



Contact: Diana Hernandez
(504) 520-5120 | dhernan1@xula.edu

Joint Effort to Advance Causes of Black Sainthood Announced at Xavier

New Orleans, LA – An effort to unite the causes and respective guilds working toward the canonization of five Roman Catholic African Americans was announced during a special event held at the St. Katharine Drexel Chapel on the campus of [Xavier University of Louisiana](http://www.xula.edu).

Xavier and its Institute for Black Catholic Studies (IBCS) served as the host and administrator for the event, which set as its goal the gathering of scholarly work and relevant academic studies for the purpose of elevating the respective causes for each of the candidates for Sainthood: the Venerable Pierre Toussaint, Venerable Henriette Delille S.S.F., Mother Mary Elizabeth Lange, O.S.P., Father Augustus Tolton, and Julia Greeley.

Attendees at the event included members of the Joint Conference of Black Catholic Clergy, Black Sisters, Black Catholic Seminarians and Black Catholic Deacons.

“It is both appropriate and significant that this joint effort to promote the cause of Sainthood for these five extraordinary individuals should originate here at Xavier University of Louisiana, the only historically Black and Catholic University in this nation and the home of the Institute for Black Catholic Studies,” said Xavier President Dr. Reynold Verret.

Also announced was a plan to establish a resource center at Xavier which will house relevant and educational scholarly work focusing on the lives of the five candidates for Sainthood, as well as that of Xavier University of Louisiana foundress St. Katharine Drexel and St. Kateri Tekakwitha.

The Causes are as follows;

1. **Venerable Pierre Toussaint** (1766-1853), a New York City hairdresser who was also a former slave. He purchased his freedom with the earnings he made from his trade.
2. **Venerable Henriette Delille** (1813-1862) founded the Sisters of the Holy Family in New Orleans in 1842. The great, great granddaughter of an enslaved African and the granddaughter of an enslaved woman who freed herself and her children, Delille defied the severe restrictions of racist laws and traditions aimed at all people of African descent in the deep South. In 1836, when she was a mere twenty-four years old she revealed her intention to devote herself to God and social justice when she recorded her prayer in the front of her prayer book. It reads: I believe in God. I hope in God. I love. I want to live and die for God. In that same year, she founded a confraternity of pious free women of African descent, the Sisters of the Congregation of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The

members pledged personal piety, to care for one another, and to care for their people. In 1842, she again challenged the racism that defined her as inferior and thus deemed her unfit to join any of the many religious sisterhoods in the city when she founded the Sisters of the Holy Family. The twelve free women of African descent who joined her vowed to provide care for the “poorest of the poor,” whether enslaved or free, black or white. The Sisters under her direction cared for the poor, the abandoned, and the elderly. They evangelized and they educated. Following Delille’s death in 1862, the Sisters grew in numbers. In all, hundreds of Holy Family Sisters pledged themselves to caring for others as they spread their ministry throughout the United States and into Central America and Africa.

3. **Servant of God Mother Mary Elizabeth Lange** (ca. 1794-1882), another former slave, founded and served as the first superior general of the Oblate Sisters of Providence in Baltimore. She founded the order so that black women would have a means by which to enter religious life. Its other purpose was to educate African-American children.
4. **Servant of God Father Augustus Tolton** (1854-1897) was America’s first black priest. He had to travel to Rome to conduct his priestly training because no U.S. seminary would take him. Back home, his ministry at his church in Quincy, Illinois, was so successful that he drew congregants from the nearby white parish. He later moved to Chicago, where he founded St. Monica’s, the city’s first black parish.
5. **Servant of God 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. 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. She joined the Secular Franciscan Order in 1901 and was active in it till her death in 1918.



(L-R) Bishop Fernand Cherie, XU President Reynold Verret, IBCS Director Sr. Eva Lumas, Sr. Greta Jupiter SSF, and Fr. Gerard Jordan.

The Road to Roman Catholic Sainthood

According to Catholic doctrine, the church does not choose saints — God does. God consecrates a person's sainthood the moment he or she enters heaven, and Earthly sainthood is thus merely a posthumous, mortal recognition of what is believed to be God's divine will. As one might expect, the Catholic Church does not take lightly the process of determining whom God has and has not sanctified. It is indeed quite a stretch of human power for one to claim to understand God's undisclosed intentions.

There is subsequently a long, deliberate set of hurdles that a person's legacy must face before he or she is recognized as a saint, complete with multiple stages and titles which charter one's progress in the overall pursuit of sainthood. It is precedent — though not an official rule — that five years pass after a person's death before his or her sainthood is considered. Once five years have passed, there is a logical line of verifications that the Catholic Church grants. Below are the four official rungs that an aspiring saint must climb before humanity acknowledges his or her sanctity.

1. Servant of God – The first esteemed title granted by the church in the canonization process is “Servant of God.” Someone must nominate a candidate for official consideration to a bishop, who then determines the candidate's viability. If the bishop determines that the nominee is a viable candidate for sainthood, then the candidate completes the first rung of canonization and acquires his or her first title.

2. Venerable – Each officially sanctioned Servant of God then pursues the next title: Venerable. The candidate's life is investigated, analyzed, and contextualized by a Vatican committee called the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. This committee works to uncover and understand the life of the candidate and, ultimately, hopes to find proof that the candidate lived a life of heroic virtue — that he or she earnestly and aggressively sought to improve his or her own spirituality consistently throughout his or her life.

3. Blessed – Once the Congregation for the Causes of Saints has ensured that there is substantial reason in the life of the candidate that he or she might be a saint, a miracle attributed to the candidate must be observed. The Catholic Church only acknowledges a miracle as legitimate if it is both spontaneous and enigmatic. Claims of a miracle are meticulously investigated, a process that includes an examination of the person who experiences or witnesses the miracle. Experts are also consulted to ensure that there is no physical or natural explanation for the miracle.

Although miracles often affect living people, especially in the form of healings, some miracles are revealed in the mortal remains of the candidate. Such examples include incorruptibility, in which the candidate's remains do not decay, liquefaction, in which the saint's dried blood liquefies on his or her feast day, and odor of sanctity, in which the candidate's corpse smells not of decay, but of a sweet aroma years after his or her death. If the miracle is verified, the candidate is then presented to the pope. So begins the process of beatification in which the pope – in his own divine influence – determines if the candidate is worthy of the title “Blessed.”

4. Saint – Once a candidate has reach the “Blessed” rung, he or she must be associated with at least one more miracle. The pope is again presented with the miracle's evidence and determines its legitimacy. If the pope indeed decides that the candidate is worthy of sainthood, then canonization ensues and the Catholic Church officially recognizes a new saint.

About the Institute for Black Catholic Studies

Founded in 1980, the Institute for Black Catholic Studies (IBCS) of Xavier University of Louisiana offers programs in pastoral theology, religious education and pastoral ministry. The IBCS provides an intellectual, spiritual and cultural immersion in the Black Catholic experience for all those interested in or committed to Catholic ministry within the black community.

About Xavier University of Louisiana

Being America's only historically Black and Catholic University is just the first of the distinctions that have set Xavier University of Louisiana apart for more than eight decades.

Despite its relatively small size (3,300 students), Xavier is a nationally recognized leader in the STEM and the health sciences, producing more African American students who graduate from medical schools each year than any other university in the United States. Its College of Pharmacy is among the top producers of African American pharmacists.

Its liberal arts based programs in such areas as art, business, education, psychology, and political science – as well as such recent additions as bioinformatics, data science, neuroscience, crime and social justice, and jazz studies – offer students an unbeatable combination of traditional classroom study, hands-on research, service-learning opportunities, and life experiences.

The winning Xavier formula? Provide students with a well-balanced curriculum and an environment that nurtures their intellect and feeds their souls.

At Xavier eXcellence awaits yoU. For more information about Xavier University of Louisiana visit us online at www.xula.edu or follow us on Facebook, YouTube, or Twitter @XULA1925. To book interviews and/or to speak with our experts in the field of pharmacy, education, premed, public health, science, technology, math, business, English, communications and the arts, contact Diana Hernandez at (504) 520-5120 or dhernan1@xula.edu.