

A BRIEF SYNOPSIS OF THE HISTORY OF BLACK CATHOLIC HISTORY MONTH

The National Black Clergy Caucus of the United States designated November as Black Catholic history Month to celebrate the long history of Black Catholics, tracing their heritage to Christian antiquity long before other nationalities.

Christian Africa was a leading light in leading Christendom. Three popes were born in Africa: Victor I (189-199), Miltiades (311-314), and Gelasius I (492-496). The list of names of the saints and souls from Africa and the diaspora is long.

Father Herman Porter of the Diocese of Rockford, Illinois invited all United States Black clergy in 1968 to discuss the racial crisis which had risen to fever pitch following the assassination of Doctor Martin Luther King, Jr. That conversation resulted in the formation of a permanent organization: the National Black Clergy Caucus. They sent a statement to the bishops which strongly criticized the church, listing nine demands the church must meet in order to be faithful to its mission to Blacks and to restore the church within the Black community. The opening sentence of the statement sent shock waves across the country:

The Catholic Church in the United States, primarily a white racist institution, has addressed itself primarily to white society and is definitely a part of that society. On the contrary, we feel that her primary, though not exclusive work, should be in the area of institutional, attitudinal and societal change.

At a meeting of the National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus in July 1990 at Fordham University, the membership voted to designate November to celebrate the long history of Black Catholics in the church. Father Cyprian Davis' landmark study, *The History of Black Catholics in the United States*, largely spurred that vote. Father Cyprian was a founding member of the organization.

Among others in attendance were local clergy and religious, including: Sister Thea Bowman, Father Clarence Williams, Sister Kendra Bottoms, Father Victor Cohea, Sister Rosella Holloman, and Sister Juanita Shealy.