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Black Catholicism: A Gift to be Shared!

Since November is Black Catholic History Month, I thought it would be appropriate to address a question that many have asked me over my past twelve years of full-time ministry. Whenever I have a speaking engagement or I am conversing with people of a different race, I am inevitably asked, "What's up with all that 'Black' stuff?" or "Why does something have to be labeled as 'Black and Catholic' and not just 'Catholic'?" I thought this would be an apropos time to address this question.

Black Catholics have been around since the foundation of the Church. Many scholars have proven that black people were present throughout the Bible - from the Old Testament tribes and Simon of Cyrene that helped Jesus carry his cross, to the Ethiopian Eunuch in the Acts of the Apostles. Also, Black Catholics were present when the first Catholics set foot in this country in St. Augustine, Florida in 1513 and Los Angeles, California in 1765.

Although our history extends to the beginnings of our faith, our history also includes times when we have been viewed as "second-class citizens" in the Church. At times, we have faced unfair prejudices both racially and culturally. Our expression of faith was viewed as not "authentically Catholic" or our historical contributions to the faith were ignored. This is why many, such as my aunt, left the faith years ago. However, many others have courageously and faithfully chosen to stay despite these factors.

This is why Offices of Black Catholic Ministries and organizations like the Knights and Ladies of St. Peter Claver and Xavier University's Institute for Black Catholic Studies exist: to make sure that we, as Black Catholics, have a place where our voices can be heard and a place for us to share our gifts with the wider Church.

The reason things are labeled "Black and Catholic" is no different than when our brothers and sisters of other cultural backgrounds (i.e. Hispanic, Asian, etc.) lift up their expression of Catholicism. Black Catholics, specifically African-American Catholics, express and celebrate the Catholic faith through the unique lens of our history, language, artwork, dress, music and other forms of expression. Our "Black Catholic" programs and ministries are not intended to separate, but are an open invitation to all for enrichment, education and communion as brothers and sisters. Our history, our dedication to the faith and our contributions to the Church remind all of us that Black Catholics are truly a gift to be shared with the wider community.

Ansel Augustine,
MPS
Director of the
Office of Black
Catholic Ministries

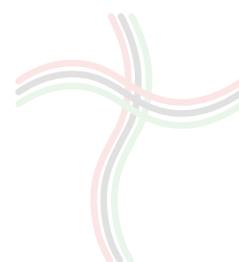


Crowds gathered and raised their voices in praise at the Gospel Music Fest at Xavier University on September 14, 2013.

The Office of Black Catholic Ministries

OBCM identifies and fosters the rich diversity of the Black Catholic community, particularly in the Archdiocese of New Orleans. Our mission is to evangelize, highlight, enhance and celebrate the contributions of the Black Catholic community as it shares its gifts in the Church and society.

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November is Black Catholic History Month!

Did you know...

There are about 2 million Black Catholics in the United States of America. Catholics of African descent represent almost 25% of the one billion Roman Catholics throughout the world in more than 59 countries.

There were 3 African Popes: St. Victor (186-197 AD), St. Miltiades (311-314 AD) and St. Gelasius (492-496 AD)

There are 102 historically black colleges and 253 Catholic colleges in the United States, yet only one is both Black and Catholic. That distinction belongs to Xavier University of Louisiana. Xavier University is also the only university founded by a Saint (Saint Katharine Drexel).

On January 6, 1966, Harold Perry, SVD, was ordained auxiliary bishop of New Orleans. He was the first black bishop stationed in the United States since the death of Bishop James Healy in 1900.

Blessed Henriette DeLille, founder of the Sisters of the Holy Family of New Orleans is on her way to becoming the first African-American Saint.

The Knights of St. Peter Claver (headquartered here in New Orleans) was founded in 1909 by the Josephite Fathers (www.kofpc.org).

Notable Black Catholics

Homer Plessy (1862-1925)
Plaintiff in the Supreme Court Case Plessy vs Ferguson, Member of St. Augustine Church (New Orleans, LA)

A.P. Tureaud (1899-1972)
Attorney for the New Orleans Chapter of the NAACP during the Civil Rights Movement.

Claude McKay
(1889-1948) Writer during the Harlem Renaissance

Joe Louis (1914-1981)
World Heavyweight Champion Boxing

Billie Holiday
(1915-1959) Blues Singer

Gregory Hines (1946-2003)
Dancer, Choreographer, Actor, Director

Ernest "Dutch" Morial
(1929-1989)
First African American Mayor of New Orleans (1978-1986)

Marc Morial
Former Mayor of New Orleans (1994-2002), Present President of the National Urban League (2003-present)

Vanessa Williams
First African-American Miss America, Actress, Singer

Keegan Michael Key
Actor, Comedian

Dr. Norman C. Francis
President of Xavier University of Louisiana (1968-present), Longest tenured president of an American University, Recipient of the President's Medal of Freedom

OBCM: A Voice of Truth for Our Community

By Joseph Simon

I grew up in New Orleans during the 1960's. As a child, I thought everyone was Catholic. After all, we were released early from class in the public schools to walk to our parish to attend catechism on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Schools were closed on All Saints Day and Ash Wednesday so we could go to Mass. However, I did wonder why we went to "our church" and not the one only five blocks away from where we lived. When I asked, I was told that "our church" was for us, the other was for white people. We could go, but we had to sit in the choir loft in the back. That never made sense to me.

Things changed in the 1970's. We had a voice and that voice came in the form of the Office of Black Catholic Ministries. The Office of Black Catholic Ministries (OBCM) remains a relevant and vital part of our archdiocese today. OBCM continues to do a phenomenal job of addressing the unique issues and concerns of Black Catholics and works to dispel the myth that our expression of faith is not authentically Catholic.

It's because of this "myth busting" that I became involved in the OBCM. While attending an Archdiocese Catholic Men's Conference as part of the Catholic Men's Fellowship, Deacon Reggie Seymour asked me to be a part of the conference planning committee. I said yes. I wanted to help bring Catholic men together regardless of race or ethnicity to openly discuss issues and grow together in spirituality. I wanted to eradicate the myths and perceptions while interacting as brothers in Christ. OBCM continues to create this dialogue in our archdiocese.

Being involved in the Office of Black Catholic Ministries has been extremely rewarding. The friendships that I've made are priceless. More importantly, the willingness of everyone to support our community's endeavors makes all our work worthwhile. I urge anyone who has the desire to use their talents for the good of the Church and the black community to get involved. After all, we have the legacy of three African Popes, Father Augustine Tolston, Mother Henriette DeLille, and all of the black saints as examples Black Catholicism to guide us.



Joseph Simon is a co-chair for the OBCM Men's Ministry. He is a parishioner at St. Maria Goretti Catholic Church.

"What does it mean to be black and Catholic? ... I bring myself, my black self, all that I am, all that I have, all that I'm worth and all I hope to become. I bring my whole history, my traditions, my experience, my culture, ...teaching and preaching, healing and responsibility as a gift to the church."

-Sr. Thea Bowman, FSPA

A Marriage Bonded by Love and Faith

By Marc and Kiki Barnes

He is laid back; she is outgoing. He likes to relax at home; she likes to go out and have fun. He's pretty quiet; she's a conversationalist. He has two left feet; she can cut a rug. He is short; she is tall. You would think with all of these differences, they would make quite an odd couple. But they have one thing in common that makes them a match made in heaven. That commonality is an abiding love of God. How do we know? Well, this couple is us. Hi, we are Marc and Kiki Barnes.

When we met in April 2005, we had no idea how our lives were about to change. We fell in love quickly and decided to get engaged. Then in July, Marc's father passed away suddenly and unexpectedly. In August, the tragedy of Hurricane Katrina struck. While we were trying to get to know each other, we were also dealing with some very difficult situations. We managed by reading the Bible together every day. We asked God for guidance because we did not know what path we were being led to take. One thing became clear to both of us. God put us together and we just had to figure out the rest.

Our faith is the glue that keeps everything together. We never make a big decision without praying about it and when there are challenges, we deal with them straight on. But it hasn't always been easy. There have been times when things could have gone the other way, both before we were married and after. When those times came, we discussed the issues, we looked for Bible verses that addressed what we were going through and we prayed. We were always able to figure it out. Now that we know each other well, those more difficult times don't happen as often, but when they do, we turn to God.

We are very different people with different interests and sometimes even different expectations. We deal with those differences by communicating them. Marc is usually the one who forces the conversations. Kiki always (although sometimes reluctantly) opens up. We don't yell. We just discuss. And we are honest about what we are feeling. We respect our differences. Sometimes we playfully tease each other about them. We never discuss a winner or loser in a disagreement and when it's over, it's over. We find the compromise and move forward.

We consider each other God's gift to us. If you are considering marriage, consider if you are willing to compromise for your future spouse. Sometimes that means conceding. Are you willing to do that? Be completely honest, even when it's hard. Is your fiancé God's gift to you? And when you are married and difficulties occur, first turn to God. Then put in the hard work of communication, counseling and compromise. This, along with the strength of your faith and your love for each other will get you through. We are a living testament.

Marc and Kiki Barnes work in collaboration with OBCM and Family Life Apostolate, promoting strong marriages built on strong faith.

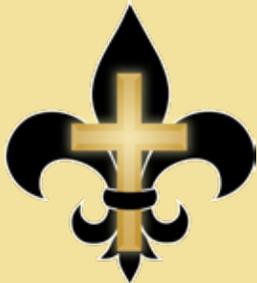


Black Saints Celebration 2013

Come Walk With Me Against Violence, Murder and Racism

Saturday,

November 9, 2013



Join the Office of Black Catholic Ministries as we Celebrate Black Catholic Heritage!

The celebration kicks-off with a parade starting from Hardin Park in New Orleans and concludes with

a prayer service and reception at Corpus Christi/Epiphany Church on St. Bernard Avenue.

- 10:00 a.m. Participants assemble at Hardin Park, 2501 New Orleans St., New Orleans
- 11:00 a.m. Parade begins
- 12:00 p.m. Arrive at Corpus Christi/Epiphany 2022 St. Bernard Ave., New Orleans Program (Prayer Service)
- 12:15 p.m. Reception at Corpus Christi/Epiphany
- 1:30 p.m.



The IMANI Youth & Young Adult Ministry Team



A recent meeting of the Office of Black Catholic Ministries Directors and advisors



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Office of Black Catholic Ministries

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Upcoming Events with the Office of Black Catholic Ministries

For more information or to get involved, contact us (504) 861-6207 or bcatholics@arch-no.org

WINTER 2013

November 9, 2013

Black Catholic History Month Event
Black Saints Celebration

November 11, 2013 - 7:00pm

IMANI TEAM MEETING - High School Leadership Board
(Xavier University)

November 16, 2013 - 6:30PM

Divine Gratefulness Concert with Pastor John P Kee
(Household of Faith, 9300 I-10 Service Rd., N.O. East)

November 21-23, 2013

National Catholic Youth Conference (NCYC)
(Indianapolis, IN)

November 23, 2013

LISTEN Literacy and Arts Festival (2523 Bayou Rd.)

WINTER/SPRING 2014

January 20, 2014

MLK "Day On, Not Off" Day of
Service

March 8, 2014

Black Catholic Day of Reflection
with the Dioceses of Houma/
Thibodaux, Baton Rouge,
Lafayette, and New Orleans
(Xavier University of Louisiana)

March 16, 2014 - 3:00PM

Youth & Young Adult Revival
St. Mary of the Angels

April 4-6, 2014

Habari Gani #6

