

in a

WordTM

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**CONGRATULATIONS
CARDINAL
WILTON GREGORY**

Photo by Father James Pawlicki, SVD

What the appointment of the first African American Cardinal means to me.

by Cathy Green-Miner

I am extremely pleased to hear that our brother, Archbishop Wilton Daniel Gregory, has been chosen by Pope Francis as the first African American Cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church. Congratulations to Cardinal-Designate Gregory! You have certainly earned it through your love and your amazing dedication to God's work and His will.

I first met then Auxiliary Bishop Gregory during the 1987 National Black Catholic Congress. I was a starry-eyed Catholic girl who had the privilege of interviewing and recording African American bishops and African American religious sisters and leaders like Sister Thea Bowman, Sister Francesca Thompson and Theresa Favors. I was educated by the Sisters of the Holy Family whose foundress is Venerable Henriette Delille, so I knew what greatness in the Church looked like at an early age. Meeting the Black bishops and African American warrior women (some who happened to be religious sisters) was like winning the Catholic lottery. I felt both excited and humbled to be surrounded by Catholic royalty.

I worked for Media Production Center, the media arm for the Divine Word Missionaries Southern Province. It was Father James Pawlicki, SVD vision to train his students at St. Mary's Academy in New Orleans to create Afro-centric video shorts, documentaries and print, and to edit and distribute them. The video crew assisted Fr. Pawlicki in amassing one of the largest video libraries of African American Catholic events, interviews and occasions. We were the first African American Catholic female video crew to capture such historical data.

I remember meeting Bishop Gregory and thinking there was something different about him. In all the excitement of Congress VI, which last met in 1894, we interviewed as many people we could to capture the significance of the meeting for Black Catholics around the United States and the message it would send the US Conference of Bishops and the Vatican.

All of the African American bishops and sisters gave us their time. As an empath, I sensed Bishop Gregory's spirit. His spirit was a calming, humble spirit. I

also sensed and witnessed how patient he was with our crew. Bishop Gregory had not a haughty word nor a condescending thought. He showed us love and kindness. It brought me to what Maya Angelou once said: *"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."*

Our new Cardinal-Designate has a way of giving you hope as you turn and walk away. Cardinal-Designate Gregory is human first, humble always. Bishop Wilton Gregory was a gem then and he's a gem now. He's like a regular Jesus guy who now has the cool job of being a cardinal. He always encouraged us girls and he made us feel like we were doing something very important for the Black Catholic community and the Church. I am grateful for his words and for his leadership.

Just as Pope Francis is the first Jesuit pope, the first from the Americas, the first from the Southern Hemisphere and the first pope from outside Europe since the Syrian Gregory III who reigned in the 8th century, so too is our Gregory a first. Cardinal-Designate Gregory Daniel Wilton is the first African American to be named a cardinal! It's been a long, long time.

Here's the rub: Why does it always take so long for the Catholic Church to recognize greatness in the African American Catholic community? Some of you may not be ready to hear this but the Church's response is problematic on so many levels. While the Church may acknowledge that racism exists within its house, while the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USSB) writes eloquent encyclicals of the evils of racism within the Church, the same movers and shakers don't, well, move or shake. They write. They write and file it away until the next George Floyd gets murdered. Then they write again. No preaching against racism and injustice. No marching like during the Civil Rights era.

Here in New Orleans, Archbishop Gregory Aymond even has a prayer against violence and racism. We pray it every Sunday. However, I've not seen him march for racial equality. I've not heard a white priest

speak out against racism from the pulpit from parishes across the greater New Orleans area. In all my years as a practicing Catholic, I've only heard two white deacons speak out against racism from the pulpit – never a white priest to his white congregation. Archbishop Aymond even has a committee on racism but lacks the courage to homilized it until parishioners have a conversion.

To change hearts, you must confront the beast – the beast of racism and white privilege. Until then, brilliant Jesus men like Cardinal elect Wilton Gregory will have to stand in the back of a long line of white bishops. Brilliant women like Venerable Henriette Delille and Servant of God Sister Thea Bowman will have to sit in the back of the canonization bus with bags of money in order to become the rightful saints they are, unlike Mother Theresa who was given a seat up front.

In 2020, archbishops around the country refuse to flip tables like Angry Jesus and shake their parishioners out of their white supremacy stupor. Archbishops and priests themselves aren't ready to admit that the way they were conditioned by their parents, priests, teachers, neighbors and peers had them believing the lie of being superior to Black and Brown people. Most white Catholics are not ready to admit that they benefit from racist institutions in this country, including the Catholic Church's racist institutions that suppress Black men and women's advancement in the hierarchy of the Church. It was not that long ago that Blacks could sit near the altar or receive the Eucharist first.

I know, these bishops and priests don't want their parishioners to feel uncomfortable by talking about racism and white privilege nor do they want their parishioners to withhold their tithes. Yet, there is it. Racism is an economic machine. Talk about racism, you lose parishioners, hence, you lose money. So now we know why Angry Jesus flipped that table. I like priests who flip tables.

Cardinal-Designate Wilton Gregory has spent many years living the Beatitudes. His humility helped him admit when he was wrong and find solutions in a problem-focused world. He has fought to protect children in our church and fought for justice for adults of who were abused by predator priests. Cardinal-Designate Gregory has always been a beacon of light in the African American Catholic community and to the Church.

I am proud to say that like Archbishop Gregory, I was part of a movement that celebrated the genius of African American Catholics throughout the United States. I am happy to see one of our brothers be propelled into a decision-making roll that can change the world. I am confident that our Archbishop Wilton Gregory will remain grounded in Christ and that his prayers for us will never cease. And like Tim Tuten, who studied Confirmation under the tutelage of then Fr. Wilton Gregory, said, "When I think of what kind of Catholic I am, I think of Father Gregory because he's the kind of Catholic I want to be."

To Cardinal-Elect Wilton Daniel Gregory: May God forever order your steps. May Jesus always be your shepherd as you navigate the complexity that is the Catholic Church. May the Holy Spirit inspire you and protect your spirit.



Cathy Green-Miner is a licensed professional counselor and owner of Talk Therapy LLC, a private practice dedicated to changing the stigma of mental health in the African American community. She is the recipient of the Humane and Caring Award and the Best of Show Award by the Louisiana Counseling Association. Mrs. Green-Miner is also the recipient of the University of New Orleans Best Internship Award for training practicum and internship students at St. Mary's Academy in New Orleans. Cathy was videographer for Media Production Center and served on the editorial staff of In a Word for over twenty years.



Remembering African Americans on the road to Sainthood during Black Catholic History month

Clergy Caucus of the United States designated November as Black Catholic History Month to celebrate the long history and proud heritage of Black Catholics. Two commemorative dates fall within this month, Saint Augustine's Birthday (November 13) and Saint Martin de Porres' Feast Day (November 3). More importantly, November not only marks a time when we pray for all saints and souls in loving remembrance, but also a time to recall the saints and souls of Africa and the African Diaspora.

In celebrating this month we remember 6 African Americans who are on the road to Canonization in the Catholic church.



[Venerable Pierre Toussaint \(1776-1853\)](#)

Venerable Pierre Toussaint was born a slave in Haiti. Philanthropist & Founder of many Catholic charitable works.

As a slave, Venerable Pierre Toussaint was brought from Haiti to New York and apprenticed 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 was very successful 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 other street people in their home. He founded one of New York's first orphanages and raised money for the city's first cathedral. Even 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 Henriette Delille \(1813-1862\)](#)

Venerable Henriette Delille was born in New Orleans, Louisiana, where she lived all of her life. She was determined to help those in need for the love of Jesus and for the sake of the Gospel. Henriette was also a person who suffered as she made her

way through life, bearing crosses. She taught us 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 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 November 17, 1862. *Throughout her life she would say: "I believe in God. I hope in God. I love. I want to live and die for God."*

[Mother Mary Elizabeth Lange \(1784-1882\)](#)



Mother Mary Lange was the foundress and first Superior General of the Oblate Sisters of Providence (1829-1832), the first congregation of African American women religious 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. This congregation would educate and evangelize African Americans. They educated youth and provided a home for orphans. Slaves who had been freed were educated and at times admitted into the congregation. They nursed the terminally ill during the cholera epidemic of 1832, sheltered the elderly, and even served as domestics at St. Mary's Seminary. She was born Elizabeth Lange, a native of the Caribbean, believed to be Cuban born of Haitian descent. By 1813 Providence directed her to Baltimore, Maryland where a large community of French speaking Catholics from Haiti was established. Mother Mary Lange practiced faith to an extraordinary degree. In fact, it was her deep faith which enabled her to persevere against all odds, in close union with Jesus, she lived through disappointment and opposition until God called her home in 1882 at the St. Frances Convent in Baltimore, Maryland.

in a word or two



[Venerable Fr. Augustus Tolton \(1854-1897\)](#)

Fr. Augustus Tolton was the first Roman Catholic priest in the United States publicly known to be black when he was ordained in 1886. A former slave who was baptized and reared Catholic, Tolton studied formally in Rome. He was ordained in Rome on Easter Sunday at the Cathedral Archbasilica of St. John Lateran. Fr. Tolton led the development and construction of St. Monica's Catholic Church as a black 'National Parish Church', completed in 1893. Tolton's success at ministering to black Catholics quickly earned him national attention within the Catholic hierarchy. "Good Father Gus," as he was called by many, 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.

[Julia Greeley \(1833 and 1848-1918\)](#)

Julia Greeley was born into slavery, at 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 that the parish had to offer.



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 and moving about. 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 remain were transferred to Denver's Cathedral Basilica of the Immaculate Conception on June 7, 2017.

In a 1939 article in the Denver Catholic Register, titled "Saintly Negress Nurse to Little White Angel," Julia is

said to have been so anxious for her little charge to be a practicing Catholic that she placed a rosary in the baby's little fingers and, when the child was just 4 months old, tried very hard to teach her to pray. The little baby, Marjorie, was the daughter of George and Agnes Urquhart. Julia went every day to care for the child.

The only picture we have of Julia is the one in which she is holding Marjorie at 7 months old; in the photograph, a white rosary is visible in Marjorie's hand.



[Sr. Thea Bowman, FSPA \(1937-1990\)](#)

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 (52 years), 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 a "holy woman" in the hearts of those who knew and loved her and continue to seek her intercession for guidance and healing.

The stories of these candidates for sainthood certainly fulfill why the Church presents saints to the faithful, which is to give believers examples of how to live holy lives amid the ordinary circumstances of life. As Andrew Lyke once observed about Father Tolton, "He's going to be, hopefully, a Catholic saint, not just a black Catholic saint, but one that is for the whole Church."

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.

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