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# The Father Tolton Guild

OFFICIAL ORGANIZATION FOR THE PROMOTION  
OF THE CAUSE OF CANONIZATION OF  
FATHER AUGUSTUS TOLTON (1854-1897)

**Bishop Joseph N. Perry, J.C.L., D.D.**  
*Diocesan Postulator*

**Dr. Andrea Ambrosi**  
*Roman Postulator*



## Greetings to our Father Tolton patrons!

Our bulletins serve to keep you abreast of events and developments with the Cause for sainthood of our beloved Father Augustus Tolton (1854-1897). We thank you for your prayers of intercession and on behalf of the Cause.

The photo of Father Tolton here on the front of the bulletin features the most popular photograph of him of the four or five photographs of him that have survived. This particular photo of him wearing the *biretta*, was taken in 1890 here in Chicago at *Ames Photographers* downtown on State Street. It was the occasion of Archbishop Patrick Feehan's 25th anniversary as a bishop. And all priests of the Archdiocese

had their picture taken for a jubilee book to mark the event. This photo of Tolton appeared in that book. Father Tolton was 36 years old and four years a priest for this photo.

## The Trial of a Saint

The one historical event that African American Catholics share in common with Father Tolton is slavery and its suffering aftermath – a people's experience of having one's humanity denied, questioned or attacked; the experience of being regarded and treated less than human. People of African descent were never meant to survive, not as human beings, in that bygone era. American society in Tolton's time had a difficult time imagining the contribution of a black man, even the church. Today, we are appalled hearing about the social deficits of that time.

*continued on next page*

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*The Trial of a Saint (continued from front)*

At the same time, we are aware of the progress in race relations obtained thus far and where we have yet to arrive.

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 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 from his childhood through his youth and young adulthood and his priesthood. Fortunately, individual priests and religious sisters came to assist him in his plight urging the Church to recognize the giftedness of one of its dark children. Tolton persevered among us when there was no logical reason to do so. And through it all, he exuded an inner peace rooted in his love for Jesus, his innocence, and his profound respect for the Church.

Among the people who provide the strongest inspiration for us, often, are people who have been tried in the crucible of suffering and mistreatment. We wonder how they survived with their faith, hope and love intact. Tolton is one such.

Saints are men and women who have lived the Christian life just as we are called to do, who model for us how to live for God and one another through life's joys and sorrows and through it all they have managed to grasp the hand of Jesus. In each their own way, the lives of saints are echoes of Christ's life, even His passion and death. Their lives are proposed for our inspiration and imitation.

Tolton's manner, namely, his loyalty to the Church and his ardent desire to evangelize the black community seeing in the Catholic Church the richest source of grace and salvation, the attraction of not only blacks but many whites to his masses and sermons and counsel, his sorrowful journey through poverty and charity with countless people in both Quincy and Chicago, gives us pause to remember a holy life and a persevering spirit.

## The Instruction of the Cause

We are currently in the research stage of pooling together

the various documentary sources for Tolton's life and ministry. These primary and secondary sources are found at Quincy University's Brenner Library, the archives of the Franciscan Fathers' Sacred Heart Province in Rome, and the Propaganda Fide in Rome. We have a number of newspaper articles from Quincy and Chicago that chronicled Tolton's movements prior to ordination and his ministry in both cities, including his death and funeral. The Blessed Sacrament Sisters of Bensalem, Pennsylvania have provided several letters Father Tolton wrote to Saint Katherine Drexel and we have information from the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois that now encompasses the city of Quincy and the former Diocese of Alton where Father Tolton was reared and initially worked as a priest. We have also a number of letters Father Tolton wrote to other personages, and letters documenting conversations recommending Tolton to seminary in Rome and correspondence between Father Tolton and the Propaganda Fide while he was a priest in Quincy. Added to this volume of material is the research of historian, Father Cyprian Davis, OSB of St. Meinrad Archabbey, Indiana and the definitive biography of Tolton, *"From Slave To Priest,"* by Sister Caroline Hemesath, OSF.

All this material will be brought together so that both historical and theological commissions can carry out their separate assignments of a report made to Rome comprising the Diocesan Phase of the Cause. The effort is to cover as comprehensively as possible Tolton's entire life, argue his virtues and describe the historical period within which he lived that forms the backdrop for his life and trials, namely, post-Civil War, Reconstruction and post-Reconstruction periods.

Beginning last Fall, Church tribunals in the Archdioceses of Chicago, Philadelphia, New Orleans and the Diocese of Springfield have undertaken taking testimony from about twenty individuals across the country who can testify to the sustained historical memory of Tolton and his reputation for holiness in the community.

Lastly, a dozen or so testimonies have come in to the Archdiocese from persons around the country who testify to receiving favors from God in Tolton's name – remarkable turn-arounds in health and other favors. We surrendered several of these to church authorities in Rome last July for further consideration. Thus, we can say confidently that the necessary connection has been made between us and heaven with Father Tolton in between!

## Events



Following some protracted conversations St. Elizabeth's pastor, Father Richard Andrus, had with local city authorities, on November 4, 2011, Bishop Joseph Perry blessed a new street sign imprinted with the words, "*Honorary Father Augustus Tolton Street*" located at the corners of 41st Street between State Street and Michigan Avenue in front of St. Elizabeth – the parish to which Tolton's ministry at St. Monica Parish, Chicago, was transferred in 1924 by Cardinal George Mundelein.

November 11, 2011 we celebrated a banquet with a silent auction as a fundraiser for the expenses connected with the Cause at Chicago's Hyatt Regency/McCormick Place. Over three hundred and twenty people came to the event – a good mix of people, old and young, white and black. Cardinal Francis George gave us a welcome via visual broadcast. Our Archdiocesan communications department put together a short video on the life of Tolton drawn from scenes taken at recent pilgrimages to Brush Creek and Quincy and the inaugural First Session of February 28, 2010 that launched the Cause with the Cardinal making the official assignments of personnel. All auction items, save one, went with the highest bidder that night. Leading with a good menu and good company, the evening was led by Andrew and Terri Lyke who MC'd the program. The Lykes are a familiar couple who have ministered with marriage enrichment programs in Chicago and throughout the country.



The celebration coincided with the 100th anniversary of the death of Father Tolton's mother, Martha Jane Chisely-Tolton (November 10, 1911), who is buried along with her daughter, Anne, and son-in law at Mt Olivet Catholic Cemetery here in Chicago. Tribute was paid to the heroism of Martha Jane who travailed over forty some miles in 1861 through fields and forests dodging threats and shots fired by Confederate bounty hunters and crossing the mighty Mississippi River to get her three children to freedom to the Underground Railroad in Quincy, Illinois. An African American woman and social worker, Maudette Carr of Oak Park, Illinois, was awarded the "*Martha Jane Tolton Award*" in recognition of her witness to strong motherhood and devotion to her children and grandchildren. She was presented with a glass trophy featuring a boat with one oar that Martha Jane Tolton used to escape to freedom with a baby girl in arms and two young sons. Along with the trophy she was given a check in the amount of one-thousand dollars. We are anticipating this to be an annual fundraiser event for the Cause.



Saturday, April 14, 2012, a Chicago tour of Tolton markers is scheduled, departing from Chicago Theological Union and visiting the city spots that were incident to Father Tolton's ministry, including Mercy Hospital where he died and Mt. Olivet Cemetery where his mother and sister and brother-in-law are interred and, of course, 36th & Dearborn Streets, where St. Monica Church once was. Watch the web-page for information regarding registration for this city-tour.

We thank you for your support with prayer and donations and spreading the story about Augustus Tolton to your families and friends and fellow church members. His Cause for sainthood will reach success precisely because of your active support and a good word on behalf of this sacred task before us.



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# Prayer

*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 slight 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*