

The seminary at Bay St. Louis was finally opened formally with much fanfare and a solemn blessing on 16 September 1923. The House Chronicle of the Seminary describes the day thus:

Today is marked as a “RED LETTER” day in the annals of St. Augustine’s Mission House at Bay St. Louis, Mississippi. It was the day of the dedication of this new Mission House: and in the history of the Catholic Church among the Colored people of America, the day of the opening of the portals of the first seminary for young men of their race with a vocation for the priesthood, a day that will be long remembered particularly by the hundreds of visiting Knights of Peter Claver, and thousands of Colored Catholics from New Orleans and other points along the Coast, as an epoch-making forward step, and as a pledge of their most hearty endorsement of the great enterprise ... A grand parade was formed ... Thus they marched through the business section of the town, then to the Seminary grounds.

As soon as the visitors arrived on the Seminary grounds, another procession was staged. At the head of the procession was the bearer of the standard of our faith, the Cross with which the new Seminary will soon be crowned; beside him two altar boys; then “Old Glory” and the banner of Peter Claver, followed by the Knights themselves, dressed in immaculate white uniforms with swords held aloft. After these came the faithful at large; then a great number of Sisters and Brothers, the Seminarians, the Clergy and His Lordship, the Bishop. This beautiful procession wended its way from the Rectory to the new Mission House where Rt. Rev. John E. Gunn, Bishop of Natchez, before the main entrance of the building, implored the blessings of God upon the new Seminary and sprinkled the exterior of the building with Holy Water.

After this Father Janser celebrated a solemn Mass, at which Father Kane, a Josephite priest, gave the sermon. At five-thirty a parade was once more formed, and the visitors in step with the music, marched back to the station to board the trains that would take them to their various homes in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Texas. Just before they boarded the train, the air was filled with the strains of “Home Sweet Home.”

September 16, 1923

Pius XI

To His Son, William Gier, Superior General of the Society of the Divine Word

Beloved Son!

Greeting and Apostolic Blessing!

It is to Us a source of deep joy to learn that the college for the education of Negroes which you had established temporarily at Greenville, in the Diocese of Natchez, will shortly be transferred to Bay St. Louis, in the same diocese, and converted into a mission house for the training of negro boys according to the Rule of your Order.

You are determined to carry this plan through to success, because it accords perfectly with the ideals of your Society, with God's admonition to the Church to teach all nations, and with the precepts of this Apostolic See; Since it is our special task to follow in the footsteps of St. Paul, and carry the word and name of God to the pagan races, it is only natural that you must be imbued with the same spirit which inspired St. Paul. This Apostle declared himself a debtor to Greeks and barbarians, to the uneducated and educated, since between Jews and Greeks there is no distinction. For all there is the selfsame Lord, bountiful in His gifts to all who pray to Him.

In your new undertaking you are following the very principle which, in so far as circumstances allowed, has always guided the Catholic Church. To this mother has arisen, especially in recent times, a numerous progeny among the black races - a host of children who have frequently displayed virtues so splendid that they sealed their faith with their blood as in the most glorious epochs of Christian history. The Negroes occupy enormous areas of the earth, and it is undoubted that these races, which the Church takes so loving and maternal an interest in gladdening with. the knowledge of her joyful message, will in the course of time be trained in all branches of human civilization, and will thus arise. from their present lowly stage of culture, and attain a high level in their mode of life and moral training.

If, therefore, we wish to accomplish some useful and solid work in this field, it is indispensable that priests of the same race shall make it their life-task to lead these peoples to the Christian faith and to a higher cultural level. You, beloved son, regard it as a very practical step to admit into the Society of the Divine Word Negroes who give evidence of a vocation for the regular life. These candidates are later to be admitted to the priesthood, and eventually work as apostles among the members of their race, You have chosen this path because you are firmly convinced that the Negroes can thus be brought much more easily und rapidly into the Church, and also because, in the spirit of true filial obedience, you wish to follow the guidance of Our immediate Predecessor. In his Apostolic Brief of November 30, 1919, the latter gives a list of practical suggestions and precepts to which no reasonable man can take exception. For does it not indeed follow, as Our Predecessor points out, from the very nature of the Church as a Divine institution, that every tribe

or people should have priests who are one with it in race and character, in habit of thought and temperament? Aside from the fact that such priests will find a friendly welcome, will they not also prove far more effective in leading their brethren into, and confirming them in, the faith than any priests of a different race and from another country? Moreover, as experience has shown, the young Negro is not poorly gifted, mentally, so that he cannot assimilate higher education and the theological sciences and the latter, not in a superficial and abbreviated form, but, as Our Predecessor commanded, in the full courses as prescribed.

You have, therefore, undertaken a most laudable work, beloved son; in which to engage your zeal for the faith and for souls. In order that your success may be all the more gratifying, you will pray with Us to Our Divine Savior that the negro youth may hear and obey His divine injunction: "Go ye also into my vineyard."

The Negroes of the United States greatly exceed ten million' souls, for whom a capable mission and secular clergy of their own race must be created as soon as possible, We extend, therefore, Our best wishes for the seminary which you intend soon to dedicate solemnly in the town of Bay St. Louis.

May it prosper greatly under the care of the American episcopate, and may it attract a large attendance of negro pupils inspired with pure intention. May the Blessed Virgin, Queen of Apostles, take under her protection this undertaking in which We wish you, beloved son, and your whole Society success, from Our heart. By her words of encouragement and her intercession, Our Lady greatly aided the first bearers of the joyful tidings, who were sent forth to make the world subject to Christ the Lord. She will also pray unceasingly that your pupils may receive a strong impulse to piety and virtue.

May the Holy Doctor St. Augustine, under whose protection you have appropriately placed the seminary, also implore for the negro race that fulness of the light of Christian knowledge which, as history shows, once suffused the fields of Africa!

Finally, beloved son, in so far as We are concerned, rest assured that We are most anxious to do everything to promote this salutary undertaking. For the present, as a pledge of heavenly favors and in token of Our fatherly good-will, We lovingly extend the Apostolic Blessing in our Lord to you, beloved son, to the Society which you govern, and to the Negroes in whom you are interested.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Pius XI". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'P' and a long, sweeping tail.

ROME, ST. PETER'S, April 5, 1923,
in the second year of Our Pontificate

*Pope Pius XI in this letter reaffirms Rome backing the opening
a seminary for African American men despite the many
obstacles Divine Word Missionaries faced through the years from
American Bishops and others in the Church.*

in a word or two

CONGRATULATIONS
BISHOP CURTIS GUILLORY, SVD



On September 1, 2023 the Diocese of Beaumont honored Bishop Curtis Guillory, SVD with a Mass of commemoration for his 50th Anniversary to the Priesthood and 80th Birthday.

It was a festive occasion honoring Bishop Curtis. The St. Anthony Cathedral was filled with many friends, family of the Bishop along with many priests, Bishops and Cardinal DiNardo who have been touched by Bishop Guillory. Bishop Guillory was born to Wilfred and Theresa Guillory on September 1, 1943, in Mallet, Louisiana. He is the oldest of 16 children. Ordained a priest in 1972 and Bishop in 1988.



Photos from Diocese of Beaumont, Texas



Divine Word Missionaries is an international missionary community of over 7,000 brothers and priests. In 1905 the SVDs began working among African Americans in the Southern United States. Today, Divine Word Missionaries work in over 35 parishes in Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas, Florida and Arkansas.

IN A WORD is a publication of The Society of the Divine Word's Media Production Center. Rev. James Pawlicki, S.V.D., Director and Editor; Cathy Green-Miner, office manager; consultant.

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Electronic messages to our inawordsvd@gmail.com. IN A WORD is not published during July and August.

Web page can be found at <http://www.inaword.com>