

So Proudly Do We Hail ... !

November is designated as Black Catholic History Month. As such, it is good for us to recall some of the outstanding deeds done by black Catholics in the past. Some of the names may be familiar from past articles in The Catholic Review, but recalling them is good for the mind, soul and for keeping our history alive.

We will begin with our own archdiocese.

In 1791, Sulpician Father Louis DuBourg, himself a refugee from Santo Domingo, opened the lower chapel of St. Mary's Seminary to the black refugees from Santo Domingo. This small humble group formed the nucleus of the first black Catholic parish in the United States. Today that parish is known as St. Francis Xavier Church. In addition, Father DuBourg appointed Sulpician Father John Marie Tessier., then president of St. Mary's Seminary College, as first pastor of the group. His successor today is Josephite Father Jim Mc Linden.

Out of this pious group, came "The Holy Family Society," a black Catholic lay group, the first in the United States. We still have all the notes and minutes intact.

Another first from the early 1800s is the Tobias Society. This organization was made up of a group of black people who raised money to bury black Catholics in the city whose families could not afford a proper burial for their kin.

In the same lower chapel, a woman, Elizabeth Lange, came to assist Sulpician Father James Joubert, with his Catechism classes for black children. In time, the two co-founded "The Oblate Sisters of Providence," the first black Sisterhood in America.

The Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary have three distinct branches; one in Monroe, Mich., another in Immaculata, Pa., and the third, in Scranton, Pa. Each branch has its own motherhouse and each branch has its own university. Their foundress was a woman of color and one of the original Oblate Sisters of Providence. Today the four congregations collaborate on a variety of projects.

In the days when Washington was part of the archdiocese of Baltimore, Father Patrick Healy, one of the first black men ordained from the United States, was

president of Georgetown University. His brother James became the second bishop of Portland, Maine. Two other brothers became priests, but none of them really acknowledged their black heritage.

Politically speaking, the first black mayor of Baltimore, Clarence "Du" Burns was a member of St. Francis Xavier and a basketball coach for the CYO. From the same parish, we have Reginald Lewis for whom the Baltimore Museum of African American Culture is named. Reginald Lewis was also taught by the Oblate Sisters.

Another first in Baltimore politics was Victorine Adams, who was the first black woman to be elected to City Council in the state of Maryland. Victorine was a parishioner of St. Peter Claver parish.

Oblate Sister of Providence Naomi (Immaculate) Smith, was one of the two black women to be admitted into the graduate school of Loyola College.

When Cardinal Lawrence Sheehan was alive and had special guests for dinner, he often asked Teddy Wilson from St. Pius Parish to prepare and serve the meal.

It was St. Peter Claver's CYO who integrated the basketball league by arranging a game with St. Bridget. Also, it was the parishioners again who hosted the first Cursillo on the East Coast.

Josephite Father William Norvel is the first African American to lead the Josephite priests. He was elected in June by his fellow priests. For his vicar, Father Norvell chose Father Michael Thompson, another African American.

A present project of the Office of African American Catholic Ministries is the creation of a scholarship program. Begun last year, the program has brought in \$ 20,800. The scholarship is geared toward two graduates of a Catholic grade school and another scholarship is awarded to a graduate of a Catholic high school. The third component of the program is the establishment of an endowment fund. As part of Black Catholic History Month let us try to build up the endowment fund, every little bit helps.

This program is the first of its kind for the office.

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