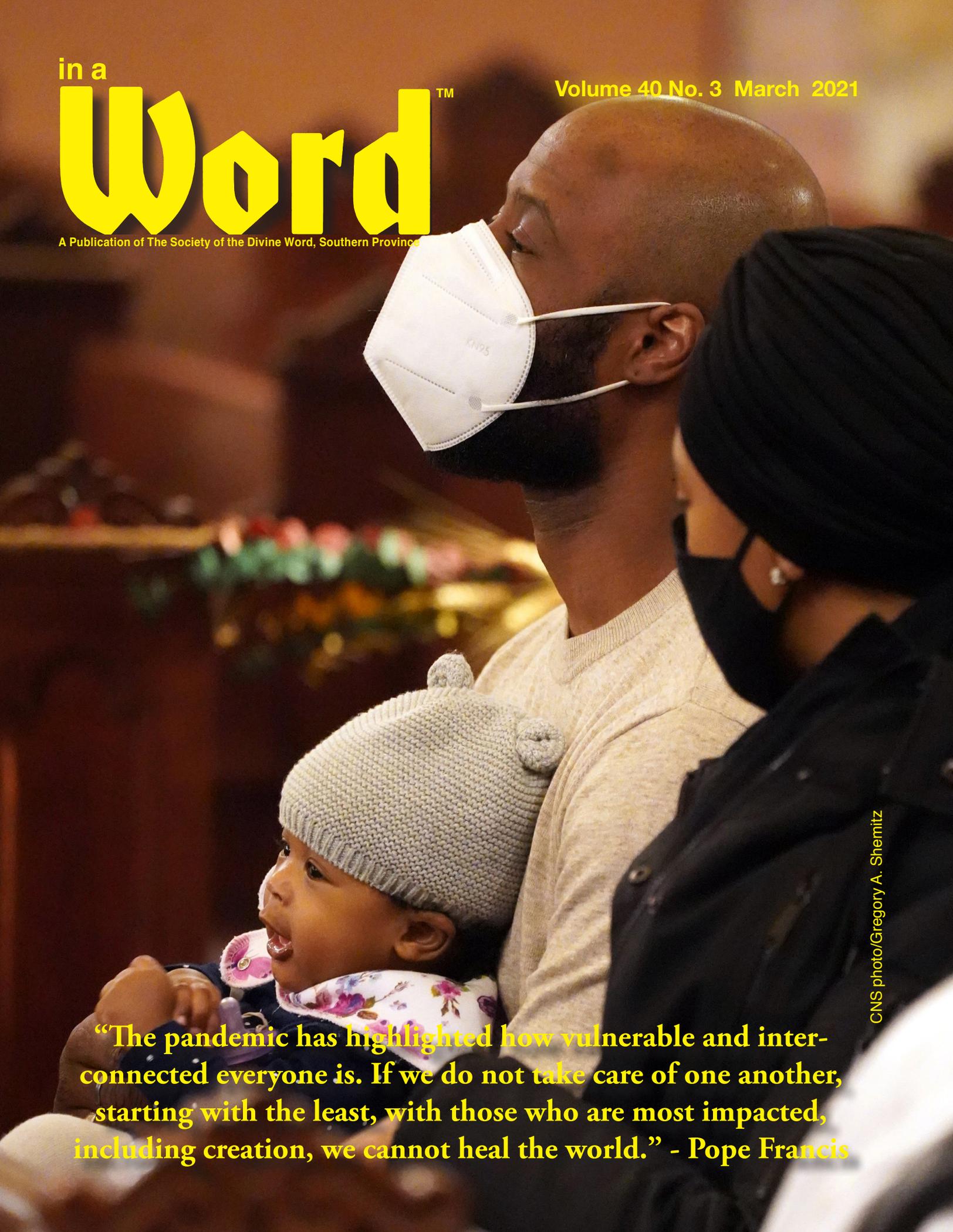


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# Word™

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CNS photo/Gregory A. Shemitz

**“The pandemic has highlighted how vulnerable and interconnected everyone is. If we do not take care of one another, starting with the least, with those who are most impacted, including creation, we cannot heal the world.” - Pope Francis**

# Beauty & Blackness

by Ansel Augustine, D.Min

“Black is Beautiful! Black is Beautiful! Black is Beautiful!” These were the words that I had the audience at the Convocation Of Catholic Leaders in 2017 shout during my panel presentation. I did receive much praise from the black participants, but many of the white participants, which made up the majority of the conference, took offense at this “exercise.” Most of the conference was made up of Diocesan staff/leadership from around the country - most of whom were, and still are overwhelmingly, white. The discussion during this plenary session was about ministering to those on the peripheries - those that are forgotten or overlooked.

Too many times, in this country, and yes, even in our Church, black people, especially African Americans are forgotten and overlooked. It is usually not until November (Black Catholic History Month), February (Black History Month), or if there is a racial PR Crisis that attention is given to black communities/issues within a particular Diocese. In addition, those of us who have been working in Black Catholic Youth/Young Adult Ministry, have had to “fight,” and still have to, to get the wider Church to understand the unique needs of our communities.

Too many times, especially in recent months, the term black has been associated with a negative connotation. Let us take for instance the controversy surrounding the phrase “Black Lives Matter.” For many of us, this phrase is used to remind folks of the unequal treatment of black people throughout the history of this country, and the present realities that institutional racism creates within our communities. Many in Church leadership have connected the meaning of the phrase to the organization with the same name, but most of us are using the phrase, not to promote the organization, but for the Church to pay attention to the needs of one of its original communities that is continually pushed to the peripheries. This “distraction ploy” used by many in the Church to not address the meaning behind the phrase is also similar to other tactics used to not address America’s “original sin” of racism, thus the problem continues.

It will be through hard dialogue (even though many of us are exhausted from talking about this issue) and sharing of power and resources that this issue will be tackled, not through more letters and statements. It will be through building of authentic, mutual, relationships that this issue will be addressed, and not through savior mentalities where certain groups come in to “fix” a community.

This Black History Month, I would ask those reading this to take a long look at where they can address America’s “original sin” (within yourself, your family, your community, your church, your school, etc.) and see how you can learn to create a more just world so that we can see Blackness as a “gift” as Sr. Thea Bowman told the USCCB in 1989. Let us move forward as people of faith to create a world where, BLACK LIVES ARE seen as BEAUTIFUL!

To learn more:

[www.blackfaithmatters.com](http://www.blackfaithmatters.com)



*Dr. Ansel Augustine is the Executive Director of Cultural Diversity and Outreach for the Archdiocese of Washington. He is the former Director of the Office of Black Catholic Ministries for the Archdiocese of New Orleans. Previously he served as the Associate Director/Coordinator of Black Youth & Young Adult Ministry for the CYO Youth & Young Adult Ministry Office. He is also on the Faculty of the Institute for Black Catholic Studies at Xavier University of Louisiana. Ansel has served on the board of directors for the National Catholic Young Adult Ministry Association (NCYAMA) and the National Federation of Catholic Youth Ministry (NFCYM). He began his career in ministry over 20 years ago when he became the youth minister at his home parish of St. Peter Claver in the Treme area of New Orleans, which he helped to rebuild following hurricane Katrina. He has presented workshops and keynotes around the country and has written various pieces related to ministry. Ansel has worked in prison ministry for over 25 years in various capacities. He is a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. the Knights of Columbus, the Knights of Peter Claver, Chata Oglia Nation and the Wild Tchoupitoulas (Black Masking) Mardi Gras Indians. He is also an Associate Member of the Sisters of the Holy Family in New Orleans, Louisiana.*

# U.S. BISHOPS PASTORAL LETTER ON ONE YEAR ANNIVERSARY OF PANDEMIC

**U.S. life has “dramatically changed” due to the yearlong pandemic, and alongside it, racial injustices and political divisions have shaken the nation, yet there is “comfort in God’s promise,” the U.S. bishops’ Administrative Committee said in a March 9 pastoral message.**



“We are also very grateful to our priests, deacons, religious, teachers, catechists and lay ecclesial ministers who have ministered to the people of God during these difficult times.”

Shortly after WHO declared a pandemic, U.S. archdioceses and dioceses, like their counterparts around

There also “is much to learn from this global suffering,” it said, adding that going forward, people must build on the many acts of sacrifice and kindness exhibited amid the scourge of COVID-19.

**March 11 marks one year since the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global pandemic, “ushering in immense suffering,” the pastoral message said. This was WHO’s first such designation since declaring H1N1 influenza a pandemic in 2009.**

To date, 525,000 lives have been lost to the disease just in the U.S., according to data from Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. Worldwide, the death toll is 2.6 million.

“Many have endured extraordinary hardships: sickness, death, mourning, a lack of food, unstable housing, loss of work and income, struggles with education, separation, abuse, isolation, depression and anxiety,” said the message, approved by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Administrative Committee during its virtual meeting.

“We witnessed racial injustices, the diminishment of the poor and the elderly, and painful divisions in our political life,” the Administrative Committee’s message said. “Yet we know, as the Psalms remind us, that we find comfort in God’s promise that gives us life (Ps 119:50).”

The pastoral message pointed to an innumerable “acts of sacrifice” and “acts of kindness” that have helped ameliorate in many ways some of the suffering -- physical, emotional and financial -- the pandemic has wrought. “We also saw countless acts of sacrifice by health care workers, first responders, chaplains, those who work in our soup kitchens and homeless shelters, mail carriers, agricultural and grocery store workers, friends and even strangers,” the committee said.

“Countless acts of kindness were offered by so many people, which served to remind us that we are all in this together. For all these acts of sacrifice, we are very grateful,” it continued.

the globe, adopted wide-ranging plans to limit the spread of the coronavirus.

Among the most common preventative measures were urging reception of holy Communion in the hand, suspension of distribution of the Communion cup and exchanging the sign of peace without physical contact. Bishops issued a general dispensation from the Sunday Mass obligation. With limits on the size of congregations in churches, dioceses also pivoted to using technology to livestream Mass, parish events and meetings.

“In the pandemic, God has once more revealed us to ourselves,” the committee’s pastoral message said. “As Pope Francis reminded us in St. Peter’s square last year, we are not as powerful or as in control as we thought. Rather than being ashamed of this powerlessness, or crushed by the fear of what we cannot control, our interconnectedness and dependence on God has been revealed.

“We join our brother bishops in urging everyone to continue to keep God’s love alive in their hearts and in their families and communities,” they said. “And we look forward to welcoming the Catholic faithful back when we all may safely participate physically in the eucharistic celebration of the Mass and gather once more in our parishes.”



Photos on this page taken during Mass at SS. Peter and Paul Catholic Church in Atlanta Feb. 14, 2021, amid the coronavirus pandemic. (CNS photos Chris Aluka Berry, Reuters)

# in a word or two

Front cover photo shows a man holding a baby during a Black History Month Mass of thanksgiving Feb. 28, 2021, at the Co-Cathedral of St. Joseph in Brooklyn, N.Y. The liturgy was sponsored by the Vicariate of Black Catholic Concerns of the Diocese of Brooklyn.

## Pope Francis names new bishop for Diocese of St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands

WASHINGTON (CNS) -- Pope Francis has appointed Msgr. Jerome Feudjio, vicar general and chancellor of the Diocese of St. Thomas in the U.S. Virgin Islands, to head the diocese. He succeeds Bishop Herbert A. Bevard of St. Thomas in the Virgin Islands, whose resignation was accepted by Pope Francis Sept. 18, 2020. Bishop-designate Feudjio, 55, also is rector of Sts. Peter and Paul Cathedral in the city of Charlotte Amalie. He was ordained a priest of the diocese Sept. 29, 1990. Cardinal Gregory said in a statement. Bishop-designate Feudjio "is no stranger to the people of the diocese. His long history of service and pastoral dedication to the people of this community of faith are well known and widely respected."



(CNS photo/Andrew Biraj, Catholic Standard)



**Immaculate Heart of Mary Church in Lafayette, Louisiana like many other parishes throughout the USA remembered those parishioners who passed away with COVID-19. Here they planted flags designating the members who lost their lives this past year.**



Photos by Joseph Walker

Churches have tried a variety of ways to keep in touch with parishioners during this past year. **Adoria Hankton from Immaculate Heart of Mary Church in Lafayette, Louisiana shares what she has done to communicate with the Church family of Immaculate Heart.**

*"The Covid-19 pandemic forced us to rely on Flocknote to get information out to everyone regarding covid restrictions at church and other information. Since that time we have increased our usage of Flocknote. I send out newsletters with information that our parishioners need to know such as changes in mass times, confession times and other urgent*

*messages. I try to make each newsletter informative and engaging for all of our parishioners. Since the pandemic, I started putting obituaries of our parishioners as well as any birth announcements or wedding announcements that people share. I also include fun things like a good book suggestion, a recipe that includes a video demonstration and also fun activities that people can do as a family.*

*During Advent, we shared different things that people could do to help them prepare. For Lent, we are sending out a daily Lenten Challenge through text and email. It is a 25 day challenge that is part of Bishop Barron's Word on Fire series. The Flocknote system allows for more engagement and supplements that all of our members have access to. The information is relevant and relatable to our times, which keeps people engaged and wanting to know more and learn more. Our messages have also been a way to keep our parishioners connected as we navigate through the pandemic. Our parishioners are able to stay connected via email and text. Many of them have stated how much they like receiving the messages and reminders. We also send out reminders for voter registration, election day reminders as well as text reminders when we have events at church. "*



On Ash Wednesday February 17, 2021 Holy Name Church in Houston, Texas suffered a catastrophic fire. Father Anil Thomas, SVD lost his car, belongings to the fire during the ice storm that affected Texas. The Church was spared but rebuilding the burnt out rectory will take time. Father Anil Thomas said he is grateful the main church was spared. He said he will continue to spend his days at the campus to oversee repairs and lend help to anyone in need. After losing his belongings during a historic cold snap, he expressed hope. "It is part of life," he said. "These things will also pass." He noted that Ash Wednesday only marks the beginning of the Lenten season. "Resurrection is the end," he said.

[Holy Name website](#) [Houston Chronicle article on fire](#)

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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