

# WE COMMIT OURSELVES:

A social justice newsletter of the Sisters of St. Joseph, Third Order St. Francis



## Special Interest Articles:

- *No Outcasts* by Sister Dorothy Pagosa
- *Blacks in the Catholic Church* by Sister Cecilia Marie Morton



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*Sr. Cecilia Marie Morton, Sr. Donna Wilhelm, Sr. Dorothy Pagosa, Jennifer Dillon, Sr. Marjorie White, Maxine Smith, Sr. Rose Grabowski, Sr. Shannon Fox*  
—Social Justice Committee

## Inside This Issue *by Sister Shannon Fox*

**“We think sometimes that poverty is only being hungry, naked and homeless. The poverty of being unwanted, unloved and uncared for is the greatest poverty. We must start in our own homes to remedy this kind of poverty.”**

—Saint Mother Teresa

This edition of *We Commit Ourselves* will bring together many diverse topics of social justice.

Sister Dorothy Pagosa shares with us her experience of celebrating national migrant week in Chicago. As a part of our continuing education on environment concerns, we are invited to learn about the ecological carbon fast.

In celebration of Black History Month, Sister Cecilia Marie shares with us some reflections on African American History.

She begins by sharing some of the rich history of the continent of Africa and

continues by offering her insights into the history of African Americans in the Catholic Church.

These reflections are not only timely due to Black History Month, but also due to recent disparaging and disrespectful remarks made about the continent of Africa.

While the issues of social justice may be diverse, may we continue to seek justice for the impoverished and stand with them against oppression. ■

## No Outcasts *by Sister Dorothy Pagosa*

### Deepest Desires

*General Chapter 2012-2013*

As Franciscans centered on the revelation of the emerging Cosmic Christ, contemplating and celebrating this Divine action in our lives, our deepest desires are to:

- **BUILD** life-giving, trusting communities that cherish each one's personal gifts,
- **EMPOWER** one another to live the truth of Gospel values,
- **BOND** with others in ever widening circles of compassion and peace,
- **SPEAK** to the Church and to the world from our common understanding that there be no outcasts in our experience of life on this earth.

These days, we Sisters of St. Joseph, TOSF and Associates are truly challenged to live up to our deepest desires. Too

many times I have watched a family being torn apart as one person or another is deported after being in our country for many years.

Jorge Garcia from Michigan is 39 and was brought into the U.S. at the age of 10. He was deemed too old to receive DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals). The rest of his family members are U.S. citizens.

DACA recipients have to reapply every 2 years, undergo a criminal check and pay \$500 to have their status renewed. They cannot have a criminal record. They pay taxes. One young man (an EMT) in Houston helped save people during the flood and gave his life for it. DACA recipients are not bad people. They are adding to the beauty of our

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*No Outcasts...* continued from p. 1

country. Some would have you believe that we should only have white people migrating to our country. That goes against every faith tradition.

**D**uring January, we celebrated National Migrant Week. In Chicago, I was one of the planners for the Liturgy on January 8 at the Cathedral. Immigrants from over 45 countries came dressed in their finest native garb. The beauty of the procession reminded me of how beautiful we are as a country because of the immigrants that came here

My family immigrated here from Poland and Germany. These countries were not exactly the most desirable places at the time most migrated. Yet, look at the wealth of knowledge, work

and family that was created through their coming. I do not just mean my family.

**O**n January 14, we ended National Migrant Week with an Interfaith Prayer Service sponsored by Sisters and Brothers of Immigrants. Leaders of Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu and Sikh faiths shared a prayer or reading from their holy books that spoke to the need to welcome the stranger, the alien in our midst.

**P**lease contact your Federal Representatives and Senators and ask them to pass a Clean Dream Act. It is important to do this now. The good news is that 80% of the country agrees on the need for a Clean Dream Act as does the Catholic Church hierarchy. ■

## Blacks in the Catholic Church

by Sister Cecilia Marie Morton

### Background

From greatness in Africa and around the world to being considered little or nothing, to greatness [in the Church] while still considered nothing by others. Who are these people we can't seem to understand?

This is a look at some of the things that black people have brought to the table, and are still bringing to the table, and more.

### From Africa

Prehistoric people were found, such as Lucy. She was uncovered in Hadar, Ethiopia. Donald Johanson is known to have found her bones while listening to the song "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds" so he named her Lucy. The Ethiopians had another name for her: "Dinkanish" meaning "Thou Art Beautiful."

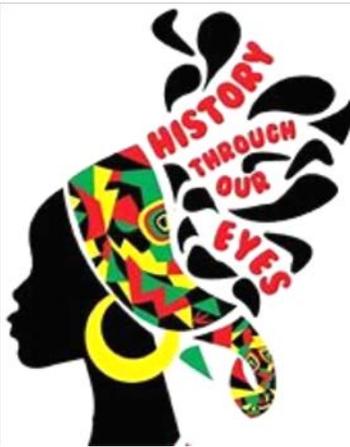
*Home Erectus* (the first person to walk upright) and *Homo Habilis* (the first to use stone tools) were discovered by the Leakeys in Tanzania at Olduvai Gorge.

### What Black People Had and Gave to the World

(Ed. Note: This disputes the idea that Africa is poor and is behind.)

- Great kings and queens
- There were kingdoms with political organizations.
- They had armies to defend their countries, including cavalymen.
  - The Armies had officers, soldiers and personal guards
  - They controlled particular regions of the King's Territory.
- They had camels and horses.
- They knew how to carve saddles, bridles, and different artifacts.
- They were fishermen, hunters, craftsmen, woodcarvers, silversmiths, goldsmiths, coppersmiths, weavers, tanners and dyers.
- They made cloth and the clothing they wore, and grew cotton to make the cloth.
- The people grew most of their own food, like rice, yams, beans and onions, enough to feed their whole villages.

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## *Blacks in the Catholic Church...* continued from p. 2

- From the baobab tree they had medicinal liquids, red dye, and a kind of white meal for bread
- The shea butter tree gave them fruit that looked like a lemon and tasted like a pear. From the kernel of this fruit the people made an oil which they used to make soap and a fuel for lamps.
- They owned and controlled salt deposits and copper mines in the Sahara Desert.
- They made and played musical instruments
- They were merchants who would travel hundreds of miles.
- They build strong and durable buildings with walls so high yet with

nothing [no mortar] in between to keep it together.

- They knew to make items out of stone.
- They have strong religious ties.
- They had great scholars.
- Yes, they also had slaves and servants who were traded.
- The list could go on...

### **Moving on to the Black Church and the Catholic Church**

Here is some background on the Black Church in general.

The Black Church became a haven for abolitionists, orators like Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, and Sojourner Truth and the list goes on. It supported the

Underground Railroad with money, personnel and sanctuary.

During the Great Depression it was a haven for philanthropy, encouraging mutual good and collecting funds.

The people of all of these churches, except for the Catholic churches, distributed food and clothing to those in need. They fulfilled social as well as spiritual needs. They had day care centers for children and senior citizens. They built houses and established credit unions and operated blood banks.

The Black Church was called on to quell gang violence and to provide health information and counsel to

*Continued on p. 4*



*"We embrace our immigrant roots and identify with the struggle of all people to find a home in this world."*

SSJ-TOSF Congregational Commitments  
26<sup>th</sup> General Chapter

## Annual Ecumenical Lenten Carbon Fast

## Ecumenical Carbon Fast

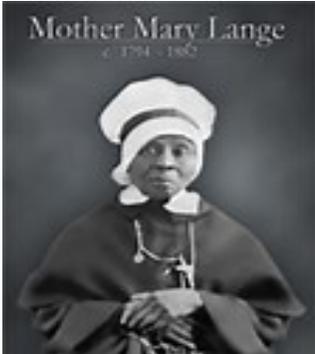
Initiated by the UCC and endorsed by other denominations and faith groups, thousands of people representing all fifty states and at least twelve other countries have benefitted from this opportunity to become more conscious and conscientious in their daily lives.

**Ash Wednesday** invites us into the season of Lent, a time within the church year to acknowledge that we are mortal, limited, so that we might be transformed and become the new life God calls us to be. The activities range from the very simple (e.g. eliminate "vampire" electrical use) to the moderately challenging (e.g. take "military" showers) to more long term (e.g. buy local produce). We consider all of the activities a form of spiritual practice, a concrete way of participating in the stewardship of God's creation.

The intention is to provide do-able actions which can make a difference; not to overwhelm people, or make them feel bad about themselves, or cause them to feel that the situation is hopeless. We want people to empower people so they can challenge themselves to do more.

The 2018 daily email messages will run from Ash Wednesday, February 14 through Easter Sunday, April 1.

**Check out MACUCC:** Ecumenical Lenten Carbon Fast at <https://www.macucc.org/carbonfast>

***Blacks in the Catholic Church...*** *continued from p. 3*

***"I can change things. I can make things happen."***

*Sister Thea Bowman, FSPA*

drug and alcohol abusers, shelter the homeless, and give support to people with HIV.

It was a solid rock in the Black Community, strengthening the human spirit while reinforcing the community's political and economic infrastructure. African-American churches, temples, salvation and service were and are all a part of the same package.

They encouraged painting over billboards advertising liquor and cigarettes. Today that would also include drugs. They were involved in Public Rights and the Civil Rights Movement.

### **Black Sisters Coming from Greatness**

- **Mother Elizabeth Lange**

Mother Lange founded the Oblate Sisters of Providence in Maryland. This was and is the first Black Religious community in the United States.

She is not pictured wearing a religious habit because at that time Blacks were not allowed to wear a Religious Habit.

Also important is that the Oblate Sisters of Providence were a teaching community. Yet, when the Yellow Fever broke out in Baltimore, the Oblate

Sisters stopped teaching and went to help those with Yellow Fever to get well. They never received recognition for this until just a few years ago by the City of Baltimore.

- **Mother Henrietta DeLille**

The Second Black Religious community was founded by Mother Henrietta DeLille of the Holy Family Sisters in New Orleans, Louisiana.

- **Mother Theresa Duchemin Maxia**

Mother Maxia founded the IHM Sisters (The Immaculate Heart of Mary Sisters) in Monroe, Michigan.

- **Sister Thea Bowman, FSPA**

In 1989, Sister Thea was invited to the US Conference of Catholic Bishops. She was 52, in a wheel-chair and suffering from late-stage cancer. She was the first to ever challenge them that the Catholic Church is a racist church.

In America magazine it is stated that she did not hesitate to challenge and even chide the Bishops for their complicity in a church of paternalism, of a patronizing attitude toward people of color. ■

**Note:**

You can look all of this, and more, up on your computer.

—Sister Cecilia Marie



*Sr. Susan Francois, CSJP learned plenty about human dignity while working at a center for homeless in London.*

## **Why Catholics care about people living in poverty**

Excerpts from an article by Sr. Susan Francois, CSJP

***"Would you like your toast buttered or dry?"***

This important question was key to my early-morning ministry to men and women experiencing homelessness on the streets of London, England.

I had traveled 3,000 miles across the Atlantic

Ocean to live in community with my British Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace during my novitiate ministry experience.

Each morning I left the comforts of our house at the crack of dawn in order to have the tea ready and the toaster warmed up when our first clients

walked in the door.

As I struggled to get out of my warm and toasty bed while it was still dark outside, I would think of the men and women waking up on park benches or, if they were lucky, in an overnight shelter. I may have been preparing to profess

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### *Why Catholics care about people living in poverty... continued from p. 4*

a vow of poverty, but these people lived real economic poverty each day.

The Passage Day Centre for the Homeless, a collaborative ministry of London's Westminster Cathedral and the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent DePaul, provides far more than a hot breakfast to men and women "sleeping rough" on the city's streets.

Staff and volunteers help clients find housing, seek employment, gain literacy, and learn computer skills. Counselors and health-care workers provide mental and physical care.

Chaplains offer spiritual care, daily Mass, and common prayer. Combined, these efforts treat the whole person with dignity and empower these men and women to rebuild their lives.

Of course I did not need to travel 3,000 miles to find people experiencing poverty. Here in the United States the poverty rate is increasing at an alarming rate...

*This is an excerpt from an article found online, from VISION Vocation Network. To read the rest of the article, click on this link: [vocation\\_network](http://vocation_network)*



## ***Little Known Black History Facts*** – From [www.PBS.org](http://www.PBS.org)

History is often reduced to a handful of memorable moments and events. In Black history, those events often include courageous stories like those of The Underground Railroad and historic moments like the famous "I Have a Dream" speech by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. But these are only a few of the significant and important events to know and remember.

In an effort to honor this expansive and growing history, Black History Month was established by way of a weekly celebration in February known as "Negro History Week" by historian Carter G. Woodson. But just as Black history is more than a month, so too are the numerous events and figures that are often overlooked during it. What follows is a list of some of those "lesser known" moments and facts in Black history.

### **Inoculation was introduced to America by a slave.**

Few details are known about the birth of Onesimus, but it is assumed he was born in Africa in the late seventeenth century before eventually landing in Boston. One of a thousand people of African descent living in the Massachusetts colony, Onesimus was a gift to the Puritan church minister Cotton Mather from his congregation in 1706.

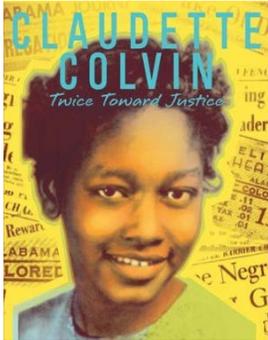
Onesimus told Mather about the centuries old tradition of inoculation practiced in Africa. By extracting the material from an infected person and scratching it into the skin of an uninfected person, you could deliberately introduce smallpox to the healthy individual making them immune. Considered extremely dangerous at the time, Cotton Mather convinced Dr. Zabdiel Boylston to experiment with the procedure when a smallpox epidemic hit Boston in 1721 and over 240 people were inoculated. Opposed politically, religiously and medically in the United States and abroad, public reaction to the experiment put Mather and Boylston's lives in danger despite records indicating that only 2% of patients requesting inoculation died compared to the 15% of people not inoculated who contracted smallpox.

Onesimus' traditional African practice was used to inoculate American soldiers during the Revolutionary War and introduced the concept of inoculation to the United States.

Read two more full "Little Known Black History Facts" on page 6.

And click on [More Black History Facts](#) to read about:

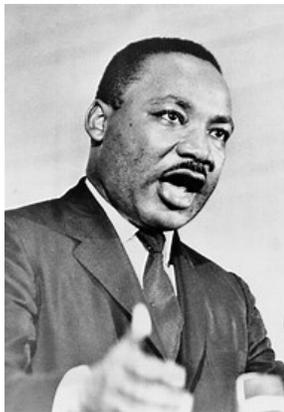
- The earliest recorded protest against slavery was by the Quakers in 1688.
- Of the 12.5 million Africans shipped to the New World during the Transatlantic Slave Trade, fewer than 388,000 arrived in the United States.
- The diverse history of Historically Black Colleges and Universities.
- One in four cowboys was Black, despite the stories told in popular books and movies.
- Esther Jones, a Black jazz singer in Harlem, was the real Betty Boop!
- The first licensed African American Female pilot was named Bessie Coleman.
- Interracial marriage in the United States was banned in 1664 and not overturned until 1967.

**Little Known Black History Facts...** *continued from page 5***Before there was Rosa Parks, there was Claudette Colvin.**

**M**ost people think of Rosa Parks as the first person to refuse to give up their seat on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama. There were actually several women who came before her; one of whom was Claudette Colvin.

**I**t was March 2, 1955, when the fifteen-year-old schoolgirl refused to move to the back of the bus, nine months *before* Rosa Parks' stand that launched the Montgomery bus boycott. Claudette had been studying Black leaders like Harriet Tubman in her segregated school, those conversations had led to discussions around the current day Jim Crow laws they were all experiencing. When the bus driver ordered Claudette to get up, she refused, "It felt like Sojourner Truth was on one side pushing me down, and Harriet Tubman was on the other side of me pushing me down. I couldn't get up."

**C**laudette Colvin's stand didn't stop there. Arrested and thrown in jail, she was one of four women who challenged the segregation law in court. If *Browder v. Gayle* became the court case that successfully overturned bus segregation laws in both Montgomery and Alabama, why has Claudette's story been largely forgotten? At the time, the NAACP and other Black organizations felt Rosa Parks made a better icon for the movement than a teenager. As an adult with the right look, Rosa Parks was also the secretary of the NAACP, and was both well-known and respected – people would associate her with the middle class and that would attract support for the cause. But the struggle to end segregation was often fought by young people, more than half of which were women.

**Martin Luther King Jr. improvised the most iconic part of his "I Have a Dream Speech."**

**O**n Wednesday, August 28, 1963, 250,000 Americans united at the Lincoln Memorial for the final speech of the March on Washington. As Martin Luther King, Jr. stood at the podium, he eventually pushed his notes aside.

**T**he night before the march, Dr. King began working on his speech with a small group of advisers in the lobby of the Willard Hotel. The original speech was more political and less historic, according to Clarence B. Jones, and it did not include any reference to dreams. After delivering the now famous line, "we are not satisfied, and we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream," Dr. King transformed his speech into a sermon.

**O**nstage near Dr. King, singer Mahalia Jackson reportedly kept saying, "Tell 'em about the dream, Martin," and while no one will know if he heard her, it could likely have been the inspiration he needed. Dr. King then continued, "Even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream..." And then the famous Baptist preacher preached on, adding repetition and outlining the specifics of his dream. And while this improvised speech given on that hot August day in 1963 was not considered a universal success immediately, it is now recognized as one of the greatest speeches in American history.

**Recommended Articles on the Internet**

Here are two more links I recommend that you view:

- "More than 1 in 4 With Disabilities Living in Poverty" To read, click on [Disabilities Poverty](#)
- "Reducing Poverty will help bring about the Kingdom of God, Bishop Says" in an article published by Catholic News Service. To read this, click on [Reducing Poverty \(Bishop\)](#)

—Sister Shannon



## WE COMMIT OURSELVES

February 14<sup>th</sup>



*"We respect the earth and recognize that all life is interconnected in a continuing cosmic evolution."*

SSJ-TOSF Congregational  
Commitments  
26<sup>th</sup> General Chapter



**Valentine's Day**, also called **Saint Valentine's Day** or the **Feast of Saint Valentine**, is an annual holiday celebrated on February 14. Originating as a Western Christian feast day honoring one or more early saints named Valentinus, Valentine's Day is now recognized as a significant cultural, religious, and commercial celebration of romance in many regions around the world, although it is not a public holiday in any country.

**M**artyrdom stories associated with various Valentines connected to February 14 are presented in

Martyrologies, including a written account of Saint Valentine of Rome's imprisonment for performing weddings for soldiers, who were forbidden to marry, and for ministering to Christians persecuted under the Roman Empire.

**A**ccording to legend, during his imprisonment Saint Valentine restored sight to the blind daughter of his judge, and before his execution he wrote her a letter signed "Your Valentine" as a farewell.

*—Excerpt from Wikipedia*

### Message from the Social Justice Committee:

**We wish each Sister and Associate  
a Happy Valentine's Day  
and a Blessed Lent.**

**May our SSJ-TOSF congregation be a sign of  
Justice, Peace and Hope for our World.**

### REMEMBER...

We welcome your submissions in the form of

- "Sightings"
- Brief write-ups of your activities, suggestions for workshops, books, articles, films, resources, etc.

Note: The **next issue** of *We Commit Ourselves* will be published in **April 2018**.

**Please send** any items for inclusion in this next issue to **Sister Marge White** no later than Friday, **March 23, 2018**.

*~ Your Social Justice Committee*