

The Father Tolton Guild

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

Remembering Longtime Tolton Promoter Father Roy Bauer

By Joyce Duriga
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When we first received word that the Archdiocese of Chicago was opening the canonization cause for Father Tolton in 2010, our photo editor, Karen Callaway and I hightailed it down to Quincy, Illinois, to begin collecting information for our coverage in the then-named Catholic New World.

We made some calls and were told to reach out to Father Roy Bauer because he was the local expert on Father Augustus Tolton. We weren't disappointed.

In his gracious and unassuming manner, Father Bauer took us around Quincy to see the site of Father Tolton's first church, his parish growing up in Quincy and where he was buried. He was a treasure of information, sharing what life was like for Tolton and his family in Quincy and how the Franciscan priests in town didn't give up when no seminary in the United States would accept the young black man. They took his case to Rome where they succeeded. A love of history, Father Bauer took to Tolton's story especially when he became pastor of St. Peter's Church where Tolton schooled and received his First Holy Communion and Confirmation. Bauer even commissioned a marble statue of Tolton that stands today outside of St. Peter's. He dedicated the statue in his own mother's honor. Father Bauer also published a short book about Father Tolton called, "They Called Him Father Gus."

Born in Quincy on March 27 1934, Father Bauer entered the seminary in high school at age 13 and was ordained in 1959. He pastored several parishes in the Diocese of Springfield and was well-known for leading trips to Washington DC for eighth graders where he shared our nation's history. Those trips went on for 40 years. Retirement in 2004 didn't slow him down. It freed up more time to



devote to his pursuits in local history. He died April 21 at 83. As our coverage of Tolton's canonization cause continued over the years, Father Bauer was always there, quietly participating in the ceremonies and services. He was there as a guide when we accompanied Cardinal Francis George down to Quincy in 2011 for the Cardinal's personal pilgrimage to the sites related to Tolton's life. And he was in a pew at St. James Chapel at the Archbishop Quigley Pastoral Center in Chicago on September 29, 2014 when Cardinal George formally closed the investigation into the life and virtues of

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Father Tolton and sent the findings to the Vatican.

The last time we saw Father Bauer was at the exhumation of Tolton's remains in Quincy, at St. Peter's Cemetery, on December 10, 2016. He looked frail but still engaged.

When I read in Springfield's Catholic Times that Father Bauer died I felt like a piece of history was gone. An important promoter of Tolton's life and legacy had passed on certainly. I didn't know Father Bauer well but I knew that in a time when few were talking about Father Tolton, Father Bauer was sharing his legacy to anyone and everyone who would listen. I'm grateful for that. Thanks, Father Bauer, for keeping the legacy of Father Tolton alive. You will not be forgotten.

Personages in Fr. Tolton's Life

PAROCCHI, Lucido Maria, Cardinal

Born 13 August 1833, ordained priest 17 May 1856, consecrated bishop 5 November 1871, created Cardinal 22 June 1877 by Pope Pius IX; Vicar of the Diocese of Rome; was delegated by Pope Leo XIII to be the ordaining prelate at St. John Lateran Basilica in Rome for the priestly ordination of the class of 1886 (April 24 Easter Vigil) of the Urban College of the Propaganda Fide, of which Augustus Tolton was a member. Cardinal Parocchi died 15 June 1903.

Richardt, Fr. Peter Michael, OSF

Priest member of the Sacred Heart Province of Franciscan Friars (OFM); professor at Francis Solanus College (at one time Quincy College, today Quincy University) and minister to Quincy's black population. About 1874 he began organizing black Catholics for instruction. Twenty year old Augustus Tolton became his right hand man as a catechist. He tutored Augustus at the College. He recommended to Bishop P. J. Baltes the idea that Augustus had a priestly vocation. He wrote to the Minister General of the Franciscans in Rome asking him to intercede for Tolton with the Cardinal Prefect of the Propaganda Fide for Tolton to enter seminary somewhere in Rome seeing that no US seminary would accept a black candidate.

Rudd, Daniel

Of Cincinnati Ohio (USA); founder of The American Catholic Tribune 1886; African American Catholic layman who organized the first Colored Catholic Congress that took place January 1-4, 1889 at St. Augustine Church, Washington DC. Rudd was a friend and colleague of Father Tolton; Tolton offered solemn high mass on that occasion of the Congress.

Sick, Sister Mary Herlinde, SSND

Tutored the lad Augustus Tolton at St. Peter School, Quincy Illinois, in 1869; born in Philadelphia 8 August 1867, professed vows 28 August 1867; final vows 14 August 1881 with the School Sisters of Notre Dame (SSND); taught at the Negro School in Quincy titled

to St. Joseph, a mission of the German Parish St. Boniface, Quincy; retired September 1889 due to poor health; died 22 June 1892.

And Who Is This Father Tolton?

Augustus Tolton was 9 years old when his family escaped with him along with his younger brother Samuel Joseph and older sister Anna across over forty miles of field, brush and forest and the Mississippi River to arrive at the free state of Illinois. The Toltons had been slaves baptized Catholic on adjacent farms owned by Catholics at Ralls County, Northeast Missouri, a slave holding state. Peter Paul, Martha Jane's husband, parted with his family probably at Hannibal, Missouri, perhaps in trade to get his family to Illinois, and thus went on to fight for freedom with Union troops in the Civil War but was later discovered to have died of illness at a dispensary in Arkansas. Martha Jane would learn of his death some years later finding her husband's name on a list of Civil War casualties.

Augustus, who went on to become the first acknowledged black Catholic priest in the United States, is now a candidate for sainthood, the Archdiocese of Chicago announced in January 2010. The required investigation into Tolton's life and ministry and heroic virtues having been completed locally is well underway by second stage in Rome. The pope ultimately can declare someone a saint following a process that includes thorough research into the details of the life of the candidate and the approval by the Vatican of two miracles at the intercession of the candidate before the throne of Almighty God.

Tolton's story has as backdrop what historians call the most oppressive era in American history evidenced in the inhuman conditions that prevailed with the devaluation, marketing and control and mistreatment of black peoples in this country and the period of legalized racial segregation that followed.

Augustus was born April 1, 1854 at Ralls County, Brush creek, Missouri. Arriving in Quincy after a harrowing escape and hunted by Confederate bounty hunters, Martha Jane's children grew up in Quincy. Augustus came to the attention of a local parish priest, Father Peter McGirr, who admitted the boy into his parish school despite racist threats. Franciscan Fathers noticed Tolton's intelligence and purity of life and arranged for Tolton to be educated in their college in Quincy and then at the prestigious Propaganda Fide Seminary in Rome when no US seminary would take him due to his background and color. Following six years of study he was ordained a priest with his class, Easter Vigil April 24, 1886 at St. John Lateran Basilica in Rome.

"It was said that I would be the only priest of my race in America and would not likely succeed," Tolton once wrote. But a Cardinal,

Giovanni Simeoni, in Rome said, *“America has been called the most enlightened nation. We’ll see if it deserves that honor. If America has never seen a black priest, it has to see one now.”* With these prophetic words the assignment orders for Father Tolton changed from some place in Africa to Quincy, Illinois.

Father Augustus served in Quincy for several years till racial bigotry thrown at him from Catholics and Protestants became intolerable. His bishop advised him to leave town. The Archbishop of Chicago, Patrick Feehan, invited him to come to help a fledgling group of black Catholics there who met in the basement of St. Mary’s Church downtown. A year or so later, Father Tolton was given permission to start St. Monica Parish in 1891 at 36th & Dearborn streets. But Tolton died before his new church building could be finished, at the age of 43, during a stifling heat wave that hit the city the week of July 9, 1897. He is buried in St. Peter Cemetery, Quincy, Illinois.

The word “no” was spat in his face more often than not during his life because of his skin color. We trust this time the Church can say “yes” to his proclaimed sainthood. Father Tolton is honored across the United States and abroad as one who conquered insurmountable odds leaving behind a shining legacy of perseverance, great faith, charity and holy service to God and the church. No trace of recrimination or vengeance can be found in him. In his life’s record, no one mentions any criticism emanating from him towards anyone. He championed the Roman Catholic Church as an instrument of the advancement of the black race even when the church proved ambivalent towards him.

His touching story 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 that we call free. A religious figure like Father Tolton rises with unique inspiration amidst the barriers and separations once ordered by law between black and white races in this country. Tolton sought to bring the races together under one roof in the house of God and was resented for it. His was a quiet and noble approach. He himself was an apostle to both black and white. Forces attempted to derail his priestly service in a creeping milieu of diversity that cried out for social and legal recognition but for which society and the church could not respond at that time. In Chicago, whereas overt opposition to him was much lessened, Father Tolton still lived the racial neighborhood isolation of this city that made his efforts to build up the Church here doubly hard.

Tolton was a stalwart Christian who lived the gospel of neighborly regard, suffering through the unreadiness of fellow clergy and citizens that meant he was demeaned and devalued in the eyes of his peers. But, he hung in there while exhibiting a welcoming spirit to everyone, white and black. The Good Lord allowed his witness only a short stay here.

Tolton was a pioneer, one who easily elicits our sympathy but one who reminds us of the courage we have within us to continue to work for racial and ethnic solidarity while eradicating all forms of hesitancy and intolerance.

A Letter from the Past

“I attended 10 o’clock Mass at St. Mary’s (Wabash Avenue), yesterday with Fr. Tolton’s congregation. I had opportunity of speaking with my good friend, the negro priest. I thought if he was going on to attend the “congress” I would send my letter to you by him but he gave me the address he thought would be most sure to reach you because he said he was feeling so ill, he was afraid he would not be able to undertake the journey. Poor father – it seems after all the “gush” we read from week to week in the papers about the “dear negro” he is left to struggle on almost alone; in poverty and humility, grappling with the giant task of founding a church and congregation in Chicago. We who come in contact with him in our labors and are witnesses of his ardent charity and self-denying zeal, feel ourselves privileged to – bow the knee for his saintly blessing.”

[From the archives of the Josephite Fathers (SSJ), Baltimore, Maryland; extracted from a five-page letter written about 1890-1891 by a woman social worker addressed to Father John R. Slattery, SSJ, rector of St. Joseph Seminary for Colored Missions, Baltimore].



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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

Imprimatur

Francis Cardinal George, OMI
Archdiocese of Chicago

2010 Bishop Joseph N. Perry

To report any spiritual or physical favors granted through prayer in Father Tolton's name, please write: The Office of the Cardinal, Archdiocese of Chicago, 835 North Rush Street, Chicago, Illinois 60611

