

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

Father Augustus Tolton (1854-1897) is chronicled as the first US priest of African descent. Born the son of slaves in Missouri, he studied for the priesthood in Rome because no American seminary would take a black student by reason of social custom and certain laws that ordered racial separation in America. Ordained in Rome on the Easter Vigil April 24, 1886 for the Diocese of Alton in Illinois he later came to Chicago to start a parish for black Catholics at the invitation



of Archbishop Patrick Feehan. He was only 43 years of age at the time of his death during a sustained heat wave that hit Chicago the first week of July 1897. His Cause for canonization as a saint was officially announced by Francis Cardinal George, OMI, Archbishop of Chicago, in February 2010 and Tolton was granted the title, “*Servant of God*,” by the Sacred Congregation for Causes of Saints at the Vatican in February 2012.

ARCHDIOCESE OF CHICAGO

PO Box 733 • South Holland, Illinois 60473

Phone: 708-339-2474 • Fax: 708-339-2477

www.toltoncanonization.org

Chicago Tolton Tour

Saturday, May 11, 2013

A group of 40 gathered for our second prayerful walk of the sites in Chicago significant to the ministry of Father Tolton. The group was made up of folks from Chicago, Milwaukee and Gary. The day started out cloudy with a slight nip in the air. But the sun burst through the clouds once we arrived, following a nice lunch at Bronzeville's Pearl's Place, at Mt. Olivet Cemetery on 111th street to visit the graves of Father Tolton's mother, Martha Jane Chisely-Tolton and his sister Anne Tolton-Pettis. Two women from the group, the oldest and the youngest placed flowers at the graves' site and we prayed. The pilgrimage began with Mass at the Meyer Pastoral Center for the Archdiocese of Chicago adjacent to where the 35th Lake Park Avenue train station used to be, the same station Father Tolton disembarked from on that stifling day of heat, July 9, 1897, returning from a priests' retreat in Bourbonnais, Illinois, only to collapse on the street a couple blocks away at 36th & Ellis Streets on his way back to the parish rectory. Other sites visited on the pilgrimage were 9th & Wabash Streets, where the first group of black Catholics in Chicago worshipped in the basement of Old St. Mary's Church under the title of the St. Augustine Society; 2251 S. Indiana, Father Tolton's one-room apartment during his first few months in Chicago 1889; 36th & Dearborn Streets, the permanent site of St. Monica Church, the first church for black Catholics in Chicago; St. Elizabeth Church at 41st & Michigan Avenue that has held, since 1924, the legacy of Tolton and St. Monica with the consolidation of these two parishes; and Mercy Hospital at 2525 S. Michigan Ave, up the street from Prairie Street, the old site of the hospital where Father Tolton died, and where we stopped for afternoon prayer in the hospital chapel. Mercy Hospital has a large painting of Father Tolton we gave to the hospital last year, hanging in their medical library with appropriate inscription. Our Pilgrimages to Brush Creek, MO and Quincy, Ill and walking the footsteps of Tolton in Chicago are led by a team of tour guides: Dr. C. Vanessa White from the Augustus Tolton Ministry Program at The Catholic Theological Union, Andrew Lyke, Director of the Office for black Catholics at the Archdiocese of Chicago and Bishop Joseph N. Perry. These pilgrimages feature a narration blending the life of Father Tolton with pointers about the area and its historical importance with African American history.



On Tour



36th Ellis Street where Fr. Tolton collapsed



3554 S. Dearborn – the address held by St. Monica Church Rectory



Mercy Hospital where Fr. Tolton died July 9, 1897



Fr. Tolton Street



Mt. Olivet Cemetery where Fr. Tolton's mother, sister and relatives are buried

The Developing Archival Record

We recently obtained from the archives of the Propaganda Fide (*Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples*) at the Vatican, about twenty pages of correspondence from the 1880s, written in Latin, French and Italian. These are letters between Rome and the bishops of Alton highlighting the attempts to find a seminary for Augustus Tolton, and handwritten letters of Father Tolton in Italian to the Propaganda describing his work in Quincy, his difficulties working his ministry in the climate of intolerance of that day and his repeated petitions to be allowed to accept the invitation of Archbishop Feehan to transfer to Chicago. Several of these letters represent material we did not have to this time. Matched with documents obtained earlier from the Propaganda noting Tolton's reception of the minor orders and sacred orders of deacon and priest, this material appears to complete the search for information amassed for Tolton held by the archives at the Vatican.

NOTE FROM THE POSTULATOR

Let me say thanks to all of our readers and friends who are watching the path of this Cause for sainthood of Augustus Tolton. I am simply inspired by all those who manage to inform us that they use the official prayer card for Tolton's intercession for a variety of individual, family and corporate needs, or schedule in the parishes the Novena just recently created by David L. Gray.

The touching story of Father Augustus Tolton reminds us of the glaring social deficits of a former time in this country. Much has improved since that time but much still remains to be done to build on the society here that we call free. A religious figure like Father Tolton rises with unique inspiration amidst the barriers and separations once ordered between the black and white races in our society. His was a quiet and noble approach to evangelization and healing. He himself was an apostle to both white and black. Forces attempted to derail his priestly service in a begrudging milieu of diversity that cried out for social and legal recognition. The good Lord allowed his witness only a short stay here on earth. He is a pioneer, an apostle of charity, a symbol of the universality of the Church, one who easily elicits our sympathy but one who reminds us of the courage we have within our hearts to continue to work for racial and ethnic solidarity while eradicating all forms of hesitancy and intolerance.

BISHOP JOSEPH N. PERRY

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Save The Dates

TOLTON MISSOURI/ILLINOIS PILGRIMAGE, September 20-21, 2013:

including the birthplace and early home of Augustus Tolton and his grave in Quincy. Departs from Catholic Theological Union, 9 am on Friday and returns 9 pm on Saturday. Cost TBA on the web-site www.toltoncanonization.org

TOLTON FUNDRAISER GALA, Sunday, October 27, 2013, 12 noon.

Union League Club, 65 W. Jackson Blvd. Chicago. Admission by pre-paid ticket only \$100.

Proceeds assist the cause for canonization for Father Augustus Tolton. Cf. Archdiocese of Chicago, Vicariate VI, Bishop Joseph Perry's Office, 708-339-2474, PO Box 733, South Holland, Illinois 60473.

