



Ongoing Series Highlighting
Important American Black Catholics

Reverend Augustine Tolton

First Black Priest in America

Whose Parents Were Both Black

1854-1897

Augustine was the second of three children born to Peter Paul Tolton and Martha Jane Chisley, both slaves in Missouri. His parents were Catholic and raised their children Catholic. Prior to the end of the Civil War, Mrs. Tolton escaped to Quincy, Illinois. Her husband had been missing for some time prior to making this decision.

At the age of 16, Augustine discussed priesthood with Father Peter McGirr, St. Peter's Church in Quincy, Illinois. Augustine worked in a cigar factory and was later hired as custodian for the church.

Fr. Theodore Wegmann, Pastor at St. Boniface Church, along with other priests, tutored him at the rectory. In 1878 he enrolled in St. Francis College. Rejected by seminaries and religious orders because of the color of his skin, he never gave up his dream of becoming a priest.

With the help of priests and nuns that saw in his eyes the spark of God, he was finally sent to Rome for studies and ordination as a priest. He was ordained on April 24, 1886. June 13, 1886 he left Rome for American to be the first Black priest in the country.

He was appointed pastor of St. Joseph's Parish in Quincy on July 25, 1886. In 1887 he was transferred to the Archdiocese of Chicago as pastor of St. Monica's Parish until his death in 1897.

Father Tolton had written to Mother Katharine Drexel and received funds to help build St. Monica School. *Cardinal George has charged Bishop Perry from the Chicago diocese to start researching Father Augustus Tolton to become a candidate for sainthood.*