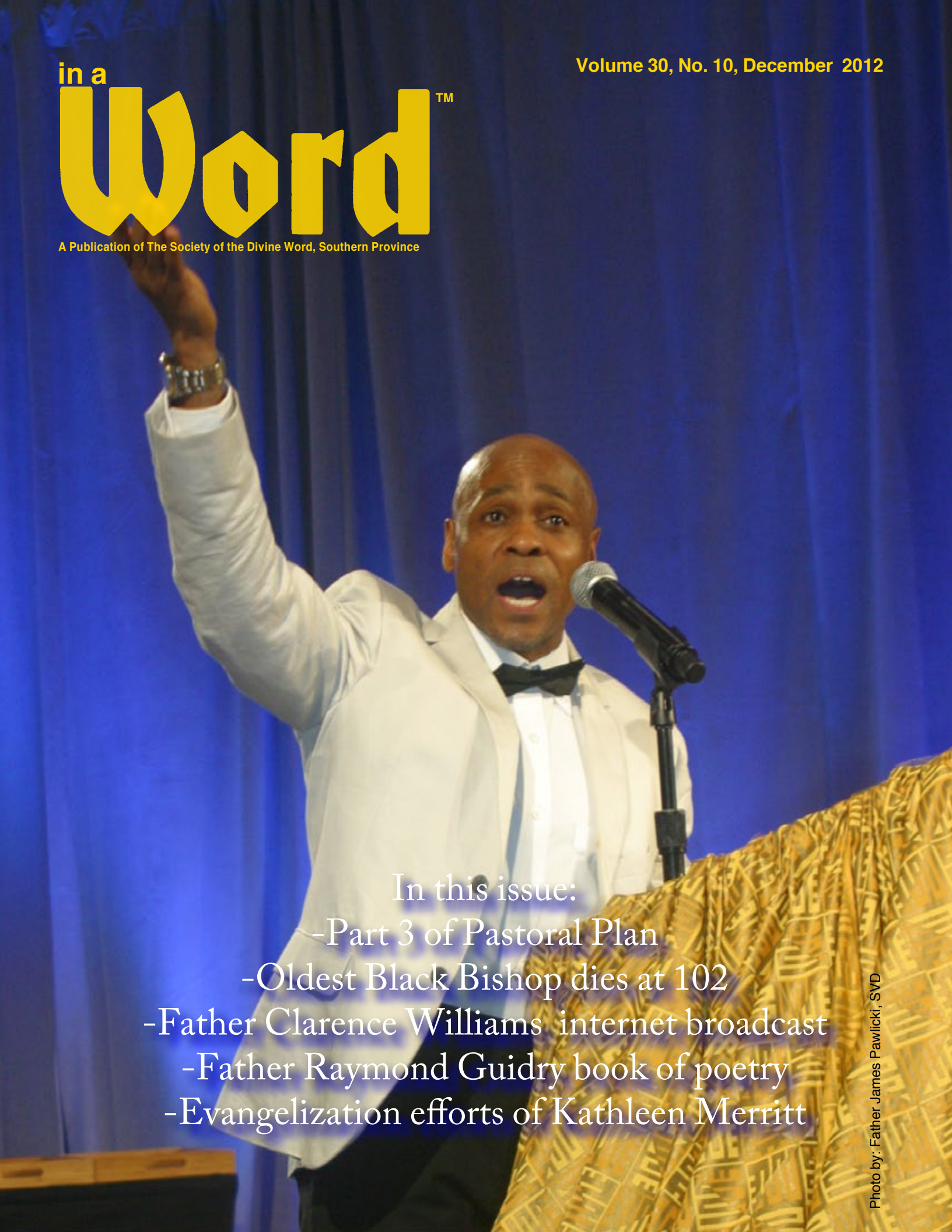


in a  
**Word**<sup>TM</sup>

A Publication of The Society of the Divine Word, Southern Province

- 
- In this issue:
- Part 3 of Pastoral Plan
  - Oldest Black Bishop dies at 102
  - Father Clarence Williams internet broadcast
  - Father Raymond Guidry book of poetry
  - Evangelization efforts of Kathleen Merritt

# WALKING WITH THE SAINTS

(Part Three of National Black Catholic Pastoral Plan)

He said to me, “These are the people who have come safely through the terrible persecution. They have washed their robes and made them white with the blood of the Lamb. That is why they stand before God’s throne and serve him day and night in his temple. (Revelations 7: 14-16)

In the Catholic tradition, we learn to live faithfully through the example of holy men and women before us—the saints who are both role models and intercessors.

## Our perspective as African Americans:

We are blessed and grateful that today there are four black Catholic candidates for sainthood: two religious sisters, a lay person, and a priest, representing a diverse cross section of the faithful. For all American Catholics, they are models of holiness and service.

**Venerable Mother Henriette Delille** (1812-1862), a free woman of color born in New Orleans, founded the Sisters of the Holy Family in 1842. The congregation ministered to slaves, at a time when educating slaves was illegal. Mother Delille was the first U.S.-born African American formally postulated for canonization.

**Servant of God Mother Mary Lange** (c 1787-1882), co-founded the Oblate Sisters of Providence in Baltimore in 1829. Dedicated to the care and education of black children, the Oblate Sisters of Providence is the first successful religious community for women of African descent.

**Servant of God Father Augustus Tolton** (1854-1897) was born into slavery in Missouri. Ordained in Rome in 1886, Tolton was the first recognized-Black American priest. Pastor of St. Monica in Chicago, Tolton became the spiritual leader of the 19th-century National Black Catholic Congress movement.

**Venerable Pierre Toussaint** (1766-1853). Born into slavery in Haiti, Toussaint became a freeman, successful businessman, and philanthropist in New

York City. He is the only lay person honored, alongside cardinal-archbishops, with burial in the crypt of St. Patrick Cathedral.

We are proud of these forebearers, but we also need them. We need their intercession, as men and women who know what it means “to shoulder the responsibilities of being both Black and Catholic.” We need their example.

The causes for canonization, in turn, need us. The Holy See deems someone worthy of canonization when it is clear that the people of God value their example and their intercession. Since we want American Catholics to know and honor saintly Black Catholic men and women, we need to work to advance the causes of canonization.

## Our faith engaged:

We commit ourselves to promote knowledge and veneration of Black saints and African American candidates for sainthood. We urge homilists and Catholic school teachers to introduce these holy men and women to their congregations and classes.

We encourage Black Catholics, especially, to support the guilds created for the cause of canonization of each of these four exemplary African American Catholics.

We urge the archdioceses of Baltimore, Chicago, New Orleans, and New York, to help promote pilgrimages for Mother Mary Lange, Father Augustus Tolton, Mother Henriette Delille, and Pierre Toussaint, respectively.

We invite other dioceses and parishes around the country to organize pilgrimages and other prayerful events devoted to the candidates for canonization.

We urge dioceses to add the Black saints to their religious curriculum for Catholic schools and religious education programs and to include their historical relevance in administrative training programs.

# HE WAS THE PATRIARCH OF BLACK BISHOPS

by

Father Jerome LeDoux, SVD

“The sum of our years is 70,” Psalm 90:10 tells us, “and, if we are strong, 80,” and, if we go completely overboard with this thing called life, 102 and change to boot!

By sheer longevity, Rev. Joseph Oliver Bowers, S.V.D., became Patriarch of the U.S.A., black bishops, beginning with episcopal ordination by Francis Cardinal Spellman on April 22, 1953 in Our Lady of the Gulf Church in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi. Hardly imaginable, this happened 11 years before the omnibus Civil Rights Act of July 2, 1964!

Despite being that late into spring on the Gulf Coast, the previous night's chill registered 45 degrees, and, beaten down by a strong, cold north wind, the blessed day's mercury struggled to rise to 75 degrees. But all of it was perfect for the unique occasion, allowing the oft-racist Deep South to leap far ahead of the rest of the country in religion.

For perspective, Joseph Oliver Bowers was appointed by Pope Pius XII and received his episcopal ordination from Francis Joseph Cardinal Spellman, assisted by Bishops Richard Oliver Gerow of Natchez-Jackson and Adolph Alexander Noser, S.V.D.

African American Joseph was not, since his native land was Massacre, Dominica where he was born on March 28, 1910. Thus, **he became the first black prelate to be ordained in the United States, while Rev. Harold Robert Perry, S.V.D., was ordained in New Orleans on January 6, 1966 as the first 20th century African-American prelate.**

The son of Montague and Mary Bowers, Joseph Oliver had journeyed to Bay St. Louis, Mississippi after the sixth grade to study for the priesthood in St. Augustine Seminary. There he was ordained a priest of the Society of the Divine Word on January 22, 1939, following a 2-year Novitiate (spiritual training) in Techny, Illinois, then 4 years of college and 4 years of theology at St. Augustine Major Seminary in Bay St. Louis.

Joseph's first assignment as a priest was to serve the people of the then Gold Coast of West Africa in the Diocese of Accra in Ghana in 1939. That was to prove to be his bailiwick for most of the rest of his life. He was appointed auxiliary bishop of Accra in 1952, then Bishop of Accra on January 8, 1953.



Bishop Joseph Bowers, SVD  
1910-2012

**Four years into his bishopric, he founded the institute of the Sisters of the Handmaids of the Divine Redeemer (HDR) in Accra, dedicated to comforting and caring for the poor. He also founded St John's College and Seminary, presently known as Pope John Secondary School and Junior Seminary, one of the best high schools in Ghana.**

In recognition of his pioneering work in Ghana, Bishop Bowers was appointed the first bishop of the newly-created Diocese of St. John's-Basseterre in the West Indies on January 16, 1971. The islands of Antigua-Barbuda, St. Kitts and Nevis, Montserrat, Anguilla and the British Virgin Islands were the components of the diocese.

On July 17, 1981, he retired from church office and, after some years spent in Charlestown, Nevis, returned to Dominica, where he lived in Mahaut in the care of his sister, Blossom Ann Reid. But the Sisters whose institute he had founded sought him out. In the 1990s, the HDR Sisters, some of whom had periodically visited him in Dominica, invited him back to Ghana, where they cared for him in the town of Agomanya. Nicholas Liverpool, President of Dominica, was a guest at the celebrations there for his 100th birthday.

The amazing centenarian had become an icon. It was far more than longevity that propelled Bishop Bowers into his status as icon. Rather, it was many long-suffering years of toil in the Lord's vineyard that got the attention of clerics and laypersons alike and endeared him to other missionaries spreading the Good News. He was a long-burning beacon of self-deprivation and giving of himself.

Finally succumbing to the incredible grind and wear of 102 years and 8 months, Bishop Bowers returned to God on November 6, 2012, at Agomanya in the Eastern Region of Ghana. He was the third-oldest Roman-Catholic bishop in the world.

Together with the people of Dominica and Africa, we salute an unflinching Christian soldier who ran an epic centenarian course as in 2 Timothy 4:7-8, "I have competed well; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith. From now on the crown of righteousness awaits me, which the Lord, the just judge, will award to me on that day."

## in a word or two

**Father Clarence Williams, CPPS reminds us that this feast day of Our Lady of Guadalupe – December 12, 2012, has special significance. Since the appearance of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, on this date in 1531, the feast day has fallen on the 12 year of each century. Thus we have the 12th month (December) on the 12 day, and the 12th year (1612, 1712, 1812, 1912 and 2012). At best only one in every two generations witness the 12-12-12 alignments of month, day and year. We are that privileged generation!**



Inspired by the God-incidence of this feast day for this century, many are expectant of the many blessings that Our Lady of Guadalupe will bestow on the faithful. We are excited about celebrating the feast day from a new 21st century perspective. Celebrating Our Lady as the Mother of the Americas, a title given by the Blessed Pope John Paul II in 1979. He also proclaimed her, as the “Star of Evangelization.” Since 1988, December 12 has been raised to the rank of a feast for all the diocese of the United States. In 1999, Pope John Paul II once again honored Our Lady of Guadalupe as “Patroness of All America” and “Star of the first and new evangelization.” For the first time on the 12-12-12 feast day we honor Our Lady of Guadalupe as the Mother of All America, North and South.

**Father Williams invites all the children of God who see themselves as brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ to take part in the honoring of Mary in the appearance of Our Lady of Guadalupe as the Mother of All America though 24 hours broadcast of devotion, praise, prayer and fellowship.**

This December 12, 2012 Father Williams and his team will broadcast through the Internet from locations across the nation and the hemisphere our prayers and praise to our Blessed Mother in English, Spanish and other languages. We will begin at 12AM on December 12 and continue the broadcast until 12:59PM that night. We will begin on Eastern Standard Time and end on Eastern Standard Time. Each hour will feature a different city, state and or country sharing its celebration with the world.

At this time the Missionaries of the Precious Blood have committed to pioneering the first hours of the broadcast beginning in Columbus, Ohio, proceeding to Whiting, Indiana and on to Los Angeles, California. Invitations will be extended to other churches and organizations who feel moved to be a part to this celebration.

During his career of over sixty years in religious vows and fifty-five years as a priest, Father Raymond Guidry filled many roles including missionary to Ghana, military chaplain in Germany and Vietnam, parish priest in Texas and Louisiana, and prolific poet and author of short stories. Fr. Guidry was one of a group of African-American men who joined the Society of the Divine Word in the 1940s. His experience as a Black Catholic priest gave him a unique perspective on life and ministry, subjects that lie at the heart of many of his writings. Many of Fr. Guidry’s writings have now been compiled to serve as a lasting tribute to his life and legacy. You can purchase a copy of his selected poems titled **POEMS and STORIES** at Amazon.com. You can borrow this book for free on a Kindle device with your Prime membership. Father Guidry passed away in June of 2011. There is a special issue of **IN A WORD** honoring this great man published in July 2011. You can access that issue at [www.inaword.com/archives/](http://www.inaword.com/archives/)

Ms. Kathleen Merritt of the Ethnic Ministries office of the Diocese of Charleston, South Carolina continues to bring forth innovative ways to evangelize. She has begun **A Ministry Moment**. This is a radio campaign to reach the upstate’s South Carolina African American young adults, especially those who are Catholic, as well as the un-churched. Recognizing the many challenges young adults are facing in the world today, **A Ministry Moment** addresses those challenges on the air and on the Ethnic Ministries website at [www.sccatholic.org/ministrymoment](http://www.sccatholic.org/ministrymoment). Ms. Merritt says “Our focus is relationships. Our team of Catholic leaders will provide advice on today’s problems that is rooted in Catholic faith. We invite not only African American young adults to participate, but we also extend an invitation to everyone to participate and worship with us on Sunday at Mass.”

**A Ministry Moment** can also be found on FACEBOOK at [www.facebook.com/AMinistryMoment](http://www.facebook.com/AMinistryMoment). Please do check it out. Very well done!

Ms. Merritt also has a very good blog called **CHURCH LADIES**. You can find it on the web at.... <http://churchlady864.wordpress.com>

Articles that Ms. Merritt has penned include articles on blessings and thanksgiving and why African American women wear hats to Sunday Church services! Congratulations to Kathleen Merritt!

**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.

**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; Father Brendan Murphy, SVD consultant.

Correspondence to Media Production Center, 199 Seminary Drive, Bay St. Louis, MS 39520, 228-467-1097, Cell phone 504-908-6343. Electronic messages to our Internet address, [editor@inaword.com](mailto:editor@inaword.com).

**IN A WORD** is not published during July and August. Web page can be found at <http://www.inaword.com>