for racial and educational justice in the nation and Church have endured. As for those black women and girls who departed religious life in the post-civil rights era, the vast majority chose to remain in the Catholic Church. Today, as laywomen, community workers, and theologians and university professors in the academy, they continue the fight for justice and equity in American society and the Church, reminding us all of how far we have come and how far we still have to go.

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WOMEN WITNESSES OF MERCY

CELEBRATING THE EXTRAORDINARY WITNESS
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A Timeline of African-American Catholic History

Introduction

Black Catholics have been active in America and in the Church from the very earliest settlements in the so-called "New World." During colonization, slavery, poverty, segregation, and exclusion, courageous and holy African Americans relied on their faith and dedicated themselves to living and sharing it.

Colonization and Slavery

1565: Spain establishes a military outpost at St. Augustine, in present-day Florida. Black women and men -- slave and free -- and their children help to establish the oldest town in the United States.

1693 – early 1700s: Spain offers to freedom to slaves in Florida and those who escape to Florida if they convert to Catholicism.

1724: The French, having settled Mobile and New Orleans along the Gulf Coast, declare the Code Noir, a set of laws governing the lives and rights of slaves including a requirement that all slaves be baptized and instructed in the Catholic faith. While sexual relations between slaves and slave owners were prohibited, the children of owners and slaves became a class of free people, known as creoles of color.

1738: Fort Mose, a community northeast of St. Augustine, is settled by freed slaves and legally sanctioned by the Spanish Government, making it the first free African settlement to legally exist in the United States.

1781: Governor Don Felipe de Neve recruits 11 families to settle what is now Los Angeles. All of

the families are Catholic and half are black.

1829: Mother Mary Elizabeth Lange and the three other women profess final vows, creating the Oblate Sisters of Providence, the first religious order of women of African descent in the US.

1839: Pope Gregory XVI issues the document *Supremo Apostolatus Fastigio*, condemning the slave trade. Catholic slaveholders, however, did not consider slavery immoral, since the Bible did not forbid it. Bishops, priests, and religious sisters were among Catholic slaveholders.

1842: Founded by Henriette DeLille and Juliette Gaudin in New Orleans, the Sisters of the Holy Family becomes the second religious order for black women. The women formed the community to serve the needs of ex-slaves, teach catechism to the children of slaves, and help to witness at marriages and baptisms.

1861-1865: American Civil War

1863: Emancipation Proclamation

Post Civil War

1866: Second Plenary Council of Catholic Bishops held in Baltimore, in part to decide how to minister to freed slaves. After bitter debates, the bishops decided to invite missionaries from Europe to evangelize American blacks.

1871: The Mill Hill Fathers, who later became the Josephites, began ministry to African Americans in the South.

1872: Escaping religious persecution in Germany, the Spiritan Fathers, led by Father Joseph Strub, emigrate to the United States. Founders of Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, the Spiritans ministered to African Americans and impoverished immigrants.

1874: Patrick Francis Healy, SJ, who concealed his African origins for much of his career, becomes president of Georgetown University.

1875: James Augustine Healy is ordained bishop of Portland, Maine.

Patrick and James, along with their brother Alexander were the first African American priests in the U.S., although they did not identify as such and never spoke out on behalf of blacks because of prevailing racist attitudes at the time. They were three of ten children born in Georgia to Mary Eliza, a slave, and her owner, Michael Morris Healy, an Irish immigrant and landowner.

1886: Augustus Tolton, the first African-American priest to publicly identify as black, is ordained in Rome and assigned to a parish in Quincy, IL, where his mother brought him and his two siblings after escaping slavery in Missouri in 1861.

1889: Daniel Rudd, a layperson, calls the first Black Catholic Congress which calls for Catholic schools for black children, endorses temperance, appeals to labor unions to admit blacks, advocates for better housing, and praises those religious orders that aid African Americans. At the fourth Black Catholic Congress in 1983, Charles Butler famously asked, "How long, o Lord, are we to endure this hardship in the house of our friends?" The congress went on to call attention to the church's failure "to raise up the downtrodden and to rebuke the proud." Making the social implications of Catholicism a primary feature of the faith was a bold and new approach at the time.

1909: Several Josephite priests and three laymen co-found the Knights of Peter Claver as a fraternal and charity organization for Black Catholic men. Within two decades, the KPC had spread across the South and affiliated organizations emerged for women and youth.

1916: A third religious community of black women, the Franciscan Handmaids of the Most Pure Heart of Mary, began in Savannah, Georgia.

Soon after, their founder, Mother Theodore Williams (1868-1931), moved the community to Harlem, New York where the sisters taught school and established various ministries to serve families and children, including the first U.S. Catholic nursing home.

1920: With the blessing of Pope Benedict XV, The Society of the Divine Word in Greenville, Mississippi (founded in 1906) opens St. Augustine, the first seminary for blacks in the U.S.

1924: Thomas Wyatt Turner organized the Federated Colored Catholics, insisting it should be directed by a layperson. Fighting racism and segregation within the Church, Turner called for an increase in the number of black priests and the opening of all Catholic schools to black students.

The Civil Rights Era

The Catholic Church in the United States has flourished and developed thanks to the courage, spirituality, and tireless witness of faithful black laity, religious, and clergy. Regrettably, the Catholic Church in the U.S. -- both hierarchy and laity -- was often slow to recognize, repent, and turn away from the sins of slavery and racism in its very midst, let alone condemn it in the larger societal landscape.

Some progress was made, however, during and after the civil rights era.

1958: Releasing Discrimination and the Christian Conscience, American bishops denounce racial prejudice as immoral for the first time, saying "Full and equal justice must be given to all citizens, specifically those who are Negro."

1965: Responding to the call by Martin Luther King, Jr. to join him, Catholic clergy and religious joined the march in Selma, Alabama. Sr. Antona Ebo was the first African-American nun to march. Thereafter Catholic leaders participated in public demonstrations for civil rights.

1968: Fourteen days after the assassination of MLK, Fr. Herman Porter of Rockford, Illinois invites all U.S. black Catholic clergy to attend a special caucus in Detroit. Together, the caucus lists nine demands for the church to be faithful in its mission to blacks and to restore the church within the black community.

1968: Sister Martin de Porres Grey gathers more than 150 African American religious women in Pittsburgh, laying the foundation for the National

Black Sisters' Conference.

Several other major national organizations for black Catholics were created in the wake of the civil rights movement.

1968: The U.S. Bishops release a statement, The National Race Crisis, following the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. and the inaugural meeting of the Black Catholic Clergy Caucus. The statement affirmed the Kerner Commission Report (1968) which found that the U.S. was becoming two societies, "one black, one white: separate and unequal." Unlike previous documents, the bishops called for immediate change. They asked that special attention be paid to education, jobs, affordable housing, and welfare. Finally, the document also explicitly referenced the part Catholics played in creating the race crisis and addressed the unfinished business of eradicating racism in the institutions of the Church.

Post Civil Rights

1979: The U.S. bishops once again address racism and the Catholic Church in a pastoral letter, Brothers and Sisters to Us, calling racism a "radical evil." The document, which laments the lost sense of urgency in combatting racism since 1968, draws the connection between racial and economic oppression, points out that social structures are prejudiced toward the success of the majority at the expense of the minority, and condemns the disproportionate rate at which minorities were being incarcerated.

1984: The Black Catholic Bishops of the United States write, What We Have Seen and Heard, a pastoral letter on evangelization which celebrates four characteristics of Black spirituality: contemplation, holism, joy, and community. The document affirmed the call to celebrate being Black and Catholic, saying that the African-American witness is precious to the universal character of Catholicism. The letter also pointed out continued racism in the Church calling it a hindrance to the full development of black leadership and saying that equality was a prerequisite for true reconciliation.

1985: The National Black Catholic Congress is re-established as a coalition of black Catholic organizations and in 1987 renews the tradition of gathering black Catholics from across the country, holding a national congress every five years.

1988: the Pontifical Commission on Justice and Peace publishes The Church and Racism: Towards a More Fraternal Society. The document called ideas of racial superiority "scientifically false, morally condemnable and socially unjust and dangerous" and called for a conversion to lived racial equality beyond simply ending legal discrimination. While praising the accomplishments of American Civil Rights Movement, it added, "Much still remains to be done to eliminate completely racial prejudice and behavior even in what can be considered one of the most interracial nations of the world." The document was rereleased in 2001, with a completely new introduction to take recent events into account.

The proceeding timeline is based on the work of Fr. Cyprian Davis, OSB which appears in "A Brief History of African American Catholics" by the National Black Catholic Congress found at <http://nbccongress.org/features/history-african-american-catholics.asp>. This article or excerpts thereof were reprinted with the express permission of the National Black Catholic Congress (NBCC). Permission to reprint this article or excerpts does not mean that NBCC has reviewed or approved the contents of this publication, or that NBCC necessarily agrees with the views expressed herein.



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The Black Lives Matter Movement & Catholics Two Scholars Speak Out

Recent events such as the US Supreme Court striking down part of the Voting Rights Act; the 2013 acquittal of George Zimmerman in the shooting death of Trayvon Martin; the fatal police shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri; the death of Freddie Gray while in police custody in Baltimore, Maryland; as well as the less-publicized police killings of seven-year old Aiyana Stanley-Jones in Detroit, 22-year old Rekia Boyd in Chicago, 34-year old Miriam Carey in Washington, D.C., and countless other black women and girls who were all unarmed at the time of their deaths have heightened public awareness of the racism and racial injustice continuing to plague the United States.

Despite statements, letters, and prayers from Church officials in these cities and the United States Council of Catholic Bishops, prominent Catholic theologians, scholars, and activists have criticized the institutional Church for failing to respond quickly and forcefully enough.

Speaking with DailyTheology in May 2015, Dr. Shannen Dee Williams, "Prayers, statements, and pastoral letters are important, but grossly insufficient, especially when they come at the tail end of protests against rampant injustice, do not call for massive structural reforms in society and a reversal of the Church's divestment from inner-city communities, and blatantly ignore the fact that black women and girls are also the disproportionate victims of state, police, vigilante, and intra-racial violence."

Fr. Bryan Massingale isn't convinced that the institutional Church in the U.S. will go further than they already have. At the 2015 Black Lives Matter Symposium hosted by the Institute for Black Catholic Studies at Xavier University of Louisiana, he asked "Will the Catholic Church be an effective ally in the Black Lives Matter movement?" Answering his own question, he said, "probably not." Explaining that the Church prioritizes "race relations" over "racial justice," Massingale argued that if the Church were to get involved in the Black Lives Matter Movement, it would "only be in ways that will not make its white members uncomfortable."

Later, returning to his original question, Massingale modified his answer: "It depends on who you mean by 'church'," suggesting that black Catholics and the laity will play a vital role in defining the "Catholic" response to the latest manifestations of racism and racial inequality in the U.S.

Williams agrees that Catholics – and not just the institutional Church -- need to be proactive. "If Catholics (and I use this term broadly and cautiously) can launch writing campaigns, organize demonstrations, and donate millions of dollars annually in the fight to end abortion, then they can do the same to end rampant police violence and murder."

But she also maintains that the institutional Church can and should do more, saying: "The U.S. Church already has the apparatus—through its political and community connections and institutions—in place to become a leading force in the #BlackLivesMatter movement, but it must finally become like Jesus. We must collectively shout with our words and actions (in whichever ways that they manifest themselves) that the broken bodies and lives of the escalating number of victims of police and state violence are fundamentally more important than damaged property. If we can't do that, then the Church will risk losing whatever moral authority and legitimacy it has left, and we will once again be lost in the wilderness."

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Bryan Massingale is a priest of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee and a professor of theology at Marquette University. He is the author of *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church* (Orbis, 2010).


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Race and Racism

Excerpts from Catholic Social Teaching

Discrimination and the Christian Conscience

United States Catholic Welfare Conference (1958)

Our nation now stands divided by the problem of compulsory segregation of the races and the opposing demand for racial justice. No region of our land is immune from strife and division resulting from this problem. In one area, the key issue may concern the schools. In another it may be conflicts over housing. Job discrimination may be the focal point in still other sectors. But all these issues have one main point in common. They reflect the determination of our Negro people, and we hope the overwhelming majority of our white citizens, to see that our colored citizens obtain their full rights as given to them by God, the Creator of all, and guaranteed by the democratic traditions of our nation.

The heart of the race question is moral and religious. It concerns the rights of [all] and our attitude toward our fellow [human being]. If our attitude is governed by the great Christian law of love thy neighbor and respect for [everyone's] rights, then we can work out harmoniously the techniques for making legal, educational, economic, and social adjustments. But if our hearts are poisoned by hatred, or even by indifference toward the welfare and rights of our fellow [human beings], then our nation faces a grave and internal crisis.

Gaudium et Spes: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World

Second Vatican Council II (1965)

with respect to the fundamental rights of the person, every type of discrimination, whether social or cultural, whether based on sex, race, color, social condition, language or religion, is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God's intent. For in truth it must still be regretted that fundamental personal rights are still not being universally honored....

...excessive economic and social differences between the members of the one human family or population groups cause scandal, and militate against social justice, equity, the dignity of the human person, as well as social and international peace (29).

The National Race Crisis

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (1968)

...it is evident that we did not do enough; we have much more to do. When the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders concluded last month that white racism was a key factor in creating and maintaining the explosive ghettos of our cities, it became clear that we had failed to change the attitudes of many believers (4).

Despite ten years of religious, civic, and governmental action, millions of our fellow Americans continue to be deprived of adequate education, job opportunity, housing, medical care, and welfare assistance, making it difficult, perhaps even impossible, for them to develop and maintain a sense of human dignity (5).

Catholics, like the rest of American society, must recognize their responsibility for allowing these conditions to persist (6).

There are certain tasks which we must acknowledge remain the unfinished business of the Catholic religious community. First among these is the total eradication of any elements of discrimination in our parishes, schools, hospitals, homes for the aged, and similar institutions. Second, there is the Christian duty to use our resources responsibly and generously in view of the urgent needs of the poor (10).

There is no place for complacency and inertia. The hour is late and the need is critical. Let us act while there is still time for collaborative peaceful solutions. (27)

Brothers and Sisters to Us

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (1979)

Racism is an evil which endures in our society and in our Church. Despite apparent advances and even significant changes in the last two decades, the reality of racism remains. In large part it is only external appearances which have changed (1).

We do not deny that changes have been made, that laws have been passed, that policies have been implemented. We do not deny that the ugly external features of racism which marred our society have in part been eliminated. But neither can it be denied that too often what has happened has only been a covering over, not a fundamental change. Today the sense of urgency has yielded to an apparent acceptance of the status quo. The climate of crisis engendered by demonstrations, protest, and confrontation has given way to a mood of indifference; and other issues occupy our attention. (2)

Racism and economic oppression are distinct but interrelated forces which dehumanize our society. Movement toward authentic justice demands a simultaneous attack on both evils. Our economic structures are undergoing fundamental changes which threaten to intensify social inequalities in our nation. We are entering an era characterized by limited resources, restricted job markets and dwindling revenues. In this atmosphere, the poor and racial minorities are being asked to bear the heaviest burden of the new economic pressures. (3)

Racism is a sin: a sin that divides the human family, blots out the image of God among specific members of that family, and violates the fundamental human dignity of those called to be children of the same Father. Racism is the sin that says some human beings are inherently superior and others essentially inferior because of races. It is the sin that makes racial characteristics the determining factor for the exercise of human rights. It mocks the words of Jesus: "Treat others the way you would have them treat you." Indeed, racism is more than a disregard for the words of Jesus; it is a denial of the truth of the dignity of each human being revealed by the mystery of the Incarnation. (7)

Each of us as Catholics must acknowledge a share in the mistakes and sins of the past. Many of us have been prisoners of fear and prejudice. We have preached the Gospel while closing our eyes to the racism it condemns. We have allowed conformity to social pressures to replace compliance with social justice. But past mistakes must not hinder the Church's response to the challenges of the present. (30-31)

What We Have Seen and Heard: A Pastoral Letter on Evangelization

Black Catholic Bishops of the United States (1984)

True reconciliation only arises where there is mutually perceived equality. This is what is meant by justice...Without justice, any meaningful reconciliation is impossible.

Black Americans are a people rich with spiritual gifts...It is fitting...to present briefly the major characteristics of what can be termed 'Black Spirituality'...Black Spirituality has four major characteristics: It is contemplative. It is holistic. It is joyful. It is communitarian.

Blacks and other minorities still remain absent from many aspects of Catholic life and are only meagerly represented on the decision-making level. Inner-city schools continue to disappear and black vocational recruitment lacks sufficient support. In spite of the fact that Catholic schools are a principal instrument of evangelization, active evangelization is not always a high priority.

Just as the Church in our history was planted by the efforts of the Spaniards, the French and the English, so did she take root among Indians, Black slaves and the various racial mixtures of them all. Blacks – whether Spanish-speaking, French-speaking or English-speaking – built the churches, tilled Church lands, and labored with those who labored in spreading the Gospel. From the earliest period of the Church's history in our land, we have been the hands and arms that helped build the Church from Baltimore to Bardstown, from New Orleans to Los Angeles, from St. Augustine to St. Louis. Too often neglected and too much betrayed, our faith was witnessed by Black voices and Black tongues – such as Jean-Baptiste Pointe du Sable, Pierre Toussain, Elizabeth Lange, Henriette Delille and Augustus Tolton.

This racism, at once subtle and masked, still festers within our Church as within our society. It is this racism that in our minds remains the major impediment to evangelization within our community. Some little progress has been made, but success is not yet attained. This stain of racism on the American Church continues to be a source of pain and disappointment to all, both Black and White, who love her and desire her to be the Bride of Christ "without stain or wrinkle (Ephesians 5:27). This stain of racism, which is so alien to the Spirit of Christ, is a scandal to many, but for us it

must be the opportunity to work for the Church's renewal as a part of our task of evangelization.

Our demand for recognition, our demand for leadership roles in the task of evangelization, is not a call for separatism but a pledge of our commitment to the Church and to share in her witnessing to the love of Christ.

The Church and Racism: Toward a More Fraternal Society

The Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace (1988)

Racial prejudice or racist behavior continues to trouble relations between persons, human groups and nations. Public opinion is increasingly incensed by it. Moral conscience can by no means accept it (1).

A change of heart cannot occur without strengthening spiritual convictions regarding respect for other races and ethnic groups. The Church, on its part, contributes to forming consciences by clearly presenting the entire Christian doctrine on this subject. She particularly asks pastors, preachers, teachers and catechists to explain the true teaching of Scripture and Tradition about the origin of all people in God, their final common destiny in the Kingdom of God, the value of the precept of fraternal love, and the total incompatibility between racist exclusivism and the universal calling of all to the same salvation in Jesus Christ. Recourse to the Bible to justify a posteriori any racist prejudice must be firmly denounced. The Church has never authorized any such deformed interpretation of Scripture.

The Church's persuasive task is equally carried out through the witness of life of Christians: respect for foreigners, acceptance of dialogue, sharing, mutual aid and collaboration with other ethnic groups. The world needs to see this parable in action among Christians in order to be convinced by Christ's message. Of course, Christians themselves must humbly admit that members of the Church, on all levels, have not always coherently lived out this teaching throughout history. Nonetheless, they must continue to proclaim what is right while seeking to "do" the truth (25).

The effort to overcome racism does in fact seem to have become an imperative which is broadly anchored in human consciences. The 1965 U.N. Convention expressed this conviction forcefully: "Any doctrine of superiority based on the difference between races is scientifically false, morally condemnable and socially unjust and dangerous." The Church's doctrine affirms it with no less vigor all racist theories are contrary to Christian faith and love. And yet, in sharp contrast to this growing awareness of human dignity, racism still exists and continually reappears in different forms (33).



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Questions for Reflection & Discussion

In 1968, the US bishops reflected on the advances the Church had made since its 1958 document, writing, “it is evident that we did not do enough; we have much more to do” and “there are certain tasks which we must acknowledge remain the unfinished business of the Catholic religious community.” In many ways, those words could be written again in 2016. In your opinion what is the “unfinished business” of the Catholic community in combatting racism today?

In 1979, the US bishops wrote, “Racism is an evil which endures in our society and in our Church. Despite apparent advances and even significant changes in the last two decades, the reality of racism remains. In large part it is only external appearances which have changed.” What are the external appearances of racism in our society and Church today?

In 1984, the US Black Catholic Bishops wrote, “Black Americans are a people rich with spiritual gifts...It is fitting...to present briefly the major characteristics of what can be termed ‘Black Spirituality’...Black Spirituality has four major characteristics: It is contemplative. It is holistic. It is joyful. It is communitarian.” Given your experience of African-American Spirituality -- no matter how limited it may be -- how do you think the Church and our communities could benefit from more fully embracing this spirituality?

If the institutional Church were to write a document or letter on race and racism today, what would you want it to say or address?

If Catholic minorities were to write a letter to the Church -- both the institution and the faithful -- what do you suppose it would say?



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WOMEN WITNESSES OF MERCY

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PRAYER Resource

Stations of the Cross

African-American Catholic Women Give Witness

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Introduction:

Welcome to our Stations of the Cross: African-American Catholic Women Give Witness. On this journey, we will hear and reflect on the stories of courageous Black Catholic Women who relied on their faith and dedicated themselves to living and sharing it despite bearing the unjust crosses of racism, slavery, poverty, segregation, sexism, and exclusion. May their witness open our minds, touch our hearts, inspire our words and actions and awaken us to the pursuit of racial justice and harmony.

We will also hear and reflect on excerpts from Catholic Social Teaching on the issue of race and racism. By doing so, we acknowledge -- before God and before one another -- that we, as individuals and as a community of believers -- have often times failed to live the Gospel values of freedom, equality, solidarity, and inclusion.

Suggested Gathering Song: "Were You There?"

Opening Prayer:

READER/LEADER:

Good and merciful God, creator of us all,

You call us to reverence your divine image and likeness in our neighbor.

Yet, the equality of your daughters and sons has not always been fully acknowledged and Christians have been guilty of the sin of racism.

As we reflect on these Stations of the Cross, may the witness of Black Catholic women touch our hearts, minds and souls, that through their Christ-like example, you might call us to conversion, reconciliation, and renewed hope for racial harmony, equality, and justice.

We ask this in the name of Jesus, through whose life, ministry, death, and resurrection we have been set free,
AMEN.

**The First Station:
Jesus Is Condemned to Death**



**The Second Station:
Jesus Is Made to Carry His Cross**



READER: Jesus is Condemned to Death;
ALL: We honor you, Jesus and we thank you. For
by your life, ministry, death and resurrection you
have set us free.

READER: As we reflect on this first station, we
call to mind the witness of Martha Jane Chisley
Tolton.

Like Jesus, Martha Tolton was unjustly
condemned. Born into slavery, she was
condemned to a life of forced servitude,
indignity, and abuse. But just as Jesus walked
a long and grueling road for us, so too did
Martha by fleeing slavery on a farm in Missouri to
freedom in Quincy, Illinois with her three children,
one of whom, Augustus, would become the
African-American priest to publicly identify as
black.

ALL: God of Freedom, we thank you for the
witness of Martha Tolton and the countless other
mothers who risked their lives to gain freedom
for their children. Give us the hope to envision
to a world where all your holy children live in true
and complete freedom, regardless of how long
and grueling the road to reality may be. AMEN.

READER: Jesus is Made to Carry His Cross;

ALL: We honor you, Jesus, and we thank you. For
by your life, ministry, death and resurrection you
have set us free.

READER: As we reflect on this second station, we
call to mind the witness of Mother Mary Lange.

In 1829, Mother Lange founded of the Oblate
Sisters of Providence, the first community of
women religious of African descent. Throughout
her tenure as superior general, Mother Lange,
carried many crosses, not the least of which was
guiding this historic and prophetic sisterhood in
its early days despite poverty, racism, and other
untold hardships.

All: God of Justice, we thank you for the witness
of Mother Lange. Give us the strength and
perseverance to work for justice despite the
insults, difficulties, and burdens that will surely
come our way. AMEN.

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The Third Station: Jesus Falls the First Time



READER: Jesus Falls the First Time;

ALL: We honor you, Jesus, and we thank you. For by your life, ministry, death and resurrection you have set us free.

READER: A reading from The National Race Crisis – A Statement Made by the U.S. Bishops in 1968

In 1958, the Catholic bishops of the United States issued a statement on Discrimination and the Christian Conscience. In it they condemned racism in all its forms... now – ten years later – it is evident that we did not do enough; we have much more to do... (1,4)

There is no place for complacency and inertia. The hour is late and the need is critical. Let us act while there is still time for collaborative peaceful solutions. We must show concern, we must give ground for hope. In the name of God, our [Creator] – and we do not invoke [God's] name lightly – let us prove to all that we are truly aware that we are a single human family on the unity of which depends our best hope for our progress and our peace.

ALL: God of the past, for over 500 years we have witnessed the degradation of people of color for the purposes of social and economic gain. With contrite hearts, we acknowledge that we as a people, we as a Church, have been guilty of the sin of racism. We did not and have not done enough. Forgive us and guide us toward reconciliation and restoration of the one human family. We ask this relying on your unfailing mercy, AMEN.

Suggested Spiritual: "There is a Balm in Gilead"

The Fourth Station: Jesus Meets His Mother



READER: Jesus Meets His Mother;

ALL: We honor you, Jesus, and we thank you. For by your life, ministry, death and resurrection you have set us free.

READER: As we reflect on this fourth station, we call to mind the witness of Mother Theodore.

In 1916, Elizabeth Williams founded the Handmaids of the Most Pure Heart of Mary when the Georgia State Legislature proposed a bill that would outlaw the instruction of Black children by White teachers. Taking the name Mother Theodore, she became the congregation's first superior general. The congregation's name was chosen to inspire members of the congregation to care for and love their neighbors with the same zeal that Mary had for her son, Jesus.

The bill never passed and the congregation moved to New York, where the sisters founded St. Benedict's Day Nursery School, Early Childhood Education Programs, Catholic Elementary Schools, an After School Program, Food Pantries, a Senior Citizen Center and Summer Camps.

ALL: Mother of us all, we thank you for the witness of Mother Theodore. May we always see others – first and foremost – as your children, worthy of our love and zealous care. AMEN

**The Fifth Station:
Simon of Cyrene Carries the Cross**



READER: Simon of Cyrene Carries the Cross;

ALL: We honor you, Jesus, and we thank you. For by your life, ministry, death and resurrection you have set us free.

READER: As we reflect on this fifth station, we call to mind the witness of Sister Cora Billings.

Sister Cora recently wrote, "I have freely given my life to service through the Sisters of Mercy. My great-grandfather, on the other hand, had no choice regarding his service. He worked as a slave, owned by the Society of Jesus."

Despite her family's history with the Church and her own experiences of racism, Sr. Cora has time and again responded willingly to serve the People of God, often breaking racial and religious barriers along the way. When asked how she can serve the very Church that enslaved her great-grandfather Sr. Cora says, "Although this part of our Catholic history might make some people turn away from the church, this knowledge makes me more determined to stay and to work for greater equality for people in the church and the world today." In 1965 she became Philadelphia's first black Religious Sister of Mercy and in 1990, she became the first African American nun to be installed as a pastoral coordinator at St. Elizabeth's Catholic Church in North Richmond, VA. She served as the community's leader until 2004. Today, Sr. Cora continues to serve as a member of the Anti-racism Transformation Team for the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas.

ALL: God of Equality, we thank you for the witness of Sr. Cora Billings. Give us determination to serve the cause of equality for people in the Church and the world today.

**The Sixth Station:
Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus**



READER: Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus;

ALL: We honor you, Jesus, and we thank you. For by your life, ministry, death and resurrection you have set us free.

READER: As we reflect on this fifth station, we call to mind the witness of Sister Antona Ebo.

Upon hearing the reports of civil rights protesters being beaten on Bloody Sunday, Sr. Antona remembers thinking, "If I didn't have this habit on, I would be down there with those people." Later she would remark, "It turned out that the habit was what got everyone's attention very quickly, because nuns had not been seen doing anything like that before."

When she arrived in Selma, Sr. Antona Ebo was the first African-American nun to march in the struggle for Civil Rights. The Rev. L.L. Anderson, pastor of Selma's Tabernacle Baptist Church remarked, "For the first time in my life, I am seeing a Negro nun." For him, Sr. Antona was living proof to the officials in Alabama and those who had beaten the protestors that, in his words, "you don't have to be white to be holy."

The next day, Sr. Antona's face appeared on the front page of the New York Times, sending shockwaves through the nation that a nun – of all people – would join the protests in Selma.

ALL: God, in whose image we are all wonderfully made, we thank you for the witness of Sr. Antona Ebo. May those among us in positions of power, privilege, honor, or reverence use their positions to advance the cause of justice. And may we always see the face of Jesus in the faces of all, especially those who suffer. AMEN.

The Seventh Station: Jesus Falls the Second Time



The Eighth Station: Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem



READER: Jesus Falls the Second Time;

ALL: We honor you, Jesus, and we thank you. For by your life, ministry, death and resurrection you have set us free.

READER: A reading from Brothers and Sisters to Us, the 1979 U.S. Catholic Bishops Pastoral Letter on Racism.

Racism is an evil which endures in our society and in our Church. Despite apparent advances and even significant changes in the last two decades, the reality of racism remains. In large part it is only external appearances which have changed.

Each of us as Catholics must acknowledge a share in the mistakes and sins of the past. Many of us have been prisoners of fear and prejudice. We have preached the Gospel while closing our eyes to the racism it condemns.

ALL: God of the present, we decry our nation's history of slavery, lynching, and segregation. Yet, today we still struggle under the burden of racism. Often we close our eyes to it around us. Forgive us our ignorance, fear and prejudice.

Transform us and open our eyes, we pray, to see and name the ugly face of racism today: economic disparity; apathy at the loss of so many young lives of people of color; lack of educational and job opportunities; unjust and racially-biased justice systems; the disproportionate effects of global climate change upon people of color in our own country and around the world. We ask this relying on your unfailing mercy, AMEN.

Suggested Spiritual: "Somebody's Knocking"

READER: Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem;

ALL: We honor you, Jesus, and we thank you. For by your life, ministry, death and resurrection you have set us free.

READER: As we reflect on this eighth station, we call to mind the witness of Sr. Martin de Porres Grey, now Patricia Grey.

Sr. Martin de Porres Grey was the only woman present when more than sixty black Catholic clergy members gathered to discuss the racial crisis in the country fourteen days after the assassination of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Encouraged by their vision and action, she called together over 150 black Catholic women religious to acknowledge and confront the racism they had experienced in both Church and society.

Through the course of the week-long gathering, the sisters became convinced that – in the words of Sr. Martin – “Since white racism is behind the race problem, then we, as black religious women, have to help white clergy and our white sisters understand white racism so they, in turn, can teach their people the truth.” Sr. Martin would serve as the first president of the National Black Sisters’ Conference, the result of the gathering.

ALL: God of community, we thank you for the witness of Sr. Martin de Porres Grey. Give us the courage to confront those in our communities – even our families, friends, colleagues, and peers – when they perpetuate systems of injustice and oppression by their attitudes, thoughts, words or actions. AMEN.

The Ninth Station: Jesus Falls the Third Time



READER: Jesus Falls the Third Time;

ALL: We honor you, Jesus, and we thank you. For by your life, ministry, death and resurrection you have set us free.

READER: A reading from What We Have Seen, the 1984 pastoral letter from the Black Catholic Bishops of the United States

True reconciliation only arises where there is mutually perceived equality. This is what is meant by justice. Without justice, any meaningful reconciliation is impossible.

Racism, at once subtle and masked, still festers within our Church as within our society. This stain of racism on the American Church continues to be a source of pain and disappointment to all, both Black and White, who love [the Church and desire it to be "without stain or wrinkle."] This stain of racism, which is so alien to the Spirit of Christ, is a scandal to many, but for us it must be the opportunity to work for the Church's renewal as a part of our task of evangelization. Our demand for recognition, our demand for leadership roles in the task of evangelization, is not a call for separatism but a pledge of our commitment to the Church and to share in [its] witnessing to the love of Christ.

ALL: God of hope, cleanse us of the stain of racism that we may journey together toward true reconciliation, justice and equality. Help us to place our hope in you and in each other. Truly diverse yet united in you, may we stand forth as a credible witness to the love of Christ. We ask this relying on your unfailing mercy, AMEN.

Suggested Song:

"I Need You To Survive" by David Frazier
or "All Are Welcome" by Marty Haugen

The Tenth Station: Jesus is Stripped of His Garments



READER: Jesus is Stripped of His Garments;

ALL: We honor you, Jesus, and we thank you. For by your life, ministry, death and resurrection you have set us free.

Reader: As we reflect on this tenth station, we call to mind the witness of Mother Henriette DeLille.

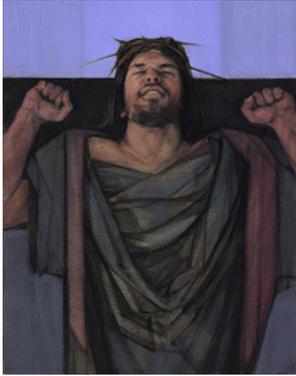
In the mid 1830s, despite laws forbidding interracial associations, Henriette quietly organized a small interracial community – the Sisters of the Presentation -- consisting of herself, seven young Creole women, and a young white French woman to care for the sick, help the poor, and educate free and enslaved children and adults in New Orleans.

In 1842, with official recognition as "religious association", the community changed its name to the Sisters of the Holy Family. The second order of African-American women religious, the sisters would establish the first and oldest Catholic nursing home in the United States, nurse New Orleans' poor through the yellow fever epidemic, and care for the wounded during and after the Civil War.

Because of racist opinions about the social status of black women, the sisters were forbidden to wear a habit by the Archbishop of New Orleans until 1872. And so the women wore a simple blue dress as their religious garb. Mother Henriette, who died in 1862, would never wear that habit.

ALL: God of all people, we thank you for the witness of Henriette DeLille and the Sisters of the Holy Family. Restore in us a desire for community, that we may embrace our diversity, stand in solidarity with one another, a see all of humanity as one, holy, human family. AMEN.

The Eleventh Station: Jesus is Nailed to the Cross



READER: Jesus is nailed to the cross

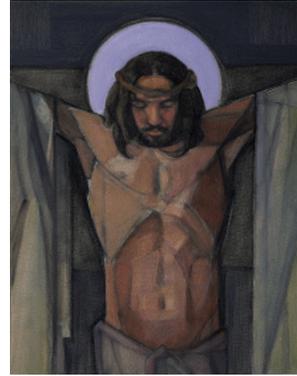
ALL: We honor you, Jesus, and we thank you. For by your life, ministry, death and resurrection you have set us free.

READER: As we reflect on this eleventh station, we call to mind the witness of all women of color who have suffered cruelty and injustice in their pursuit of making the Church truly 'catholic' – truly universal.

"Long before there were black priests in the United States, there were black Catholic sisters. Black sisters renounced an outside world that deemed all black people immoral and provided a powerful refutation to the insidious racial and sexual stereotypes used by white supremacists to justify African-American exclusion from U.S. citizenship rights and the ranks of religious life in the Church. Though practically invisible in the annals of American and Catholic history, black sisters also played critical, and oftentimes, leading roles in the fight to dismantle racial barriers in the U.S. Church. As the earliest champions of black Catholic education and priests, black sisters forced an often-ambivalent white hierarchy to acknowledge their African-American constituency and adhere to canon law and the Church's creed of universal Christian brotherhood. In doing so, black sisters challenged the nation and the Church to live up to the full promises of democracy, Catholicism, and justice for us."
(Shannen Dee Williams)

ALL: God of the past, present and future, we thank you for the witness of these women. May we find in them the inspiration and strength to continue the unfinished work of eradicating from our Church and society the racism, sexism, and every form of prejudice and discrimination that continue the economic, social, physical and spiritual crucifixion of our sisters and brothers. AMEN.

The Twelfth Station: Jesus Dies on the Cross



READER: Jesus Dies on the Cross

ALL: We honor you, Jesus, and we thank you. For by your life, ministry, death and resurrection you have set us free.

Allow a moment for silent reflection: What attitudes, beliefs, and practices regarding race am I being called to die to?

Reflective music may be played in the background.

The Thirteenth Station: Jesus' Body is Removed from the Cross



READER: Jesus' Body is Removed from the Cross

ALL: We honor you, Jesus, and we thank you. For by your life, ministry, death and resurrection you have set us free.

READER: As we reflect on this thirteenth station, we call to mind the witness of Sister Thea Bowman.

In one of her last interviews, having lived with cancer for nearly six years, Sr. Thea said, "I don't try to make sense of [suffering] I try to make sense of life."

Drawing inspiration and insight from African-American spirituals, which were so much a part of her life and ministry, Sr. Thea lived life fully and purposefully. A champion of incorporating African-American spirituality and Black Sacred Songs into the life of the Catholic Church, she challenged Catholics of all backgrounds to see their unique cultures, histories, and heritages as reason for celebration not cause for discrimination.

During her 1989 address the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Bowman, began her remarks by singing "Sometimes I feel Like a Motherless Child." She went on to say, "What does it mean to be black and Catholic? It means that I come to my church fully functioning. That doesn't frighten you, does it? I come to my church fully functioning. I bring myself, my black self, all that I am, all that I have, all that I hope to become. I bring my whole history, my tradition, my experience, my culture, my African American song and dance and gesture and movement and teaching and preaching and healing and responsibility as gift to the church."

ALL: God of welcome and inclusion, we thank you for the witness of Sr. Thea Bowman. Help us to embrace each other's giftedness. We ask this relying on your unfailing mercy, AMEN.

The Fourteenth Station: Jesus' Body is Laid in the Tomb



READER: Jesus' Body is Laid in the Tomb

ALL: We honor you, Jesus, and we thank you. For by your life, ministry, death and resurrection you have set us free.

READER: As we reflect on this fourteenth station, we call to mind the witness of Dr. Shannen Dee Williams.

As a doctoral student, Shannen Dee Williams stumbled on the subject of black nuns when researching the history of her own mother, who in 1972 became the first African-American woman accepted into Notre Dame University. In the midst of her research, Williams came across the 1968 creation of the National Black Sisters Conference. She reached out to some of the early members and the letters started pouring in: "We've been waiting on you. We're so glad someone's trying to tell our story," they said. The topic became the basis of her doctoral research. When her upcoming book *Subversive Habits: Black Nuns and the Struggle to Desegregate Catholic America after World War I* is released, it will be the first to examine the lives and struggles of black Catholic sisters in the 20th-century United States.

Without Williams' hours of research and interviews, this important part of Catholic history and the incredible witness of so many women could have been completely forgotten with the passage of time.

ALL: God of memories, we thank you for the witness of Shannen Dee Williams. May we always remember and learn from our Church's history of racism and discrimination and so that, together, we may journey from death to new life. We ask this relying on your unfailing mercy, AMEN.

Closing Prayer:

READER/LEADER: Recognizing that we are all one human family, let us pray together the words that Jesus taught us...

ALL:

Creator God,
Mother and Father to the one human family,
hallowed be your name!
May your reign come
may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven:
give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
AMEN.

Suggested Closing Song: "Lift Every Voice and Sing" or "We Shall Overcome"

Notes:

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MUSIC: All of the suggested music is available in the hymnal "Lead Me, Guide Me" (2nd Edition) available through GIA Publications, Inc. With the exceptions of "I Need You to Survive" and "Lift Every Voice and Sing" (which have alternative suggestions) all of the music is also available in *Gather Comprehensive Third Edition* by GIA Publication, Inc.

ROLES: It is preferred that these Stations of the Cross be led by a diverse group. Consider inviting African-American women or other women of color from your community to read the reflections.



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Be A Witness of Mercy

resources for learning & doing

Websites

National Black Sisters' Conference: www.nbsc68.com

Books on Racial Justice & African-American Catholic History

Subversive Habits: Black Nuns and the Struggle to Desegregate Catholic America after World War I by Shannen Dee Williams (forthcoming)

Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being by M. Shawn Copeland

Racial Justice and the Catholic Church by Bryan Massingale

The History of Black Catholics in the United States by Cyprian Davis

Work for Justice

Southern Poverty Law Center's Teaching Tolerance
<http://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources>

