

in a
WordTM

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Father John Harfmann, SSJ
“was a tireless fighter for justice who did things
that people said were not possible”

- Monsignor Ed Miller

LIFE AND DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON

(Part Two of National Black Catholic Pastoral Plan)

As Catholics, we believe that “God’s creative action is present to every human life and is thus the source of its sacred value.” We are called to protect the sacredness and dignity of all human life from conception to natural death. We believe that human dignity does not depend on accomplishments or talents, nor is it rooted in race, age, gender, wealth, social status, or legal status. **Each and every human person has dignity that deserves our respect, for that dignity comes from God.**

Our perspective as African Americans:

Our history as Black Americans makes us keenly aware that what is legal may not be what is just. Our experience as Black Americans shows us that we must be vigilant and insistent, so that legal institutions do not impede the freedom and dignity of any human person. Abortion rates are falling across America, including in the Black community. This tells us that attitudes can be reversed and that we must continue to speak prophetically, in the public square and to our children, friends, and associates, about the sacredness of all human life.

Nevertheless, abortion remains a particular scourge in Black America. Since 1990, the African American community has lost more than 10 million children to abortion. Census figures show only 15% of American women of childbearing age are black, yet black women have more than one third of abortions in the United States and are 3.5 times more likely than whites to have an abortion. These facts tell us, as people of color and of faith, that we have much work to do: teaching our youth to reject the pervasive sexual permissiveness in our culture, promoting the institution of marriage, creating real options for women facing crisis pregnancies, and advocating for the economic opportunity and security that would help couples embrace parenthood with confidence.

To preserve our people, African Americans need to promote the culture of life and so we lament that more Black Catholics are not involved in pro-life advocacy. **We urge the national pro-life movement to embrace fully an inclusive, diverse, and comprehensive approach to life issues, which would attract more African American Catholics to this just cause.** At the same time, we strongly reject efforts by organizations and funders that seek to expand “access” to abortion in minority communities.

Our Black youth and young adults need access to role models and higher education. We need affordable health care, housing, and child care options, so that we can raise our children in economic security. We do not seek the “choice” to decrease the next generation of African American children.

Today, the death penalty and an abhorrent prison system disproportionately affect Black Americans. We affirm our opposition to the state-sponsored violence of capital punishment and commend the work of Catholic conferences nationwide

in advocating for the abolition of the death penalty. We commit ourselves to raise awareness of the many attacks against human dignity throughout the world, especially war, violence against women and children, and discrimination against persons with disabilities.

Called to love the lives God gave us, we deplore the conditions of modern life that lead too many of our brothers and sisters to a profound loss of hope and suicide.

We are convinced that every human being is loved by God and redeemable through Jesus Christ. Following the Lord’s commandment (*Matt 25: 44-45*), we recognize our obligation to provide moral and spiritual support for prisoners and their families, and upon their release, to welcome them into our parishes and to support their efforts to reintegrate into society. In addition to institutionalized violence against human life and dignity, we deplore the individual acts of violence that plague many urban neighborhoods. We especially deplore the senseless and widespread violence perpetrated by African Americans against their African American brothers and sisters and the devastating impact this has had on our communities. We are certain that God shares our heartache at young lives destroyed, parents and grandparents mourning, and innocent neighbors living in fear and despair because of youth violence.

Our faith engaged:

- Embracing a consistent ethic of life, we commit to work zealously to confront the “Culture of Death” by publicly witnessing to the value of human life as we actively seek to end legalized abortion and the death penalty, to redress the injustices of the penal system, and to join forces with persons of common interest and good will to combat the root causes of violent crime, gang-related activity and drug trafficking in the African American community.

- We commit ourselves to opposing euthanasia, assisted suicide and all legislation supporting these acts.

- We commit to raise awareness about and participate in the work of the National Black Catholic Apostolate for Life.

- We commit to increased involvement in the pro-life activities of Church organizations, at the national, diocesan, and parish levels, bringing an African American voice and perspective to those ministries.



Father John Harfmann, SSJ

1935-2012



Father John George Harfmann, SSJ, died in hospice care October 30, 2012 of a long illness. Interment was November 7, 2012, in New Cathedral Cemetery in Baltimore, Maryland from St Peter Claver Church, his earlier pastorate. The 77-year-old priest died at St Joseph Manor in Baltimore.

Father Harfmann was born in Brooklyn, New York, the son of John Harfmann and Anna Schubert Harfmann, on October 24, 1935. The oldest of five children,

he is survived by brothers William, Edward, Lawrence Harfmann and sister Anna Harfmann Windsor. He was ordained to the priesthood June 8, 1963.

He was for years a valuable partner and contributor to many Josephite and diocesan committees. Father Harfmann's leadership was well known and respected especially in the Baltimore African American communities. He was deeply involved in a multitude of Josephite initiatives and diocesan structures.

His funeral Mass was held at St. Peter Claver church in Baltimore, a parish that he served several times in his ministry. The Mass was concelebrated by Bishop John H. Ricard, SSJ, Bishop Denis Madden, auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Baltimore, and Father Michael Thompson, SSJ, vicar general.

In his homily, Monsignor Edward Miller, a long time friend and pastor of nearby St. Bernadine's church, recalled Father Harfmann's many qualities, including his pastoral wisdom, with candor, humor and affection. He noted that Father Harfmann was active in connecting people and he had a special love for youth.

"He also was a tireless fighter for justice who did things that people said were not possible," Monsignor Miller recalled. "He was on the front line of what was right and just." He added, "The things that he did gave God a good name. Fear never froze him and faith freed him."

Bishop Ricard said Father Harfmann was a "quintessential priest, wholly dedicated to being a priest in the African American community. He was a very special person and many will benefit from the seeds that he planted. We're going to miss him."

Father Harfmann served much of his career in Baltimore especially at St. Peter Claver and St Pius V churches. He was assigned to St. Peter Claver as assistant in 1962, again in 1966, and as pastor in 1972. Father Harfmann authored a "Summer Program for Lively Learning," "The Stations of the Cross for Children" for pastoral purposes and other teaching aids. Civic disturbances in the '60s in Baltimore found him and St Peter Claver parish deeply involved with the city and the Archdiocese of Baltimore, seeking calm and solutions.

He was a member of the Baltimore Ministerial Alliance and its secretary for a time, and worked as associate Director of "Operation Champ," a youth program. Father Harfmann was director of the Archdiocesan Urban Commission from 1977 to 1980. In 1985 Father Harfmann was awarded for his service by the Archdiocesan Associated Catholic Charities.

The Josephite Development committee, an editor for the Josephite Harvest magazine and director of the Josephite Pastoral Center were some of his activities. He was often a delegate or administrative member of the General Conference held for governance and elections of the Josephites. Between some of these assignments, he worked elsewhere in the country. He wore several administrative hats for the Josephite Society as member of numerous Society committees. He would later be an administrator himself.

He was director of the Josephite Pastoral Center for publications and media for 15 years from 1980. While in this role Father Harfmann was also pastor of the Washington, DC, parish of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, and later at St Pius V church in Baltimore. He continued with the Pastoral Center in a supervisory role even from Los Angeles and New Orleans until another hat came his way.

Father Harfmann served early on in Mobile, Alabama, at Most Pure Heart of Mary Parish in 1964. Summer work in Norfolk, Virginia, gave him direct experience of the Head Start Program, which he translated into a special work in Baltimore at St Peter Claver Church. He also served St Brigid in Los Angeles, California, and Our Lady Star of the Sea in Houston, Texas.

He was assigned lastly to New Orleans and in 2008 as pastor there to Corpus Christi Parish. In the post Katrina Louisiana world, he worked hard raising funds for food and shelter in support of resident camps in northern Louisiana for the evacuees. Networking with other parishes and organizations throughout the country, he recruited people, clothes, food and the basics for survival. His assignment at Corpus Christi church, itself heavily damaged by Hurricane Katrina, involved battling to solve the dilemma of funding with FEMA over a now unusable school building. During all this he was also the Consultor General, part of the Executive Council of the Josephite leadership.



Father John Harfmann was energetic and extremely supportive of IN A WORD and the video work done over the years by the Media Production Center of the Society of the Divine Word. His encouragement and

liveliness will be sorely missed. That is why we feature him in the front cover photo this month. This 1989 photo shows him with Tanya and Nicole who were part of the video team of young women that has provided historical video footage for African American Catholics since 1986. All made possible by the encouragement of Father John Harfmann.

in a word or two

The Sisters of the Holy Family will celebrate the 170th anniversary of their founding and the 200th anniversary of the birth of their foundress, Venerable Henriette Delille.

The celebration will begin with a symposium depicting the life, spirituality, genealogy and charism of Venerable Henriette Delille on Friday, November 16, 2012 from 5:00 – 7:00pm at St. Mary's Catholic Church, 1100 Chartres Street. The celebration will continue on Sunday, November 18, 2012 at 11:00 am with a Mass in honor of the 170th anniversary of the Sisters of the Holy Family and 200th anniversary of the birth of Venerable Henriette Delille at St. Louis Cathedral, 615 Pere Antoine Alley. Events are free and open to the public. Refreshments will be served.

Henriette Delille was a free woman of color who was born in New Orleans, Louisiana in 1812. She was a kind and compassionate person who had a deep love for God and a desire to live her life for God. She demonstrated her love for God by caring for the sick and elderly, providing food for the poor and homeless and instructing many in the teachings of the Catholic faith. Her name appears numerous times in the register of St. Louis Cathedral as a sponsor for many who were baptized. When she was 24 years old, she committed herself to God and wrote this simple prayer in her book of devotions which guided her life: "I believe in God. I hope in God. I love. I want to live and die for God." In spite of the resistance of the Church and State to the idea of a Black religious congregation, she founded the Sisters of the Holy Family in 1842. Henriette along with her companions Juliette Gaudin and Josephine Charles continued the ministry of educating the slaves, caring for the sick, and elderly, and the marginalized of the society. On November 17, 1862 at the age of 50, Henriette died.

Henriette has been recognized by the Church as a woman of heroic virtue and on March 27, 2011 she was proclaimed "Venerable" by Pope Benedict XVI. Henriette is the first United States native born African American whose cause has been accepted by Rome. The Sisters of the Holy Family have continued her legacy of faith, love and service for 170 years.

The African American Cultural Awareness Ministry of Holy Name of Jesus Catholic Church, a Los Angeles Archdiocese parish in Jefferson Park with significant active membership of African descent, began their annual celebration of Black Catholic History Month each Sunday in November. At Masses on November 4 and 11 the 10:00 a.m. gospel music masses featured distinguished guest speakers and culturally enhanced liturgies. The liturgies were followed with fellowship and entertainment in the school hall by performers such as renowned jazz vocalist and trumpeter Clora Bryant on

November 4.

Black Catholic History Month was inaugurated in 1990, when the National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus (NBCC) selected November as the month to celebrate the history and legacy of Black Catholics in the United States, as well as to commemorate those ancestors and Black saints from the motherland and throughout the African Diaspora.

Eighty percent of all families registered as parishioners at Holy Name of Jesus Church are of African descent, coming from the United States, the Caribbean, Central, South and Latin America, and Africa. Annual Black Catholic History Month celebrations at Holy Name advance the purpose of the parish's African American Cultural Awareness Ministry, which was formed in 1985 to raise awareness of African American and African American Catholic gifts of history, culture, and spirituality through liturgical celebrations, prayer, and fellowship within and beyond the parish. "We are at a critical point in history when we must keep alive our cultural and historical presence within the Catholic Church," says Deacon Douglass Johnson, a co-chair of the Ministry with Director of Religious Education Catherine Brown and founding member Monica Lewis.

Holy Name of Jesus Church's month-long celebration will be highlighted by a three-day "Faith on Fire" revival, the parish's first revival since 1998. The "Faith on Fire" revival takes place Friday, November 16 through Sunday, November 18, 2012, and features Reverend Anthony Michael Bozeman S.S.J., pastor of St. Raymond & St. Leo the Great parish in New Orleans, Louisiana. "As a priest in the Josephite Society of the Sacred Heart, Fr. Bozeman represents that community of priests in the United States exclusively engaged in advancing the social and spiritual doctrine of the Church in the Black community," says Deacon Johnson. Revival activity begins Friday, November 16 at 6:30 p.m., and continues on Saturday, November 17 at 6:30. On Sunday, November 18, there will be a reception at 12:30 p.m., followed by the revival at 3:30 p.m. The African American Cultural Awareness Ministry is co-chaired by Deacon Douglass Johnson, Catherine Brown (Director of Religious Education), and founding lay minister Monica Lewis. Holy Name of Jesus Catholic Church is located at 1955 West Jefferson Boulevard, Los Angeles, California 90018; (323) 734-8888. The pastor is Rev. Paul Spellman.

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 and Arkansas.

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