

ON THE ROAD TO SAINTHOOD – SEVEN AFRICAN AMERICAN CATHOLICS

These are brief biographies of the Seven African American Catholics who have taken the first step toward sainthood by being declared a "Servant of God." The title, "Servant of God" means the Congregation for the Causes of Saints has found enough evidence to open a case. Three of these candidates have reached the second step by being declared "venerable." "Venerable" means that the pope has recognized the person has lived a life of "heroic virtue." The remaining steps are beatification and canonization which require proof of a miracle at each stage. Prayers for each of these candidates listed in the links below.

Servant of God Mother Mary Lange

Mother Lange (1787-1882) co-founded the Oblate Sisters of Providence in Baltimore in 1829. Dedicated to the care and education of Black children, the Oblate Sisters of Providence is the first successful religious community for women of African descent. See more at: www.motherlange.org.



Venerable Father Augustus Tolton



Father Augustus Tolton (1854-1897) was born into slavery in Missouri. Ordained in Rome in 1886, he was the first recognized Black American priest. Pastor of St. Monica in Chicago, he became the spiritual leader of the 19th century National Black Catholic Congress movement. See more at: tolton.archchicago.org/.

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Servant of God Julia Greeley

Julia Greeley (born between 1833-1848-died 1918) is known as Denver's Angel of Charity. She was born into slavery in Hannibal, Missouri, and entered the Catholic Church at Sacred Heart Parish in Denver in 1880. 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. See more at www.juliagreeley.org.



Servant of God Sister Thea Bowman



Sister Thea Bowman (1937-1990) born in Canton, Mississippi, was a convert to Catholicism. At the age of 15, she moved to LaCrosse, Wisconsin, to join the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, where she became the only African-American member of the community. She taught at all grade levels, eventually earning her doctorate and becoming a college professor of English and linguistics. She later became a highly acclaimed evangelizer, teacher, writer and singer, sharing the joy of the Gospel and her rich cultural heritage throughout the nation. See more at www.sistertheabowman.com/.

Venerable Mother Henriette DeLille

Mother Henriette DeLille (1812-1862) was a free woman of color. Born in New Orleans, she founded the Sisters of the Holy Family in 1842. The congregation ministered to slaves at a time when educating slaves was illegal. Mother DeLille was the first U.S.-born African American formally postulated for canonization. See more at www.sistersoftheholysfamily.com.



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Venerable Pierre Toussaint



Toussaint (1766-1853) was born into slavery in Haiti. He became a freeman, successful businessman and philanthropist in New York City. He is the only lay person honored, alongside cardinal-archbishops, with burial in the crypt of St. Patrick Cathedral. See more at: www.obmny.org/venerable-pierre-toussaint.

Servant of God Martin Maria de Porres Ward

Fr. Martin de Porres Ward, OFW, Conventual was the first African American Conventual Franciscan in North America. He was born Matthis DeWitte in 1918 in Charleston, Massachusetts. After his studies at St. Francis Seminary, Staten Island, and Saint Anthony on the Hudson Major Seminary, he was ordained in 1955, he and six other friars left for Brazil. He ministered as a missionary in Brazil in capacities as a teacher, counselor, chaplain and formation of the young friars. He is most noted as being a very compassionate confessor who was always available for the Sacrament of Reconciliation. In 1999, Fr. Martin died in Brazil. His final wish was that he be buried among the people he had spent all of his ministry as a Friar Priest. <https://www.olaprovince.org/locations/the-cause-for-fr-martin-de-porres-maria-ward-ofm-conv-2/>

