

# Telling the tale Black Catholics in Baltimore

The coming of the Mill Hill Fathers to Baltimore was a landmark in the administration of Archbishop Martin Spalding. This group of priests was founded outside London by Cardinal Herbert Vaughan for the purpose of missionary work. On arriving in Baltimore, the black parish community of St. Francis Xavier was transferred from the care of the Jesuits to the Mill Hill Fathers. Later in 1883, the second black parish, St. Monica (in the area where Camden Yards now stands) was established in South Baltimore. During this time, the number of black Catholics had increased and had populated all areas of the city. In the meantime, the Mill Hill Fathers had established a seminary on Pennsylvania Avenue for the training of priests to serve the black community. During this period, an American superior was elected: Father John Slattery. The new superior saw the need of a parish where the future priests could be trained. As a result, on Sept. 9, 1888, the parish of St. Peter Claver was established at the intersection of Fremont and Pennsylvania Avenue. Now the west-side black Catholics had their own church. One year later, 1899, the pastor, Father Lambert Welbers, established St. Peter Claver School with an integrated staff of two lay teachers. The school is still in existence and is now called Father Charles A. Hall Lower School. The following year, Father John Slattery was instrumental in getting the Glen Riddle Franciscan Sisters to conduct the school. The sisters served the black community for 103 years. Congratulations, sisters!

The Mill Hill Fathers were recalled to England in 1893. The priests had a decision to make: return to England or remain in the United States. The five priests who remained in Baltimore started a new community called the Society of St. Joseph of the Sacred Heart, commonly known as Josephites. Their purpose was the evangelization of African-Americans. The headquarters is on Calvert Street in Baltimore, and the fathers are responsible for St. Francis Xavier, St. Peter Claver and St. Veronica. They are also chaplains for the Oblate Sisters at St. Frances Academy and Sunday chaplain for the Oblate Sisters at their motherhouse on Gun Road. They also offer a weekly liturgy at Bon Secours. A future article will give the history of the Josephites in the archdiocese.

Today, the Office of African American Catholic Ministries of the Archdiocese of Baltimore is one of the most active in the country. With a limited staff, the office serves African-American Catholics with a variety of services, among which are two Africentric Catechetical Programs, "Keep on Teaching" and "Walk in the Light"; an Africentric page in The Catholic Review; the publication of the book "What We Have Seen and Heard"; and an evangelization outreach program, "Operation Faith Lift." The office sponsors the annual Mother Lange Awards Banquet and the annual Black Catholic History Tour. The office is involved in Lobby Night in Annapolis, the National Black Catholic Congress and the National Black Catholic Apostolate for Life. In the area of youth, there is the Harambee Youth Activities, including the new effort of "Handling our Business: Theology on Top Of."

Some statistics of the African-American population in the Archdiocese of Baltimore are: approximately 25,000 persons, 16 predominantly African-American parishes with an additional eight parishes with a significant African-American population, nine predominantly African-American Catholic elementary schools and four with significant black populations. There is one predominantly black high school and six high schools with a meaningful number of black students. There are two African-American (archdiocesan) priests and two African pastors. We have seven active African-American deacons and two retired deacons. We also have two religious African-American women who serve as pastoral associates and one African sister who serves as a pastoral associate.

We have come a long way ... God be praised!

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