



**ON THE
ROAD TO
SAINTHOOD**

LEADERS OF AFRICAN DESCENT
IN THE UNITED STATES

COMPILED BY SISTERS OF THE PRECIOUS BLOOD

DEAR FRIENDS

We are excited to offer this booklet on Leaders of African Descent on the road to Sainthood in the United States to you. At a time when we are acutely aware of the racism present in our world and even in our religious institutions, it demands that we recognize the contribution of Black and Brown folks over the years to the American Catholic Church. Despite being rejected, marginalized and sidelined by many Catholics and the institutional church, these women and men not only kept their faith in God but continued to toil so that others may come to know of a God who loves them wholly and unconditionally as they are.

Cognizant that the road to sainthood also depends on more people joining the cause through prayer and action, we hope that this booklet will contribute to the eventual canonization of these exemplary individuals and that their life stories will inspire us in our own journeys of faith. More so, we pray that in recognizing the adversity and prejudice, due to their race, that they faced in trying to respond to their vocational call, we may be inspired to never tire in our commitment to work for racial justice.

Sisters of the Precious Blood
Racial Reconciliation Working Group
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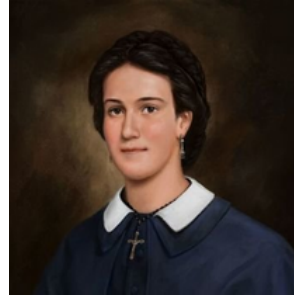
CONTENTS



03 VENERABLE
PIERRE
TOUSSAINT



05 SERVANT OF
GOD MOTHER
MARY LANGE



07 VENERABLE
HENRIETTE
DELILLE



09 VENERABLE
FR. AUGUSTUS
TOLTON



11 SERVANT OF
GOD JULIA
GREELEY



13 SERVANT OF
GOD SR. THEA
BOWMAN

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Watercolor portraits of Pierre Toussaint and his wife, Juliette Noel Toussaint.

VENERABLE PIERRE TOUSSAINT

1776 - 1853

Venerable Pierre Toussaint, a philanthropist and founder of many Catholic charitable works, was born a slave in Haiti and brought from Haiti to New York as an apprentice under a popular hairstylist in the city. He eventually became the most sought-after hairdresser of high society women. Upon the death of his master, he gained his freedom and quickly succeeded as one of the country's first black entrepreneurs. He became quite wealthy, but instead of spending lavishly on himself, he supported the Church and the poor. He and his wife sheltered orphans, refugees, and others out on the streets in their home. He founded one of New York's first orphanages and raised money for the city's first cathedral. During yellow fever epidemics, Toussaint would risk his life to help others by nursing the sick and praying with the dying. *"I have never felt I am a slave to any man or woman but I am a servant of Almighty God who made us all. When one of his children is in need, I am glad to be His slave."*

VENERABLE PIERRE TOUSSAINT

PRAYER

Lord God, source of love and compassion,
we praise and honor You for the virtuous and charitable
life of our brother in Christ, Venerable Pierre Toussaint.

Inspired by the example of our Lord Jesus,
Pierre worshipped You with love
and served your people with generosity.
He attended Mass daily and responded
to the practical and spiritual needs of friends
and strangers, or the rich and the poor,
the sick and the homeless of 19th century New York.

If it is Your will, let the name of
Venerable Pierre Toussaint
be officially raised to the rank of Saint,
so that the world may know
this Haitian New Yorker
who refused to hate or be selfish,
but instead lived to the full commandments of heaven
and the divine law of love – love for God
and for neighbor.

By following his example and asking for his prayers,
may we, too, be counted among the blessed in heaven.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Prayer for the Canonization of Pierre Toussaint

SERVANT OF GOD MOTHER MARY LANGE

1784-1882



Photo of early Oblate Sisters of Providence.

Servant of God Mother Mary Lange was born Elizabeth Lange, a native of the Caribbean, and believed to be Cuban born of Haitian descent. She was the foundress and first Superior General of the Oblate Sisters of Providence (1829-1832), the first religious congregation of African American women in the history of the Catholic Church. On July 2, 1829, Elizabeth and three other women professed their vows and became the Oblate Sisters of Providence with the goal of educating and evangelizing African Americans. They educated youth and provided a home for orphans. Freed slaves were educated and at times admitted into the congregation. They nursed the terminally ill during the cholera epidemic of 1832, sheltered the elderly, and served as domestics at St. Mary's Seminary. Mother Mary Lange practiced faith to an extraordinary degree. It was her deep faith – in close union with Jesus – which enabled her to persevere against all odds. She lived through disappointment and opposition until God called her home in 1882 at the St. Frances Convent in Baltimore, Maryland.

SERVANT OF GOD MOTHER MARY LANGE

PRAYER

Almighty and Eternal God,
you granted Mother Mary Lange extraordinary trust
in Your providence.

You endowed her with humility, courage, holiness
and an extraordinary sense of service
to the poor and sick.

You enabled her to found
the Oblate Sisters of Providence
and provide educational, social and spiritual
ministry especially to the African American community.

Mother Lange's love for all
enabled her to see Christ in each person
and the pain of prejudice and
racial hatred never blurred that vision.

Deign to raise her to the highest honors of the altar
in order that through her intercession,
more souls may come to a deeper understanding
and more fervent love of you.

Heavenly Father, glorify Your heart
by granting also this favor

(here mention your request),

which we ask through the intercession
of your faithful servant, Mother Mary Lange.

Amen.



VENERABLE HENRIETTE DELILLE

1813-1862

Venerable Henriette Delille was born in New Orleans, Louisiana, where she would live her entire life. For the love of Jesus and responding to the Gospel's mandate, she was determined to help those in need. Henriette was also a person who suffered as she made her way through life, and she bore many crosses. She taught those around her that sanctity can be attained in following the path of Jesus. It was in this manner that she dealt with her troubles and major obstacles to achieve her goals. Some of the troubles Henriette met were the resistance of the ruling population to the idea of a black religious congregation; the lack of finances to do the work; the taunts and disbelief of people in her mission; the lack of support from both the Church and civil authority; and poor health.

However, Henriette practiced heroic virtue. She had faith, lived in hope, and practiced love. She was compassionate, forgiving, and merciful. She believed in justice and was not afraid to do what was right in the eyes of God. God blessed her efforts and, in 1842, she founded the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Family. Henriette died 20 years later on November 17, 1862. Her funeral was held at St. Augustine Church. Her obituary stated, "... Miss Henriette Delille had for long years consecrated herself totally to God without reservation to the instruction of the ignorant and principally to the slave."

VENERABLE HENRIETTE DELILLE

PRAYER

O good and gracious God,
you called Henriette Delille to give herself
in service and in love
to the slaves and the sick,
to the orphan and the aged,
to the forgotten and the despised.

Grant that inspired by her life,
we might be renewed in heart and mind.

If it is your will
may she one day be raised to the honor of sainthood.

By her prayers,
may we live in harmony and peace,
through Jesus Christ, Our Lord.

Amen.

VENERABLE FR. AUGUSTUS TOLTON

1854-1897

Venerable Augustus Tolton was the first U.S. Roman Catholic priest publicly known to be black when he was ordained in 1886. A former slave who was baptized and reared Catholic, Tolton formally studied in Rome. He was ordained in Rome on Easter Sunday at the Archbasilica of St. John Lateran. Fr. Tolton led the development and construction of St. Monica's Catholic Church as a black "National Parish Church", which was completed in 1893. Tolton's success at ministering to black Catholics quickly earned him national attention within the Catholic hierarchy. "Good Father Gus," as many called him, was known for his eloquent sermons, his beautiful singing voice, and his talent for playing the accordion. He is the subject of the 1973 biography from *Slave to Priest* by Sister Caroline Hemesath.



VENERABLE FR. AUGUSTUS TOLTON

PRAYER

O God, we give you thanks for your servant and priest, Father Augustus Tolton, who labored among us in times of contradiction, times that were both beautiful and paradoxical. His ministry helped lay the foundation for a truly Catholic gathering in faith in our time. We stand in the shadow of his ministry. May his life continue to inspire us and imbue us with that confidence and hope that will forge a new evangelization for the Church we love.

Father in Heaven, Father Tolton's suffering service sheds light upon our sorrows; we see them through the prism of your Son's passion and death. If it be your Will, O God, glorify your servant, Father Tolton, by granting the favor
I now request through his intercession

(mention your request)

so that all may know the goodness of this priest whose memory looms large in the Church he loved.

Complete what you have begun in us that we might work for the fulfillment of your kingdom. Not to us the glory, but glory to you O God, through Jesus Christ, your Son and our Lord; Father, Son and Holy Spirit, you are our God, living and reigning forever and ever.

Amen



SERVANT OF GOD JULIA GREELEY

1833- 1918

Servant of God Julia Greeley was born into slavery in Hannibal, Missouri sometime between 1833 and 1848. Freed by Missouri's Emancipation Act in 1865, Julia subsequently earned her keep by serving white families in Missouri, Colorado, Wyoming, and New Mexico—though mostly in the Denver area. Julia entered the Catholic Church at Sacred Heart Parish in Denver in 1880 and was an outstanding supporter of all the parish. The Jesuits who ran the parish considered her the most enthusiastic promoter of devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus they had ever seen. Every month she visited on foot every fire station in Denver and delivered literature of the Sacred Heart League to the firemen, Catholics and non-Catholics alike. A daily communicant, Julia had a rich devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and the Blessed Virgin and continued her prayers while working. She joined the Secular Franciscan Order in 1901 and was active in it till her death in 1918. As part of the Cause for Canonization, Julia's mortal remains were transferred to Denver's Cathedral Basilica of the Immaculate Conception on June 7, 2017.

SERVANT OF GOD JULIA GREELEY

PRAYER

Heavenly Father,
your servant Julia Greeley
dedicated her life
to honoring the Sacred Heart of your Son,
and to the humble service of your children,
especially the poor.
If it be in accordance with your holy will,
please grant this favor I now ask
through her intercession.

(mention your intercession)

I ask also, in the Name of Jesus,
whose Sacred Heart filled Julia's heart
with love for all she met,
that I may follow her example
of humility and simplicity
in loving you and my
neighbor.

Amen

SERVANT OF GOD THEA BOWMAN

1937-1990

Sr. Thea Bowman, FSPA was a self-proclaimed, “old folks’ child.” Bowman was the only child born to middle-aged parents, Dr. Theon Bowman, a physician, and Mary Esther Bowman, a teacher. At birth, she was given the name Bertha Elizabeth Bowman. She was born in 1937 and reared in Canton, Mississippi. As a child, she converted to Catholicism through the inspiration of the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration and the Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity who were her teachers and pastors at Holy Child Jesus Church and School in Canton. During her short lifetime, many people considered her a religious sister undeniably close to God and who lovingly invited others to encounter the presence of God in their lives. She is acclaimed as a “holy woman” in the hearts of those who knew and loved her and continue to seek her intercession for guidance and healing.

Photo from www.fspa.org/content/about/sister-thea-bowman



SERVANT OF GOD THEA BOWMAN

PRAYER

Ever loving God, who by your infinite goodness inflamed the heart of your servant and religious, Sister Thea Bowman with an ardent love for you and the People of God; a love expressed through her indomitable spirit, deep and abiding faith, dedicated teaching, exuberant singing, and unwavering witnessing of the joy of the Gospel.

Her prophetic witness continues to inspire us to share the Good News with those whom we encounter; most especially the poor, oppressed, and marginalized. May Sister Thea's life and legacy compel us to walk together, to pray together, and to remain together as missionary disciples ushering in the new evangelization for the Church we love.

Gracious God imbue us with the grace and perseverance that you gave your servant, Sister Thea. For in turbulent times of racial injustice, she sought equity, peace, and reconciliation. In times of intolerance and ignorance, she brought wisdom, awareness, unity, and charity. In times of pain, sickness, and suffering, she taught us how to live fully until called home to the land of promise. If it be your Will, O God, glorify our beloved Sister Thea, by granting the favor I now request through her intercession

(mention your request),

so that all may know of her goodness and holiness and may imitate her love for You and Your Church. We ask this through Your Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Amen

Prayer for Beatification of Sr. Thea Bowman

Portrait painted by Marshall Bouldin III

MORE INFORMATION

UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

<https://www.usccb.org/committees/african-american-affairs/road-sainthood-leaders-african-descent>

PIERRE TOUSSAINT

archny.org/ministries-and-offices/cultural-diversity-apostolate/black-ministry/venerable-pierre-toussaint/

MOTHER MARY LANGE

oblatesisters.com

SR. HENRIETTE DELILLE

www.sistersoftheholymfamily.com/

FR. AUGUSTUS TOLTON

tolton.archchicago.org/

JULIA GREELEY

juliagreeley.org

SR. THEA BOWMAN

www.sistertheabowman.com

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www.preciousbloodsistersvocations.com