



Office for Evangelization & Catechetical Ministry
Diocese of San Diego
Celebrating our Saints – American Heroes

**The Office for Evangelization & Catechetical Ministry
Proudly Presents:**

Celebrating our Saints – American Heroes

We Catholics in the USA are blessed to have saintly men and women from every corner of our great nation, from sea to shining sea, throughout our history. Immigrants and natives, rich and poor, religious sisters and brothers, lay people and priests have all carried the light of Christ, as they lived out their faith with joy and love in this blessed land. As catechists, we can never talk enough about the glorious witness of our older brothers and sisters in the faith, the saints. We must share their stories, as they lead us to Christ by their examples and intercession.

You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lampstand, where it gives light to all in the house. Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father.

Matthew 5: 14-16

We encourage you to learn about these heroes for your own formation as well as use them each and every day woven into your lessons and discussions with those you serve.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, a let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus...

Hebrews 12: 1-2

During the month of February, we celebrate African American History month, and we would like to take the opportunity to reflect on the awe-inspiring stories of the Catholic African American holy men and women that are part of our Catholic family. They are a true gift to us in the United States of America and the universal Church.



Trinity Dome Mosaic, Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, Washington D.C.



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LESSON PLAN
Venerable Pierre Toussaint
(1766 – 1853)

“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.”

Directions: Please use this template to create your lesson plan.

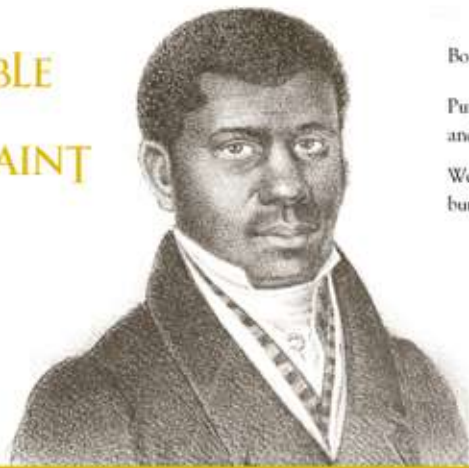
Date/Time:

Lesson Topic: Venerable Pierre Toussaint

Virtues & Themes: Love, Humility, Joy, Service, Dedication, Fortitude, Forgiveness, Generosity, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness, Piety, Counsel



**VENERABLE
PIERRE
TOUSSAINT**



Born a slave in Haiti.

Purchased his enslaved wife's freedom
and that of many others.

Went to daily Mass for 66 years and now
buried in the Cathedral crypt.

**ST. PATRICK'S
CATHEDRAL**
RESTORE YOUR HEART RESTORE THE CHURCH
RESTORE THE CATHEDRAL



Opening Prayer:

Lord, Father of our human family,
you created all human beings equal in dignity:
pour forth into our hearts a fraternal spirit
and inspire in us a dream of renewed encounter,
dialogue, justice and peace.
Move us to create healthier societies
and a more dignified world,
a world without hunger, poverty, violence and war.
Amen.

-Pope Francis
Fratelli Tutti

Scripture for Reflection:

Matthew 5: 3-12 The Beatitudes

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted.
Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land.
Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.
Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.
Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against
you falsely because of me.
Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven. Thus they persecuted the
prophets who were before you.

Galatians 5: 1 – Importance of Faith

For freedom Christ set us free; so stand firm and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery.

Galatians 5: 13-14 – Freedom for Service

For you were called for freedom, brothers. But do not use this freedom as an opportunity for
the flesh; rather, serve one another through love. For the whole law is fulfilled in one
statement, namely, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”



Galatians 5: 22-26 – Freedom for Service

In contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

Against such there is no law. Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified their flesh with its passions and desires.

If we live in the Spirit, let us also follow the Spirit. Let us not be conceited, provoking one another, envious of one another.

From the Catechism:

1717 The Beatitudes depict the countenance of Jesus Christ and portray his charity. They express the vocation of the faithful associated with the glory of his Passion and Resurrection; they shed light on the actions and attitudes characteristic of the Christian life; they are the paradoxical promises that sustain hope in the midst of tribulations; they proclaim the blessings and rewards already secured, however dimly, for Christ's disciples; they have begun in the lives of the Virgin Mary and all the saints.

1937 These differences belong to God's plan, who wills that each receive what he needs from others, and that those endowed with particular "talents" share the benefits with those who need them. These differences encourage and often oblige persons to practice generosity, kindness, and sharing of goods; they foster the mutual enrichment of cultures:

I distribute the virtues quite diversely; I do not give all of them to each person, but some to one, some to others.... I shall give principally charity to one; justice to another; humility to this one, a living faith to that one.... and so I have given many gifts and graces, both spiritual and temporal, with such diversity that I have not given everything to one single person, so that you may be constrained to practice charity towards one another.... I have willed that one should need another and that all should be my ministers in distributing the graces and gifts they have received from me.⁴³

Biography:

Venerable Pierre Toussaint, a philanthropist and founder of many Catholic charitable works, was born a slave in Haiti and brought from Haiti to New York as an apprentice 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 quickly succeeded as



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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 others out on the streets in their home. He founded one of New York's first orphanages and raised money for the city's first cathedral. 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."*

<https://www.usccb.org/committees/african-american-affairs/road-sainthood-leaders-african-descent>

Venerable Pierre Toussaint (1766-1853) was born a slave in Haiti and died a freeman in New York City. He is credited by many with being the father of Catholic Charities in New York. Pierre was instrumental in raising funds for the first Catholic orphanage and began the city's first school for black children. He also helped to provide funds for the Oblate Sisters of Providence, a religious community of black nuns founded in Baltimore and played a vital role in providing resources to erect Old Saint Patrick's Cathedral in Lower Manhattan. During a Yellow Fever epidemic when many of the city's political leaders fled the city in search of healthier rural climates, Pierre Toussaint cared for the sick and the dying. He was a successful entrepreneur, who did not hesitate to share the fruits of his labor with others.

In recognition of Pierre Toussaint's virtuous life, the late Cardinal Cooke introduced Pierre's cause for canonization at the Vatican in 1968. In December 1989, the late Cardinal O'Connor had the remains of Pierre Toussaint transferred from Lower Manhattan to St. Patrick's Cathedral in midtown Manhattan where he is buried as the only lay person, alongside the former Cardinal-Archbishops of New York City. On December 17, 1997, Pope John Paul II declared Pierre Toussaint, Venerable, thus placing him firmly on the road to becoming North America's first black saint. Venerable Pierre Toussaint was a man who was proud of his faith, proud of his culture and committed to serving others.

<https://archny.org/ministries-and-offices/cultural-diversity-apostolate/black-ministry/venerable-pierre-toussaint/>

Useful Video Clips Venerable Pierre Toussaint:

Archdiocese of New York - Office of Black Ministry
<https://vimeo.com/226776463> (6:33 minutes)

Archdiocese of Indianapolis – Black Catholic Ministry
<https://youtu.be/5P3nMRsuX6I> (3:07 minutes)



Prayer for the Canonization of Venerable Pierre Toussaint

Lord God, source of love and compassion, we praise and honor You for the virtuous and charitable life of our brother in Christ, Venerable Pierre Toussaint.

Inspired by the example of our Lord Jesus, Pierre worshipped You with love and served Your people with generosity. He attended Mass daily and responded to the practical and spiritual needs of friends and strangers, of the rich and the poor, the sick and the homeless of the 19th century New York.

If it is your will, let the name of Venerable Pierre Toussaint be officially raised to the rank of Saint, so that the world may know this Haitian New Yorker who refused to hate or be selfish, but instead lived to the full commandments of heaven and the divine law of love – love for God and for neighbor.

By following his example and asking for his prayer, may we, too, be counted among the blessed in heaven.

We ask for this through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Student Learning Expectations/Standards to be addressed:

Religion Curriculum Standards:

- A.7 Students will grow in their understanding of the Saints.
- C.1 Students will grow in the understanding of Life in Christ.
- C.2 Students will grow in their understanding of the Beatitudes.
- E.1 Students will grow in their knowledge of Catholic social teaching.
- E.2 Students will grow in their understanding of justice and service
- E.3 Students will grow in their understanding of the life and dignity of the human person.
- E.4 Students will grow in their understanding of solidarity.

Suggested Activities: Discussion focused on Fruits of the Holy Spirit and connections to African American history. What qualities make him a good example and saint for us? Perhaps consider doing an activity focusing on the Beatitudes, check out [The Religion Teacher](#) website for some creative ideas or create one of your own!

Resources:

Archdiocese of New York
<https://archny.org/ministries-and-offices/cultural-diversity-apostolate/black-ministry/venerable-pierre-toussaint/>

Archdiocese of Indiana – Office for Black Catholics
Black Catholics on their way to becoming Saints
<https://www.archindy.org/catechesis/index.html>



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Arlington Catholic Herald

https://www.catholicheald.com/faith/your_faith/venerable_pierre_toussaint_a_man_a_gift_an_inspiration/

Loyola Press

<https://www.loyolapress.com/catholic-resources/saints/saints-stories-for-all-ages/venerable-pierre-toussaint/>

Sadlier

<https://www.sadlier.com/religion/blog/bid/102506/catholic-virtues-series-the-legacy-of-generosity>

Franciscan Media – Saint of the Day

<https://www.franciscanmedia.org/saint-of-the-day/venerable-pierre-toussaint>



LESSON PLAN
Servant of God
Mother Mary Lange
(1784 – 1882)

Directions: Please use this template to create your lesson plan.

Date/Time:

Lesson Topic: Mother Mary Lange

Virtues & Themes: Perseverance, Humility, Joy, Vocation, Service, Dedication, Fortitude, Love, Kindness, Goodness, Peace, Wisdom



Opening Prayer:

May our hearts be open
to all the peoples and nations of the earth.
May we recognize the goodness and beauty
that you have sown in each of us,
and thus forge bonds of unity, common projects,
and shared dreams.

Amen.

-Pope Francis
Fratelli Tutti



Scripture for Reflection:

James 1:19-27 - Doers of the Word

Know this, my dear brothers: everyone should be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath, for the wrath of a man does not accomplish the righteousness of God. Therefore, put away all filth and evil excess and humbly welcome the word that has been planted in you and is able to save your souls.

Be doers of the word and not hearers only, deluding yourselves.

For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his own face in a mirror. He sees himself, then goes off and promptly forgets what he looked like.

But the one who peers into the perfect law of freedom and perseveres, and is not a hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, such a one shall be blessed in what he does. If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, his religion is vain.

Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

From the Catechism:

SOCIAL JUSTICE

1928 Society ensures social justice when it provides the conditions that allow associations or individuals to obtain what is their due, according to their nature and their vocation. Social justice is linked to the common good and the exercise of authority.

I. Respect For the Human Person

1929 Social justice can be obtained only in respecting the transcendent dignity of man. the person represents the ultimate end of society, which is ordered to him:

What is at stake is the dignity of the human person, whose defense and promotion have been entrusted to us by the Creator, and to whom the men and women at every moment of history are strictly and responsibly in debt.³⁵



Biography:

We do not know much about the early years of Mother Mary Lange, the foundress of the Oblate Sisters of Providence. She was born Elizabeth Lange in the around 1794 in Santiago de Cuba, where she lived in a primarily French speaking community. She received an excellent education and in the early 1800s Elizabeth left Cuba and settled in the United States. By 1813, Providence directed her to Baltimore, Maryland where a large community of French speaking Catholics from Haiti was established. Elizabeth came to Baltimore as a courageous, loving, and deeply spiritual woman. She was a strong, independent thinker and doer. As a well educated, it did not take Lange long to recognize that the children of her fellow immigrants needed an education. There was no free public education for African American children in Maryland until 1868. She responded to that need by opening a school in her home in the Fells Point area of the city for the children. She and her friend, Marie Magdaleine Balas (later Sister Frances, OSP) operated the school for over ten years.

Providence intervened through the person of Reverend James Hector Joubert, SS, who was encouraged by James Whitfield, Archbishop of Baltimore, and presented Elizabeth Lange with the idea to found a religious congregation for the education of African American girls. Father Joubert would provide direction, solicit financial assistance, and encourage other "women of colour" to become members of this, the first congregation of African American women religious in the history of the Catholic Church. Elizabeth joyfully accepted Father Joubert's idea. She no longer needed to keep locked up the deepest desire of her heart. For years she felt God's call to consecrate herself and her works entirely to Him. How was this to be? At the time black men and women could not aspire to religious life. But now God was providing a way! On July 2, 1829 Elizabeth and three other women professed their vows and became the Oblate Sisters of Providence.

Elizabeth, foundress and first superior general of the Oblate Sisters of Providence, took the religious name of Mary. She was superior general from 1829 to 1832, and from 1835 to 1841. This congregation would educate and evangelize African Americans. Yet they would always be open to meeting the needs of the times. Thus the Oblate Sisters educated youth and provided a home for orphans. Slaves who had been purchased and then 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 Saint Mary's Seminary.

Mother Mary's early life prepared her well for the turbulence that followed the death of Father Joubert in 1843. There was a sense of abandonment at the dwindling number of pupils and defections of her closest companions and co-workers. Yet through it all Mother Lange never lost faith in Providence. Mother Mary Lange practiced faith to an extraordinary degree. In fact, it was her deep faith which enabled her to persevere against all odds. To her black brothers and sisters she gave herself and her material possessions until she was empty of all but Jesus, whom she shared generously with all by witnessing to His teaching. In close union with Him,



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she lived through disappointment and opposition until God called her home, February 3, 1882 at Saint Frances Convent in Baltimore, Maryland.

<https://www.oblatesisters.com/founders>

Useful Video Clips of Mother Mary Lange :

Oblate Sisters of Providence

<https://vimeo.com/580324905> (5:07 minutes)

Archdiocese of Indianapolis – Black Catholic Ministry

<https://youtu.be/oFiTiOndpIQ> (3:21 minutes)

Prayer for the Canonization of Mother Mary Lange

Almighty and Eternal God, You granted Mother Mary Lange extraordinary trust in Your providence. You endowed her with humility, courage, holiness and an extraordinary sense of service to the poor and sick. You enabled her to found the Oblate Sisters of Providence and provide educational, social and spiritual ministry especially to the African American community.

Mother Lange's love for all enabled her to see Christ in each person, and the pain of prejudice and racial hatred never blurred that vision. Deign to raise her to the highest honors of the altar in order that, through her intercession, more souls may come to a deeper understanding and a more fervent love of You. Heavenly Father, glorify Your heart by granting also this favor

(here mention your request)

which we ask through the intercession of Your faithful servant, Mother Mary Lange.

Amen.

Student Learning Expectations/Standards to be addressed:

Religion Curriculum Standards:

- A.7 Students will grow in their understanding of the Saints.
- C.1 Students will grow in the understanding of Life in Christ.
- C.2 Students will grow in their understanding of the Beatitudes.
- E.1 Students will grow in their knowledge of Catholic social teaching.
- E.2 Students will grow in their understanding of justice and service
- E.3 Students will grow in their understanding of the life and dignity of the human person.
- E.4 Students will grow in their understanding of solidarity.



Suggested Activities: Discussion focused on vocation to service of our brothers and sisters. Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy game or other creative activity. What qualities make her a good example and saint for us? How does Mother Mary Lange’s mission live on today?

Resources:

Archdiocese of Baltimore

<https://www.archbalt.org/mother-lange-sainthood-cause-on-track/>
<https://www.archbalt.org/?s=mother+lange>

Catholic Review Archdiocesan newspaper

<https://catholicreview.org/meet-mother-mary-lange-the-namesake-of-the-archdiocese-of-baltimores-newest-school/>

Oblates Sisters of Providence

<https://www.oblatesisters.com>

Cause of Canonization website

<https://www.motherlange.org>

Meet Mother Mary Elizabeth Lange article

<https://aleteia.org/2016/11/12/celebrating-catholic-black-history-month-meet-mother-mary-elizabeth-lange/>

Works of Mercy Game

Cut out the numbers. Fold and place them in a hat. Color and cut out the markers. With a partner, play a game. Choose a number, move that number of spaces, and follow the directions on the square. Then put the number back in the hat. Continue until someone reaches Finish.





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LESSON PLAN
Venerable Henriette Delille
Servant of the Slaves
(1813 – 1862)

"I believe in God. I hope in God. I love. I want to live and die for God."

Directions: Please use this template to create your lesson plan.

Date/Time:

Lesson Topic: Henriette Delille

"I believe in God. I hope in God. I love. I want to live and die for God."

For the Love of Jesus Christ she became the humble and devout servant of slaves

Virtues & Themes: Perseverance, Humility, Joy, Vocation, Service, Dedication, Fortitude, Love for the Poor, Counsel, Piety, Kindness





Opening Prayer:

O God, Trinity of love,
from the profound communion of your divine life,
pour out upon us a torrent of fraternal love.
Grant us the love reflected in the actions of Jesus,
in his family of Nazareth,
and in the early Christian community.

Amen.

-Pope Francis
Fratelli Tutti

Scripture for Reflection:

Matthew 25: 31-46

The Judgment of the Nations.

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit upon his glorious throne,

and all the nations* will be assembled before him. And he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

Then the king will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me,

naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.’

Then the righteous* will answer him and say, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink?

When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you?

When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?’

And the king will say to them in reply, ‘Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.’

Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, a stranger and you gave me no welcome, naked and you gave me no clothing, ill and in prison, and you did not care for me.’

Then they will answer and say, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or ill or in prison, and not minister to your needs?’

He will answer them, ‘Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me.’



And these will go off to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

From the Catechism:

1889 Without the help of grace, men would not know how "to discern the often narrow path between the cowardice which gives in to evil, and the violence which under the illusion of fighting evil only makes it worse."¹³ This is the path of charity, that is, of the love of God and of neighbor. Charity is the greatest social commandment. It respects others and their rights. It requires the practice of justice, and it alone makes us capable of it. Charity inspires a life of self-giving: "Whoever seeks to gain his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will preserve it."¹⁴

Biography:

Born in 1812, Henriette Delille was a real life person like you and me. She was born a free woman of color and lived her life in New Orleans, Louisiana. Henriette was surrounded by family and friends.

Among Henriette's relatives was her great, great grandmother who was a slave from West Africa. Her mother and the other women in her family formed liaisons or serial monogamous relationships with white men. This means colored women "in concubinage" with wealthy white men. In recent findings, in funeral records, Henriette may have given birth to two sons who died before the age of three. She had one sister and two brothers, one of whom died in infancy. Descendants have been found and are in touch with the Sisters.

When Henriette was 24 years old, she underwent a religious experience. This religious experience is expressed in a brief declaration of faith and love. On the flyleaf of a book centered on the Eucharist, is a profession of love, in her own handwriting. Written in French: "Je crois en Dieu. J'espère en Dieu. J'aime. Je veux vivre et mourir pour Dieu."

In 1836 Henriette drew up the rules and regulations for devout Christian women, which would eventually become the Society of the Holy Family. The group was founded for the purpose of nursing the sick, caring for the poor, and instructing the ignorant.

1842 is the date for the founding of the Sisters of the Holy Family for the same purposes. Henriette was assisted by her friends, Juliette Gaudin and Josephine Charles. Records show that these women served as godmothers to many: slaves, free, children, and adults. They also witnessed many marriages.

With a three pronged program and a set of carefully drawn up rules, they expressed their apostolic intentions through caring for the sick, helping the poor, and instructing the ignorant



of their people, free and enslaved, children and adults, in the name of Jesus Christ and the Church.

They took into their home elderly women who needed more than visitation, and thereby opened America's first Catholic home for the elderly of its kind, as recorded in the National Register. Noteworthy are the heroic efforts of the early Sisters who cared for the sick and the dying during the yellow fever epidemics that struck New Orleans in 1853 and 1897.

In the eyes of the world Henriette may not have accomplished much, but her obituary and the Catholic Church tell us otherwise. “. . . (Henriette) devoted herself untiringly for many years, without reserve, to the religious instruction of the people of New Orleans, principally of slaves. . . .” The last line of her obituary reads, “. . . for the love of Jesus Christ she had become the humble and devout servant of the slaves.”

Because she lived such a holy, prayerful, and virtuous life, we, the Sisters of the Holy Family, wanted to present her to the world as a model of a true Christian. Therefore, we asked, from the Catholic Church, permission to begin a canonization process. Through the efforts of the late Archbishop Philip Hannan, this request was granted by Blessed John Paul II in 1988. The Church then declared her "Servant of God."

The process to sainthood has four phases: servant of God, venerable, blessed, and saint. Two of the phases, servant of God and venerable, are complete. Venerable was decreed by Pope Benedict XVI March 27, 2010.

Venerable Henriette Delille is the first United States native born African American whose cause for canonization has been officially opened by the Catholic Church. What remains for the process to be complete is the validation of an alleged miracle which is now being processed. If all goes well and Pope Benedict XVI issues the decree of the alleged miracle's authenticity, then Henriette will be proclaimed blessed.

What follows is a glorious ceremony and celebration in New Orleans. A second miracle would be needed for sainthood.

Venerable Henriette Delille lived her prayer: "I believe in God. I hope in God. I love. I want to live and die for God."

<https://nolacatholic.org/mother-henriette-delille>

Useful Video Clips of Venerable Henriette Delille :

Sisters of the Holy Family
<https://vimeo.com/285658142> (6:46 minutes)

Archdiocese of Indianapolis – Black Catholic Ministry
<https://youtu.be/jWbvF6B0E3M> (3:55 minutes)



Prayer for the Canonization of Venerable Henriette Delille

O good and gracious God, You called Henriette Delille to give herself in service and in love to the slaves and the sick, to the orphan and the aged, to the forgotten and the despised.

Grant that inspired by her life, we might be renewed in heart and in mind. If it be Your will may she one day be raised to the honor of sainthood. By her prayers, may we live in harmony and peace, through Jesus Christ, Our Lord.

Amen.

Student Learning Expectations/Standards to be addressed:

Religion Curriculum Standards:

- A.7 Students will grow in their understanding of the Saints.
- C.1 Students will grow in the understanding of Life in Christ.
- C.2 Students will grow in their understanding of the Beatitudes.
- E.1 Students will grow in their knowledge of Catholic social teaching.
- E.2 Students will grow in their understanding of justice and service
- E.3 Students will grow in their understanding of the life and dignity of the human person.
- E.4 Students will grow in their understanding of solidarity.

Suggested Activities: Discussion focused on Matthew 25 and how we treat others. What qualities make her a good example and saint for us? Perhaps consider using the Love Your Neighbor calendar activity or create one of your own.

Resources:

Archdiocese of New Orleans

<https://nolacatholic.org/mother-henriette-delille>

<https://nolacatholic.org/road-to-sainthood>

<https://youtu.be/0TTsq8zfWr0>

Presentation on the life of Venerable Henriette Delille

<https://nolacatholic.org/sisters-of-the-holy-family>

Cause for Canonization website

<https://www.henriette-delille.com>

Sisters of the Holy Family

<https://www.sistersoftheholysfamily.com/henriette-delille>

Our Sunday Visitor



Office for Evangelization & Catechetical Ministry
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<https://www.osvnews.com/amp/2019/09/06/who-was-venerable-henriette-delille/>

Love Your Neighbor Challenge

30 Acts of Love in 30 Days

Challenge your family members to work together to complete these thirty small acts of love for thirty days. Grow in holiness together and share your progress to inspire others.

1 Eat lunch with someone who doesn't have anyone to sit with.	2 Clean out your closet and donate clothes to a local shelter.	3 Make a conscious effort to not speak badly about anyone today.	4 Every time you enter a doorway today pray for those living in poverty.	5 Take five minutes to write a thank you note or draw a picture for a teacher who has had an impact on you. Be sure to mail or drop it off.
6 Do the dishes without being asked.	7 Do laundry for the whole family.	8 Charitably ask someone to stop gossiping about someone else.	9 Invite someone to a playdate or an event who isn't typically invited.	10 Make blessing bags for a homeless outreach, including toiletries, snacks, socks, gloves, and a handwritten note.
11 Treat someone you love with a coffee.	12 Every time you get in or out of a car today, pray silently for the sick.	13 Take the day off from screens and intentionally spend time in conversation.	14 Offer to babysit for a local family for free so they can get a date night.	15 Write a note of encouragement or draw a picture for a friend going through a difficult time.
16 Spend the afternoon baking cookies for your local nursing home. Drop them off.	17 Help a family member with homework or a chore.	18 Pack lunches for your entire family.	19 Call an extended family member you haven't spoken to who could use your company.	20 Volunteer as a family at a soup kitchen or food pantry.
21 Write a letter or make a card for a member of the armed forces.	22 Every time you change activities today, offer a prayer for your parents.	23 Play a game as a family today.	24 Clean a room in your home that doesn't belong to you.	25 Volunteer at a program that supports others.
26 Write cards for children in your local pediatric hospital. Make sure to mail them or drop them off.	27 Every time you write something down today, offer a prayer for those in prison.	28 Offer to help a colleague or classmate with something he or she is struggling with.	29 Give up buying lunch for one week and use the money to pick out school supplies for an under-resourced school.	30 Prepare sandwiches for your local soup kitchen.



LESSON PLAN
Venerable Fr. Augustus Tolton
(1854 – 1897)

Directions: Please use this template to create your lesson plan.

Date/Time:

Lesson Topic: Venerable Father Augustus Tolton

Virtues & Themes: Perseverance, Humility, Joy, Vocation, Service, Dedication, Fortitude



Opening Prayer:

Grant that we Christians may live the Gospel,
discovering Christ in each human being,
recognizing him crucified
in the sufferings of the abandoned
and forgotten of our world,
and risen in each brother or sister
who makes a new start.

Amen.

-Pope Francis
Fratelli Tutti



Scripture for Reflection:

Philippians 3:13-14

“Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

Matthew 5: 43-48 - Love of Enemies

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what recompense will you have? Do not the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what is unusual about that? Do not the pagans do the same? So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Ephesians 2: 13-22 - One in Christ

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have become near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, he who made both one and broke down the dividing wall of enmity, through his flesh, abolishing the law with its commandments and legal claims, that he might create in himself one new person* in place of the two, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile both with God, in one body, through the cross, putting that enmity to death by it. He came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near, for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the holy ones and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the capstone. Through him the whole structure is held together and grows into a temple sacred in the Lord; in him you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

From the Catechism:

2303 Deliberate hatred is contrary to charity. Hatred of the neighbor is a sin when one deliberately wishes him evil. Hatred of the neighbor is a grave sin when one deliberately desires him grave harm. "But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven."⁹⁶



2304 Respect for and development of human life require peace. Peace is not merely the absence of war, and it is not limited to maintaining a balance of powers between adversaries. Peace cannot be attained on earth without safeguarding the goods of persons, free communication among men, respect for the dignity of persons and peoples, and the assiduous practice of fraternity. Peace is "the tranquility of order."⁹⁷ Peace is the work of justice and the effect of charity.⁹⁸

2305 Earthly peace is the image and fruit of the peace of Christ, the messianic "Prince of Peace."⁹⁹ By the blood of his Cross, "in his own person he killed the hostility,"¹⁰⁰ he reconciled men with God and made his Church the sacrament of the unity of the human race and of its union with God. "He is our peace."¹⁰¹ He has declared: "Blessed are the peacemakers."¹⁰²

2306 Those who renounce violence and bloodshed and, in order to safeguard human rights, make use of those means of defense available to the weakest, bear witness to evangelical charity, provided they do so without harming the rights and obligations of other men and societies. They bear legitimate witness to the gravity of the physical and moral risks of recourse to violence, with all its destruction and death.¹⁰³

Opening Prayer:

O God, who ennobled your servant, the Venerable Augustus Tolton, through the saving waters of baptism, teach us, by his example, to rise above the vanities of this world and attain the heights of your majesty. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever.

Amen.

Biography from the Pontifical Missionary Societies:

The first black priest of the United States of America was born in Ralls County, Missouri, on April 1, 1854, from two slaves, Peter Paul Tolton and Martha Jane. Augustus' father was one of 180,000 black soldiers who perished in the ranks of the Union Army. Thus, he lost his father at a young age. He owed his survival to his mother who decided to escape to Quincy, Illinois, where the devout woman began to attend a Catholic church. There, the Toltons also had to fight against prejudices which limited young Augustus' education.

Early on in life, Augustus showed interest in the priesthood. Father McGirr and Father Richardt encouraged the young man in his aspiration and tried to enroll him in numerous diocesan seminaries but did not succeed. Finally, in 1878, the Franciscan College of Quincy accepted Augustus as a special student and two years later, his sponsors succeeded in enrolling



him in the Pontifical Urban College "De Propaganda Fide" in Rome.

Augustus Tolton was ordained a priest on April 24, 1886, at St. John Lateran and celebrated his first Mass at St. Peter's the following day. Like every member of Propaganda Fide, he knew that he had to accept the destination his superiors chose for him, and, in all his years of formation, he prepared himself to go to Africa, thinking that he was destined for that mission. To his surprise, Cardinal Giovanni Simeoni, Prefect of the Congregation of Propaganda Fide, told him that he would be sent back to the United States, where the Church at that time was considered in need of missionaries, and work in a parish in Illinois. "America needs black priests," the cardinal said to the newly-ordained priest. "America has been called the most enlightened nation. We will see whether it deserves that honor. If the United States has never seen a black priest, they must see one now. Can you drink from this chalice?" Fr. Tolton replied in Latin, "I can."

Fr. Augustine Tolton's first assignment was at St. Joseph Church in the heart of Quincy. During the first two years, Fr. Tolton earned the respect and attention of many parishioners with German and Irish origin who ended up sitting with their African-American brothers and sisters in Christ to listen to his inspiring sermons. He was often invited to preach in other parishes and his catechism classes were full of enthusiastic catechists, but due to his popularity, not only the Protestant pastors, but even the Catholic priests were envious of him, including Dean Father Weiss. Shortly after, Fr. Tolton was forced to look for another diocese to work in and after much research, the Archbishop of Chicago, Monsignor Patrick Augustine Feehan, assigned him to a poor parish in the south end of the city where many African-American Catholics lived. It eventually became St. Monica Church and the center of evangelization for all African-American Catholics in Chicago.

Fr. Tolton's reputation as a preacher earned him many opportunities to reveal the truths of the Faith and the vocation of holiness to all. This included preaching to the first Congress of Catholics in Washington, D.C., in 1889, where he met Mother Katharine Drexel, an heiress who was encouraged by Pope Leo XIII to become a missionary and found the congregation the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, serving the Native-Americans and African-Americans in Philadelphia. Unfortunately, Fr. Tolton did not write a lot nor keep a diary, but only sent a few letters to Mother Drexel, who was canonized by Saint John Paul II in 2000. It was she who financed a school for African-American children that Fr. Tolton opened near his parish.

While facing discrimination and unjust prejudice, Fr. Augustine Tolton never surrendered his priestly ministry which wore him out physically, but never in spirit. One very hot day, on July 9, 1887, Fr. Tolton returned to Chicago after participating on a spiritual retreat with a group of other diocesan priests. While he was walking, he fell on the sidewalk and suffered a heat stroke. He was rushed to Mercy Hospital but there was not much to do. That evening, his life on earth ended at forty-three years old surrounded by his mother, sister and many religious sisters praying. On February 13, 2012, the Congregation for the Causes of Saints granted the title of Servant of God to Fr. Augustus Tolton. Pope Francis decreed the heroic virtue of Father Tolton and gave him the title, Venerable on June 11, 2019.

<http://www.october2019.va/en/testimoni/i-testimoni/father-augustus-tolton.html>



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Useful Video Clips of Venerable Father Augustus Tolton:

Tolton: A film about the first Black Catholic Priest in the United States

<https://youtu.be/pJlKN2x87gk> (9:11 minutes)

from the Archdiocese of Philadelphia

<https://heedthecall.org/tolton/>

Archdiocese of Indianapolis – Black Catholic Ministry

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f8XWgG0fGmQ> (3:53 minutes)

National Black Catholic Congress – Enduring Faith

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9QjPyCXGN7E> (1:32:20 minutes)

Additional Biographies:

Bishop Joseph N. Perry, *Aux. of Chicago, Diocesan Postulator for the Cause of Augustus Tolton*

<https://tolton.archchicago.org/about>

About Venerable Augustine Tolton

<https://tolton.dio.org/story.html>

Biography: They Called Him Father Gus by Rev. Roy Bauer of Quincy, IL

<https://adams.illinoisgenweb.org/letters/they-called-him-father-gus.html>



Prayer for the Canonization of Fr. Augustus Tolton

O God, we give you thanks for your servant and priest, Father Augustus Tolton, who labored among us in times of contradiction, times that were both beautiful and paradoxical. His ministry helped lay the foundation for a truly Catholic gathering in faith in our time. We stand in the shadow of his ministry. May his life continue to inspire us and imbue us with that confidence and hope that will forge a new evangelization for the Church we love.

Father in Heaven, Father Tolton's suffering service sheds light upon our sorrows; we see them through the prism of your Son's passion and death. If it be your Will, O God, glorify your servant, Father Tolton, by granting the favor I now request through his intercession (mention your request) so that all may know the goodness of this priest whose memory looms large in the Church he loved.

Complete what you have begun in us that we might work for the fulfillment of your kingdom. Not to us the glory, but glory to you O God, through Jesus Christ, your Son and our Lord; Father, Son and Holy Spirit, you are our God, living and reigning forever and ever.

Amen.

Student Learning Expectations/Standards to be addressed:

Religion Curriculum Standards:

- A.7 Students will grow in their understanding of the Saints.
- C.1 Students will grow in the understanding of Life in Christ.
- C.2 Students will grow in their understanding of the Beatitudes.
- E.1 Students will grow in their knowledge of Catholic social teaching.
- E.2 Students will grow in their understanding of justice and service
- E.3 Students will grow in their understanding of the life and dignity of the human person.
- E.4 Students will grow in their understanding of solidarity.

Suggested Activities: Discussion focused on Vocation and connections to African American history. What qualities make him a good example and saint for us? Take this opportunity to pray for vocations and the seminarians for our local Church. Consider inviting Fr. Lauro Minimo to speak on vocations. Visit the Diocese of San Diego Office for Vocations webpage at: <https://www.sdcatholic.org/diocese/clergy/vocations/>

USCCB Activity

<https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/racism/upload/grade-4-resource.pdf>



Resources:

Archdiocese of Chicago

<https://tolton.archchicago.org/>

To request the prayer card for the canonization of Father Augustus Tolton, call or write:

Bishop Joseph N. Perry
Phone: 312.534.8376
3525 South Lake Park Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60653

Diocese of Springfield

<https://tolton.dio.org/>

Quotes:

“Although slavery ended legally after the American Civil War, severe racial prejudice remained dominant in American life for many decades; the Church was not immune to this evil. Participation of blacks in ordinary political, economic, social and even religious life was hampered and curtailed at every turn. Father Tolton lived courageously in the midst of this prejudice with the help of some Catholic priests, religious sisters and laity. The introduction of his Cause now gives the Church as a whole the opportunity to affirm his courage and enable him, long after his death, to take his place in our history and our prayers.”

– *Francis Cardinal George, OMI*
Archbishop of Chicago

“As an obedient servant of Christ the eternal high priest and a faithful steward of the mysteries of God, Father Tolton’s sharing in the Cross led him to a life of long-suffering in the face of prejudice and misunderstanding, which produced within him the fruits of joy and a humble love for God and the people. His zeal for the priestly ministry illuminates for us the path to God.”

– *Diocese of Springfield in Illinois*

“Tolton’s story is one of carving out one’s humanity as a man and as a priest in an atmosphere of racial volatility. His was a fundamental and pervasive struggle to be recognized, welcomed and accepted. He rises wonderfully as a Christ-figure, never uttering a harsh word about anyone or anything while being thrown one disappointment after another. He persevered among us when there was no logical reason to do so.”

– *Bishop Joseph N. Perry*
Auxiliary Bishop of Chicago
Diocesan Postulator for the Cause of Augustus Tolton



Office for Evangelization & Catechetical Ministry
Diocese of San Diego
Celebrating our Saints – American Heroes

LESSON PLAN
Servant of God Julia Greeley
Denver's Angel of Charity
(1833~1848 – 1918)

Directions: Please use this template to create your lesson plan.

Date/Time:

Lesson Topic: Julia Greeley

Virtues & Themes: Forgiveness, Humility, Joy, Service, Dedication, Fortitude, Love for the Poor, Human Dignity, Charity





Opening Prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit, show us your beauty,
reflected in all the peoples of the earth,
so that we may discover anew
that all are important and all are necessary,
different faces of the one humanity
that God so loves.

Amen.

-Pope Francis
Fratelli Tutti

Scripture for Reflection:

Matthew 6: 1-4 - Teaching About Almsgiving

“But take care not to perform righteous deeds in order that people may see them; otherwise, you will have no recompense from your heavenly Father.

When you give alms, do not blow a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets to win the praise of others. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward.

But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing, so that your almsgiving may be secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you.

James 2:14-18 - Faith and Works.

What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?

If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well,” but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it?

So also faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead. Indeed someone may say, “You have faith and I have works.” Demonstrate your faith to me without works, and I will demonstrate my faith to you from my works.



From the Catechism:

II. Equality and Differences Among Men

1934 Created in the image of the one God and equally endowed with rational souls, all men have the same nature and the same origin. Redeemed by the sacrifice of Christ, all are called to participate in the same divine beatitude: all therefore enjoy an equal dignity.

1935 The equality of men rests essentially on their dignity as persons and the rights that flow from it:

Every form of social or cultural discrimination in fundamental personal rights on the grounds of sex, race, color, social conditions, language, or religion must be curbed and eradicated as incompatible with God's design.⁴⁰

Biography:

Julia Greeley, Denver's Angel of Charity, was born into slavery, at Hannibal, Missouri, sometime between 1833 and 1848. While she was still a young child, a cruel slavemaster, in the course of beating her mother, caught Julia's right eye with his whip and destroyed it.

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. Whatever she did not need for herself, Julia spent assisting poor families in her neighborhood. When her own resources were inadequate, she begged for food, fuel and clothing for the needy. One writer later called her a “one-person St. Vincent de Paul Society.” To avoid embarrassing the people she helped, Julia did most of her charitable work under cover of night through dark alleys.

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 she lived in a boarding house, Julia's body was laid out in church, and immediately many hundreds of people began filing past her coffin to pay their grateful respect. She was buried in Mt. Olivet Cemetery (sect. 8, Block 7), and to the present day many people have been asking that her cause be considered for canonization, a request which was finally granted in the Fall



of 2016.

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.

<http://juliagreeley.org/>

Useful Video Clips of Servant of God Julia Greeley:

Julia Greeley – Our Model of Mercy
<https://archden.org/julia/> (9:14 minutes)

Archdiocese of Indianapolis – Black Catholic Ministry
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ignajfz_KFg (2:37 minutes)

Prayer for the Canonization of Julia Greeley

Heavenly Father, your servant Julia Greeley dedicated her life to honoring the Sacred Heart of your Son and to the humble service of the poor. Grant to me a generous heart like your Son's, and if it be in accordance with your holy will, please grant this favor I now ask through Julia's intercession (*insert intention*)... I pray this through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Student Learning Expectations/Standards to be addressed:

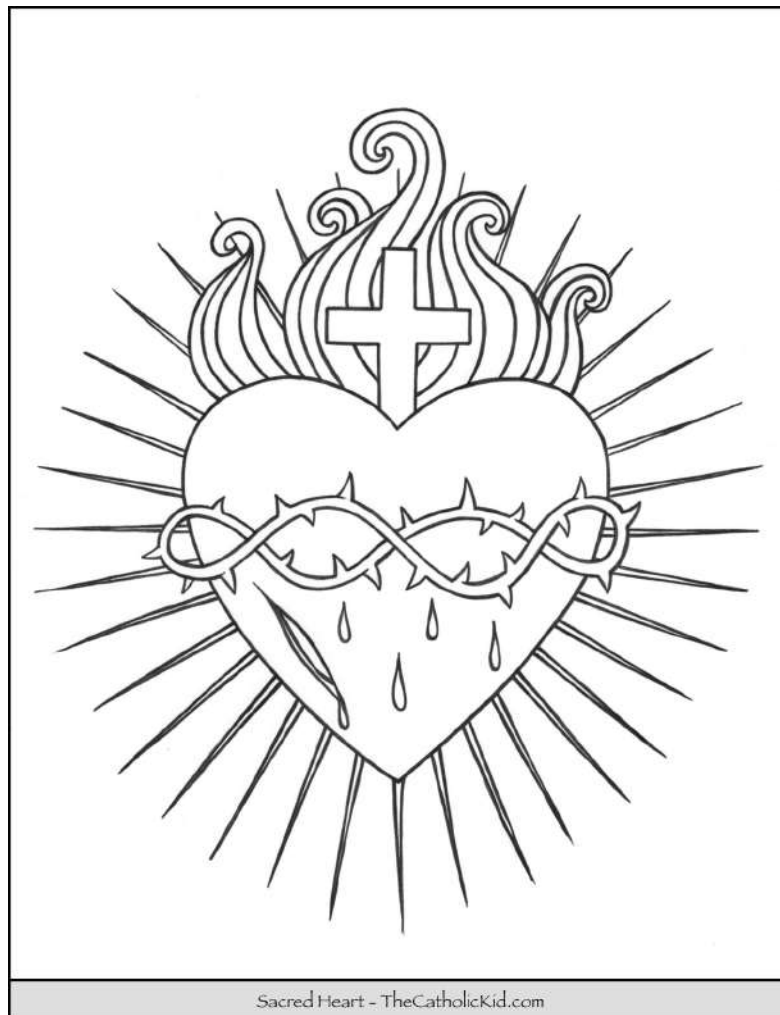
Religion Curriculum Standards:

- A.7 Students will grow in their understanding of the Saints.
- C.1 Students will grow in the understanding of Life in Christ.
- C.2 Students will grow in their understanding of the Beatitudes.
- E.1 Students will grow in their knowledge of Catholic social teaching.
- E.2 Students will grow in their understanding of justice and service
- E.3 Students will grow in their understanding of the life and dignity of the human person.
- E.4 Students will grow in their understanding of solidarity.



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Suggested Activities: Discussion focused on devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Faith in Action. What qualities make her a good example and saint for us? Consider collecting food and items to be donated to those in need using a wagon.



https://coloringhome.com/sacred-heart-of-jesus-coloring-pages#google_vignette



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Resources:

Archdiocese of Denver
<https://archden.org/julia/>

Julia Greeley Guild
<https://juliagreeley.org>



Office for Evangelization & Catechetical Ministry
Diocese of San Diego
Celebrating our Saints – American Heroes

LESSON PLAN

Servant of God Sister Thea Bowman, FSPA Franciscan Sister of Perpetual Adoration (1937-1990)

“We unite ourselves with Christ’s redemptive work when we reconcile, when we make peace, when we share the good news that God is in our lives, when we reflect to our brothers and sisters God’s healing, God’s forgiveness, God’s unconditional love.”

Directions: Please use this template to create your lesson plan.

Date/Time:

Lesson Topic: Sister Thea Bowman

Virtues & Themes: Perseverance, Humility, Joy, Vocation, Service, Fortitude, Evangelization, Harmony, Diversity, Strengthened by the Eucharist





Opening Prayer:

Mary, Virgin and Mother,
you who, moved by the Holy Spirit,
welcomed the word of life
in the depths of your humble faith:
as you gave yourself completely to the Eternal One,
help us to say our own “yes”
to the urgent call, as pressing as ever,
to proclaim the good news of Jesus.

Amen.

-Pope Francis
Evangelii Gaudium

Scripture for Reflection:

Matthew 28: 16-20 - The Commissioning of the Disciples

The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had ordered them. When they saw him, they worshiped, but they doubted. Then Jesus approached and said to them, “All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.”

Ephesians 4: 11-16

And he gave some as apostles, others as prophets, others as evangelists, others as pastors and teachers, to equip the holy ones for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of faith and knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the extent of the full stature of Christ, so that we may no longer be infants, tossed by waves and swept along by every wind of teaching arising from human trickery, from their cunning in the interests of deceitful scheming.

Rather, living the truth in love, we should grow in every way into him who is the head, Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, with the proper functioning of each part, brings about the body’s growth and builds itself up in love.



From the Catechism:

II. The Desire for Happiness

1718 The Beatitudes respond to the natural desire for happiness. This desire is of divine origin: God has placed it in the human heart in order to draw man to the One who alone can fulfill it:

We all want to live happily; in the whole human race there is no one who does not assent to this proposition, even before it is fully articulated.¹³

How is it, then, that I seek you, Lord? Since in seeking you, my God, I seek a happy life, let me seek you so that my soul may live, for my body draws life from my soul and my soul draws life from you.¹⁴

God alone satisfies.¹⁵

1719 The Beatitudes reveal the goal of human existence, the ultimate end of human acts: God calls us to his own beatitude. This vocation is addressed to each individual personally, but also to the Church as a whole, the new people made up of those who have accepted the promise and live from it in faith.

I. Freedom and Responsibility

1738 Freedom is exercised in relationships between human beings. Every human person, created in the image of God, has the natural right to be recognized as a free and responsible being. All owe to each other this duty of respect. The right to the exercise of freedom, especially in moral and religious matters, is an inalienable requirement of the dignity of the human person. This right must be recognized and protected by civil authority within the limits of the common good and public order.³²

II. Equality and Differences Among Men

1934 Created in the image of the one God and equally endowed with rational souls, all men have the same nature and the same origin. Redeemed by the sacrifice of Christ, all are called to participate in the same divine beatitude: all therefore enjoy an equal dignity.

1935 The equality of men rests essentially on their dignity as persons and the rights that flow from it:

Every form of social or cultural discrimination in fundamental personal rights on the grounds of sex, race, color, social conditions, language, or religion must be curbed and eradicated as incompatible with God's design.⁴⁰



Biography:

Sister Thea Bowman

Educator, Missionary Disciple, Advocate for Cultural Awareness and Racial Harmony
Diocese of Jackson in Mississippi

“We unite ourselves with Christ’s redemptive work when we reconcile, when we make peace, when we share the good news that God is in our lives, when we reflect to our brothers and sisters God’s healing, God’s forgiveness, God’s unconditional love.”

Sister Thea Bowman, F.S.P.A., shared these words a few weeks before dying of cancer in her home in Canton, Mississippi as part of a reflection on Holy Week, entitled, “Let Us Resolve to Make This Week A Holy One” in the Diocese of Jackson’s newspaper, Mississippi Today. These would be the final public words of a religious woman who dedicated her life to spreading the joy of the Gospel and promoting cultural awareness and racial reconciliation. A self-proclaimed, “old folks’ child,” Thea 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. These religious communities nurtured her faith and greatly influenced her religious vocation.

Growing up, Thea listened and learned from the wisdom of the “old folks,” the elders of her community. Ever precocious, she asked questions and gained insights on how her elders lived, thrived and survived. She learned from family members and those in her community coping mechanisms and survival skills. These skills proved essential as she navigated through the horrid experiences of blatant racism, segregation, inequality, and the struggle for Civil Rights in her native Mississippi. At an early age, Thea was exposed to the richness of her African-American culture and spirituality, most especially the history, stories, songs, prayers, customs and traditions. Moreover, she was cognizant that God loved and provided for the poor and the oppressed. Her community instructed her, “If you get, give—if you learn, teach.” These life lessons instilled in her an abiding love for God and to be charitable to toward those most in need.

For Thea Bowman, her conversion to Catholicism was rooted in what she witnessed: she was attracted to the Catholic Church by the example of how Catholics seemed to love and care for one another, most especially the poor and needy. For Thea, she was impressed by how Catholics put their faith into action. At the age of fifteen she told her parents and friends she wanted to join the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration and left the familiar Mississippi terrain to venture to the unfamiliar town of LaCrosse, Wisconsin where she would be the only African-American member of her religious community.

At her religious profession, she was given the name, “Sister Mary Thea” in honor of the



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Blessed Mother and her father, Theon. Her name in religious life, Thea, literally means “God.” She was trained to become a teacher. She taught at all grade levels, eventually earning her doctorate and becoming a college professor of English and linguistics.

The turbulent 1960s was a period of transformation for a nation torn by racial strife and division. The United States was confronted by the quest for justice and racial equality for all Americans. The late 1960’s was also a time of transformation for Sister Thea Bowman: both a spiritual and cultural awakening. The liturgical renewal of the Second Vatican Council encouraged Sister Thea to rediscover her African-American religious heritage and spirituality and to enter her beloved Church “fully functioning.” She emphasized that cultural awareness had, as a prerequisite, intentional mutuality. She was eager to learn from other cultures, but also wanted to share the abundance of her African-American culture and spirituality. Indeed, Sister Thea became a highly acclaimed evangelizer, teacher, writer, and singer sharing the joy of the Gospel and her rich cultural heritage throughout the nation.

Spurred by the need to return home to Canton to care for her aging parents, in 1978, Sister Thea, with the blessing, approval and permission of her superior and religious community, accepted an appointment by Bishop Joseph Bernard Brunini to direct the Office of Intercultural Affairs for the Diocese of Jackson. In this position Sister Thea continued to assail racial prejudice and promote cultural awareness and sensitivity. She was a founding faculty member of the Institute for Black Catholic Studies at Xavier University in New Orleans. With the full support of the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, Sister Thea remained then and remains still a member in good standing in her religious community.

In 1984, Sister Thea faced devastating challenges: both her parents died, and she was diagnosed with breast cancer. Her friends and students encouraged her to choose life. Sister Thea vowed to “live until I die” and continued her rigorous schedule of speaking engagements. Even when it became increasingly painful and difficult to travel as the cancer metastasized to her bones, she was undeterred from witnessing and sharing her boundless love for God and the joy of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Donned in her customary African garb, Sister Thea would arrive in a wheel chair with no hair (due to the chemotherapy treatments) but always with her a joyful disposition and pleasant smile. She did not let her wheel chair, or the deterioration of her body keep her from one unprecedented event – an opportunity to address the U.S. Bishops at their annual June meeting held in 1989 at Seton Hall University in East Orange, NJ. Sister Thea spoke to the bishops as a sister having a “heart to heart” conversation with her brothers.

This well-crafted, yet at times, quite spontaneous message spoke of the Church as her “home,” as her “family of families” and as her trying to find her way “home.” She explained what it meant to be African-American and Catholic. She enlightened the bishops on African-American history and spirituality. Sister Thea urged the bishops to continue to evangelize the African-American community, to promote inclusivity and full participation of African-Americans within Church leadership, and to understand the necessity and value of Catholic schools in the African-American community. And when she was through she invited the



bishops to move together, cross arms and sing with her, “We Shall Overcome.” She seemingly touched the hearts of the bishops as evidenced by their thunderous applause and tears flowing from their eyes.

When asked by her dear friend and homilist for her funeral, Father John Ford, S.T. what to say at her funeral, Sister Thea responded: “Tell them what Sojourner Truth said about her eventual death, ‘I’m not going to die. I’m going home like a shooting star.’” And so she did, peacefully at five o’clock in the morning of March 30, 1990 in the home where she was reared in Canton, MS. Sister Thea said that she wanted inscribed on her tombstone the simple, yet profound words: “She tried.” “I want people to remember that I tried to love the Lord and that I tried to love them...” She was buried beside her parents and an uncle at the Elmwood cemetery in Memphis, Tennessee.

Sister Thea Bowman’s life was always one of Gospel joy, enduring faith, and persevering prayer even in the midst of racial prejudice, cultural insensitivity, and debilitating illness. Her personal holiness witnessed to the faith and endurance of her ancestors, the hope expressed in the Spirituals, compassion for the poor and marginalized, her devotion to the Eucharist, and the radical love embodied by St. Francis of Assisi. Asked how she made sense of suffering, she answered, “I don’t make sense of suffering. I try to make sense of life... I try each day to see God’s will...”

Her life epitomized the words of Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium*: Indeed, those who enjoy life most are those who leave security on the shore and become excited by the mission of communicating life to others. [10] Sister Thea’s life is also a radiant example of Pope Francis’ Gaudete Et Exsultate. The Holy Father writes, Holiness is boldness, an impulse to evangelize and to leave your mark in this world. [129] ... Your identification with Christ and his will involves a commitment to build with him that kingdom of love, justice and universal peace. [25]

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.

Today across the United States there are schools; an education foundation to assist needy students attend Catholic universities; housing units for the poor and elderly, and a health clinic for the marginalized that are named in her honor. Books, articles, catechetical resources, visual media productions, and a stage play have been written or created documenting her exemplary life, spirituality, and ministry; prayer cards, works of art, statues, and stained-glass windows bear her image all attesting to Sister Thea’s profound spiritual impact and example of holiness for the faithful.

<https://www.sistertheabowman.com/biography/>



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Useful Video Clips of Servant of God Sister Thea Bowman:

The Amazing Light of Sister Thea Bowman

<https://vimeo.com/261511927> (11:43 minutes)
<https://www.sistertheabowman.com/media/videos/>

Archdiocese of Indianapolis – Black Catholic Ministry

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VYwGaoEeuls> (4:19 minutes)

Prayer for the Canonization of Sister Thea Bowman

Ever loving God, who by your infinite goodness inflamed the heart of your servant and religious, Sister Thea Bowman with an ardent love for you and the People of God; a love expressed through her indomitable spirit, deep and abiding faith, dedicated teaching, exuberant singing, and unwavering witnessing of the joy of the Gospel.

Her prophetic witness continues to inspire us to share the Good News with those whom we encounter; most especially the poor, oppressed, and marginalized. May Sister Thea's life and legacy compel us to walk together, to pray together, and to remain together as missionary disciples ushering in the new evangelization for the Church we love.

Gracious God imbue us with the grace and perseverance that you gave your servant, Sister Thea. For in turbulent times of racial injustice, she sought equity, peace, and reconciliation. In times of intolerance and ignorance, she brought wisdom, awareness, unity, and charity. In times of pain, sickness, and suffering, she taught us how to live fully until called home to the land of promise. If it be your Will, O God, glorify our beloved Sister Thea, by granting the favor I now request through her intercession (*mention your request*), so that all may know of her goodness and holiness and may imitate her love for You and Your Church. We ask this through Your Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Amen.

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Imprimatur: *Most Rev. Joseph R. Kopacz, Bishop of Jackson*



Student Learning Expectations/Standards to be addressed:

Religion Curriculum Standards:

- A.7 Students will grow in their understanding of the Saints.
- C.1 Students will grow in the understanding of Life in Christ.
- C.2 Students will grow in their understanding of the Beatitudes.
- E.1 Students will grow in their knowledge of Catholic social teaching.
- E.2 Students will grow in their understanding of justice and service
- E.3 Students will grow in their understanding of the life and dignity of the human person.
- E.4 Students will grow in their understanding of solidarity.

Suggested Activities: View and discuss Sr. Thea's address to the Bishops of the United States. What qualities make her a good example and saint for us? Alternatively use the clip from the closing song "We Shall Overcome." Perhaps listen together to one of her songs available online.



United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Address June 1989 (35:02 minutes)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uOV0nQkjuoA>

Sr. Thea Bowman, FSPA, devoted her life to sharing her rich African American Catholic heritage and spirituality in song, prayer, teaching and preaching. Watch Sr. Thea's June 1989 address to the U.S. Catholic Bishops on Black Catholic Spirituality.

Short Clip of Presentation to USCCB (4:26 minutes)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d6pBrBOawII>

Songs of My People – The Complete Collection – Sister Thea Bowman

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C9HdQ7X5_cE&list=OLAK5uy_kUKd_v3KymibwAacg5vZDnBKXTV6d1XN4

We Shall Overcome, lyrics

We Shall Overcome, we shall overcome We shall overcome someday.
Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe,
We shall overcome someday.

We are not afraid, we are not afraid, We are not afraid today.
Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe, We shall overcome someday.



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Celebrating our Saints – American Heroes

We are not alone, we are not alone We are not alone today
Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe, We are not alone today.

The truth will make us free, the truth will make us free, The truth will make us free
someday.

Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe,
We shall overcome someday.

We'll walk hand in hand, we'll walk hand in hand, We'll walk hand in hand someday.

Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe,
We shall overcome someday.

The Lord will see us through, the Lord will see us through, The Lord will see us
through someday.

Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe,
We shall overcome someday.

Black and white together, Black and white together, Black and white together
someday.

Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe,
We shall overcome someday.

We shall all be free, we shall all be free, We shall all be free someday.

Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe,
We shall overcome someday.

"We Shall Overcome"[lyrics of a traditional song]. In Manning Marable and Leith Mullings, eds. *Let Nobody Turn Us Around: Voices of Resistance, Reform and Renewal* (Oxford: Rowan & Littlefield, 1999).



The Lives of the Saints

Name _____

Sister Thea Bowman

One memorable moment in Sister Thea Bowman's life was when she led bishops to join hands, stand very close, and sing together. The close proximity of the singers and the lyrics of the spiritual tune "We Shall Overcome" combined to break down barriers between the participants and remind them of the solidarity and strength in numbers that African Americans used in peaceful protests during the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s.

Sometimes, a physical activity can be used to break down barriers and help different people to come together for a common goal. This "icebreaker" can open the doors to teamwork and even friendship. Write about or draw a picture of an activity that a group could use to break down barriers in order to get to know one another better and work together despite differences, inspired by the work of Sister Thea Bowman.



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Celebrating our Saints – American Heroes

Resources:

Cause for Canonization Website

<https://www.sistertheabowman.com>

Diocese of Jackson, Mississippi

<https://jacksondiocese.org>

Diocesan Newspaper

<https://www.mississippicatholic.com/2021/09/12/diocese-and-new-group-media-shoot-documentary-commemorating-sister-thea-bowman/>

Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration

<https://www.fspa.org/content/about/sister-thea-bowman>

Part 1

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2IcIOU2sfIo>

Part 2

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xZNXH9qIdUY>

<https://www.sadlier.com/religion/blog/sister-thea-bowman-canonization>



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Holy Geography

Holiness is everywhere! Locate on the map below where the African American holy men and women served God.





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To Learn More About the African America Catholics on the Road to Sainthood Please visit:

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

On the Road to Sainthood: Leaders of African Descent

<https://www.usccb.org/committees/african-american-affairs/road-sainthood-leaders-african-descent>

Combatting Racism – Educational Resources

<https://www.usccb.org/committees/ad-hoc-committee-against-racism/combatting-racism-educational-resources>

Combatting Racism – Parish Resources

<https://www.usccb.org/committees/ad-hoc-committee-against-racism/combatting-racism-parish-resources>

Archdiocese of Indiana – Office for Black Catholics

Black Catholics on their way to becoming Saints

<https://www.archindy.org/catechesis/index.html>

Liguori pamphlets

<https://www.liguori.org/black-american-saints-pamphlet-set.html>

Josephite Pastoral Center

<http://www.josephitepastoralcenter.org/african-american-candidates-for-sainthood/>

National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus

<https://nbccc.cc/black-catholic-sainthood/>

Resources for Discussing Racism:

Notre Dame: Church Life Journal

Communal Guilt and the Black Catholic Experience in America: An Interview with Fr. Josh Johnson

<https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/communal-guilt-and-the-black-catholic-experience-in-america-an-interview-with-fr-joshua-johnson/>

Franciscan Media

<https://www.franciscanmedia.org/news/black-catholics-celebrate-their-heritage-take-active-role-in-the-church>

