

# ICSB NEWSLETTER

BLACK HISTORY MONTH & LENTEN SPECIAL  
EDITION

## PRAYER OF THE AFRICAN AMERICAN FAMILY

God of mercy and love today we place before you our families, especially our African American families. May we be proud of our history and never forget those who paid a great price for our liberation. Bless us one by one and keep our hearts and minds fixed on higher ground. Help us to live for YOU and not for ourselves, and may we cherish and proclaim the gift of life. Bless our parents, guardians and grandparents, relatives and friends. Give us the amazing grace to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Help us, as Your children, to live in such a way that the beauty and greatness of authentic love is reflected in all that we say and do. Give a healing anointing to those less fortunate - especially the motherless, the fatherless, the broken, the sick and the lonely. Bless our departed family members and friends. May they be led into the light of Your dwelling place where we will never grow old, where we will share the fullness of redemption and shout the victory for all eternity. This we ask in the Precious Name of Jesus, our Savior and Blessed Assurance. AMEN. Holy Mary, Mother of our Families, pray for us.

## LEADERSHIP PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we join in prayer to celebrate this nation and surrender its destiny to You. We ask that Your spirit now fill our hearts and that we may do our part in the healing and furtherance of our country, May we learn from our mistakes, that the people who have died from them shall not have died in vain. And Dear Lord, we pray that You help leaders to remember that leading is a task that requires them to serve. We continue to pray for the leadership of this nation, President Joe Biden, Vice President Kamala Harris that the world will make room for their leadership and growth into greatness. In Jesus' name we pray.

# HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO JANUARY BABIES

Barnes,Earl,1/4  
Barnes,Phyllis,1/27  
Bostick,Nellie,1/22  
Bradler,Robert,1/28  
Brooks,Sandra,1/13  
Cooper,Alex,1/2  
DeRouen,Lauren,1/11  
Gainey,Joyce,1/28  
Hicuburundi,Scholastique,1/1  
Reaves,Yvette,1/16  
Smith,Shelly,1/26  
Walker,James,1/22

*We wish a very happy birthday to everyone born in the month of January and February. May we always cherish the value of life and see the presence of Christ within all of us.*



# HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO FEBRUARY BABIES

Bouphavong,Jaidi,2/8  
Bouphavong,Rosalie,2/8  
Dingwall,Jonathan,2/8  
Fontenette,Andre,2/25  
Pierre-Philippe,Leslie,2/4  
Reaves,Bing,2/7  
Tatum,Lily,Booker-,2/11  
Whitcraft,Gail,2/3

# WORD FROM OUR SHEPHERD

Dear Friends,

What could a Deaf Irish Catholic priest have to say about Black history Month?

Perhaps it would be best to say nothing and listen. Several of you have said this is an uncomfortable month because the stories get told, the pain exposed, the glory revealed and nothing changes. Come March first, we move on to another topic. Some of you have also expressed that you have no desire to enter into the many “dialogues” regarding racism. One person told me recently, “It’s not our problem. Racism is white people’s sin, not ours.”

Did you hear Amanda Gorman, Poet Laureate, proclaim her poem, “The Hill We Climb?”

This 22-year-old young woman took my breath away. Later, doing some online research, I discovered that she is a Catholic, from St. Bridget parish in Los Angeles. Ironically as a child, she had a speech impediment. Later, I read the blog of Layla F. Saad (whose point of reference is from history, from our ancestors).

She would describe Amanda Gorman as a true prophet. Saad states that if we wish to hold to the higher ideals of Peace, Unity and Hope we must do so by paring them with Truth. Telling the Truth. Reckoning with the Truth. Healing from the Truth.

Here is what Amanda’s pastor, Josephite Father Kenneth Keke, of Nigeria had to say.

“We are a community; everyone here is important. Whatever belongs to the parish belongs to everyone; in our parish, the success of anyone is the success of all.”

Thank God for poets like Amanda Gorman, who can still break through our cold shells and inspire us to our better selves; if only we listen,

Peace,  
Fr Ray

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# IMMACULATE CONCEPTION/ST. BRIDGET'S IN ROCHESTER'S HISTORY

Rochester is known for its deep Black History roots. But did you know that Immaculate Conception/ St. Bridget's Church was a significant contributor to that history? We do, indeed, have strong ties to Rochester's past.

## James Allen Dobson

While James Dobson left this life in 1997, his influence at Immaculate Conception/ St. Bridget's Church and in the Rochester community lives on. James and Dorothy Dobson came to Rochester right out of college and married at Immaculate Conception Church in October of 1957. Mr. Dobson grew up initially in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, and he was particularly affected by the disparities in living conditions between Blacks and Whites. He saw this as well when he moved to Rochester as a teen. When he came back to Rochester from college (North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State College-at that time) and started going to Immaculate Conception, the priests at that time were very much involved in the civil rights movement as was his fraternity (Omega Psi Phi) and an organization in Rochester called the FIGHT organization. Mr. Dobson introduced the idea of addressing housing issues that had gotten worse. He wanted to build housing units which would NOT be seen as "projects." He worked with fellow Immaculate parishioners, Millard Rutherford and William Castle, the clergy of Immaculate Conception Church and the Fight Organization, which formed the Interracial Council Housing and Development Fund Co. They were able to procure funding and land to build the Urban Park Apartments and Tower. Mr. Dobson and team worked diligently to find a Black architect from Buffalo and employed Black workers to build the complex which was completed in 1971. This complex would later be renamed the James A. Dobson housing complex in honor of Mr. Dobson's tireless work for fair and decent housing in Rochester.

## **Dorothy A. Dobson**

Even though the work of her husband, James Dobson, may have stood out due to his work with so many organizations and the erection of an apartment complex, no less notable was the work done by his devoted wife, Dorothy Dobson. Mrs. Dobson stood out as a role model for many in the community because, even with her taxing jobs as a Social Worker and mother to three daughters (Dr. Kimberley, Gina Maria and Jacquelyn), Mrs. Dobson worked tirelessly at Immaculate Conception and in the community on various committees and worked to welcome young people who relocated to the Rochester area to find a safe and supportive experience here. She and her sister, Jean Pryor (a faithful member of our Parish), also established a gospel choir at Immaculate Conception and worked to bring the Black Christian experience to the Catholic Church. So noted was her work that Mrs. Dobson was honored by her alma mater (North Carolina A&T State University) and a scholarship in the name of James and Dorothy Pryor Dobson was established at North Carolina A & T State University to support students who attended the College from the Rochester area. Mrs. Dobson also continued her husband's work after his death when she became the Managing Director of the housing complex named for her husband and established several programs to benefit the residents. We are blessed to continue to have Mrs. Dobson's wise council and support today in our ICSB Community.

## **Jacquelyn Dobson**

Jacquelyn Dobson was the youngest person to serve as the Director of the Office of Black Ministry of the Diocese of Rochester, was its third director and the first female to serve in that capacity. In her role as director, Jacquelyn, eldest daughter of Dorothy and James Dobson, presented the Black Catholic culture and concerns to the Diocese and was the Rochester Diocesan representative in the National Association of Black Catholic Administrators where she was also the youngest representative. Jacquelyn also, most notably, yearly organized a tour of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) for high school students. This tour was highly sought after in Rochester and Monroe County and served over one thousand students in 20 tours.

## **Jacquelyn Dobson (cont'd)**

She also took students to participate in the Ashanti Weekends at SUNY Brockport which was established by another Immaculate Conception parishioner, Frieda McCray. The College Tour was greatly missed after Jacquelyn left the Diocese for a social work career in the Rochester City School District. Jacquelyn brought many African American priests, Diocesan officials, religious, a Black Catholic theologian, several choirs and liturgical dance groups to Rochester to expose all Catholics to the depth and breadth of the Black Catholic experience. Jacquelyn also served on and chaired many important Rochester Community committees during her tenure at the Diocese. Jacquelyn remains an active member of the ICSB Community and Delta Sigma Theta, Inc., and is a lover of the arts and a role model for youth as she follows in the footsteps of her parents.

## **George Fontenette**

George Fontenette is a third generation member of Immaculate Conception Church. His grandparents names (Alpheus and Eunice Vallot) are enshrined on a plaque in the front of the Church, and his family names (Vallot, Fontenette, Stamps, Mitchell and DeRouen) are to be found in various Immaculate Conception and Rochester notable records. George's grandparents came from Louisiana. Once they arrived here and established themselves, many other family members and acquaintances followed. The Vallots owned a tavern on Clarissa and Tremont Street. The tavern had a boarding house above it where they used to house relatives that came here until they established themselves. This building also had a restaurant and a barbershop, both of which were owned by family members. George's parents owned a grocery store on Ford and Troup Street. The Stamps branch of the family owned The Gibson Hotel on Clarissa St. which was the only Black owned hotel in the City. Many Black celebrities stayed there when they came to town. The Stamps also owned a cleaners which existed into the '80's on South Plymouth Ave, and the Mitchell branch became involved in the Rochester political scene with Constance Mitchell being one of the first Black members of Rochester's City Council. George, his wife Myrtle (Precious), and their sons Andre and Adrian remain highly devoted to ICSB.

## Rev. Charles Hall

Fr. Charles Hall was the first and only Black priest to come out of Immaculate Conception Church and the City of Rochester. The Hall Family originally came from Washington, DC. Charles was the eldest of eleven children. The family moved to Rochester, NY in 1938. Charles went to Immaculate Conception School and graduated from Aquinas in 1950. At that time he felt called to the priesthood, but was unable to go to St. Bernard's Seminary, as they did not accept Black students. He went to the Josephite Missionary School in New Orleans, Louisiana where he studied and was ordained in 1960. After his ordination ceremony in Louisiana, Fr. Charles came to Rochester where he also was given an ordination ceremony and even acknowledged by the Knights of Columbus. Fr. Hall said his first Mass at Immaculate Conception, June 12, 1960.

Fr. Charles went back to New Orleans where he taught physics and chemistry at St. Augustine High School. He was noted for encouraging young people there to seek higher education, and several even went to Ivy League schools. Fr. Charles also served in various area churches along with his teaching duties. A diagnosis of colon cancer interrupted Fr. Hall's journey. He was refused treatment in some hospitals in Louisiana, but when he was finally admitted to a Catholic hospital, the nurses refused to treat him, and he had to get a private duty nurse to care for him. He came to Rochester briefly and was seen by a doctor here who felt his treatment was not totally appropriate, but Fr. Charles did go back to Louisiana where he died March 25, 1967. He wished to be buried in Rochester and was interred at the Holy Sepulcher Cemetery in the section reserved for priests. Fr. Hall left an important quote: "Until every man is recognized as a person, there is no freedom."

## Bing Reaves

Bing was one of the few African American officers in the Rochester Police Department in the 1970's. He is also a veteran from the Armed Services, and is a member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars Pennington Moye Post 9251. This Post was named for two African American Rochesterians (Leland Pennington –a Tuskegee Airman- and Donald Moye) who were killed in WWII. David Green (a member of St. Bridget's Church) was the head of Post 9251 and asked Bing if he would start a Color Guard for the Post. After much research, Bing started the Buffalo Soldier color guard. This Buffalo Soldier Color Guard first marched in Rochester's Memorial Day parade of 1996. They were met with jeers and the crowd threw pebbles at them and laughed. This reception gave Bing resolve that he needed to do something to educate the community about the role that Buffalo Soldiers had played in the history of our nation. Bing assembled a team, and they began doing Buffalo Soldier presentations during which they expose people to the history, uniforms and culture of these soldiers. It is truly a fascinating presentation! Bing and his wife, Yvette, have been members of Immaculate Conception/ St. Bridget's church since 2010. Bing serves as a Minister of Hospitality at our Church and is usually one of the first people to greet you on Sunday mornings.

## Norma Thom

Originally from the island of Trinidad in the Caribbean, Norma Thom began to establish her name here in Rochester when she became a founding member of the Rochester West Indian Festival Organization. As a member, the vision was to educate the community and the surrounding cities about the rich Caribbean culture. In 1985, the Rochester West Indian Festival organization held the first Carifest , a Caribbean festival in the city of Rochester which highlighted the food, music and dances from the various islands. People from Rochester, Syracuse and Buffalo were invited. Ms. Thom remembers how in the very early years, she sewed costumes for the children to participate in the festival.

Norma Thom also loved to cook her island favorite dish (pelau) for the festival. Later, Fr. Robert Werth and Jacquelyn Dobson from the Diocese of Rochester organized a Caribbean Mass and sought Ms. Thom to help them coordinate their efforts. The Mass originally moved to various churches, but later settled at St. Monica's Church for many years. The Mass, presided by a Caribbean priest, was known for its great homily, music and authentic Caribbean food after the service. Ms. Thom was the main coordinator of the food and many of the other aspects of the Mass. Ms. Thom remains an active member of ICSB and has written a book on her journey, *Shared Memories* (2018).

# PERSONAL STORIES

Life's experiences vary from person to person and those experiences shape who we ultimately become. A few parishioners shared their personal stories with us. These stories tell us how far we have come and how far we still have to go. May these stories not depress us but encourage us to lean more into the love and guidance of God in order to be the light where darkness persists.

## Just how far have we come?

*Author: Rose Stokes*

I came to Rochester after the '64 riots. I worked for the City School District and was part of a teaching team in which I was the only Black person. One day two white male teachers asked me "What do you people want?" My reply was, " We want the same things that you all take for granted; equality, jobs, and housing". As I reflect on this, I realize that the things we were fighting for then are the same things we are fighting for now, and I wonder, just how far have we really come?

## White Folks and Colored Folks

*Author: Lee Wingo*

I really didn't understand the relationship between the white folks and the colored folks (as we were referred to back then), as a child growing up in the segregated south, I couldn't understand why my father had to hold his head down and couldn't look a little white boy in the eye, but had to call him Massa and to do what he said to do. I just didn't understand that because I couldn't tell my father what to do, how could this little white boy who was my age do that! I also remember as children how the white people called us names, we didn't know they were bad names because that's all they ever called us. I've seen it all, the "White Only and Colored Only" water fountains and restrooms, and the side door entrances to the movie theaters where we had to sit in the balcony. Yes, I've seen it all.

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## **Words Matter**

***Author: Thelma Uter***

As a 5th grader in Mississippi, I was encouraged by my teacher to go to college. The words from this Black Teacher inspired me to seek a college degree. Subsequently, I became the first person in my family to earn a Bachelor's Degree and a Master's Degree.

## **My Math Story**

***Author: Wayne Uter***

With the help of my father's friend who was a Black Man, I went from a 55 on a midterm exam to a 98 on the Regents Trig exam and later scored 90 on a college Calculus final exam. As a result I was the only person in my family to earn a Bachelor's Degree and eventually a Master's Degree.

## **Two Sides of Segregation**

***Author: Ramona Moore***

Having grown up in the segregated South, I have seen the dual nature of segregation. There was a dark side, but also a very positive, empowering side. On the dark side, I witnessed and lived the fear and constraint inherent in segregation- the Colored only drinking fountains, the inability to use public restrooms or eat in establishments labeled "Whites Only." There was also a contextual fear that existed in the presence of hate groups, especially the Ku Klux Klan who reared their ugly heads to instill fear in folks of color. On one occasion, when I was around 12, I went to the movies alone, which was a treat my parents allowed for chores done. As I was waiting at the box office window for the theatre to open, there was a sudden blaring of horns and shouting. I looked on the main street of our downtown area to see a truck load of fully dressed and hooded Klansmen coming down the street with their guns raised and shouting. I was frozen with fear. I felt a hand on my shoulder and a gentle pull back through the theatre door. The man from the theatre told me to stay there behind the door with assurance that I was safe. Such displays of hatred were not infrequent- just to remind folks that the Klan still was present.

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On the other hand, living a segregated existence forced Black folks to necessarily create a parallel society that allowed us to have Black owned restaurants, theatres, medical establishments, legal establishments, schools, banks and more. I was born in a Black owned and run hospital. Until I left Richmond, my doctors were all Black; my family had a Black lawyer; the bank that my parents dealt with was Black owned and operated. We had policies with a Black insurance company and all my teachers and school administrators were Black. My world was Black. I never felt any trepidation about my ability to be anything I wanted to be because I saw what I was capable of being and doing in all the role models that looked like me in my world- a positive outcome of segregation.

### **It Takes a Village**

***Author: James Walker***

I grew up in the fifties in a small town in Mississippi. I was educated in a separated but not so equal school system, using hand me down books. My brother and I were raised by my mom with much help from my grandmother. Truly in an atmosphere of it takes a village to raise a child.

# TUNE IN TO WXXI FOR UPCOMING SHOWS:

## **THE BLACK CHURCH: "This is Our Story, This is Our Song"**

Premiering in February, this new, two-part, four-hour documentary reveals the broad history and culture of a living institution in African American life - the Black church. From enslavement to emancipation, the civil rights struggle to political action at every level of society, explore how African American faith communities have forged interracial ties and have been on the frontline of uplift and change.

Saturday, February 6th:

- Flight to Freedom pt.1 at 4 PM
- Flight to Freedom pt. 2 at 5 PM

Tuesday, February 9th:

- Amen! Music of the Black Church at 9PM

Tuesday, February 16th:

- Finding Your Roots Episode 705: 8:00 – 9:00 PM
- The Black Church "This is Our Story, This is Our Song" Episode 101: 9:00 – 11:00 PM

Wednesday, February 17th:

- The Black Church "This is Our Story, This is Our Song" Episode 102: 9:00 – 11:00 PM

Friday, February 26th:

- AKOMA:25 Years of Gospel Sisterhood at 8:30 PM
- Independent Lens "Mr. Soul" at 9 PM

## LENT – 40 DAYS TO REFLECT, RECONCILE, AND REJOICE

From the Olde English, lent is defined as meaning “spring,” or a new season. In other languages, it is considered a derivative of the Latin Quadragesima, or “the forty days,” a season of preparation of fasting and prayer, to imitate the example of Christ. For Catholics, it is the period of time leading up to the Paschal Triduum, the three days of the Last Supper, the Crucifixion and Death and, the resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ on Easter Sunday, who died for all man’s sins so that we may one day share in the kingdom of heaven. Beginning with Ash Wednesday, we have the privilege and opportunity to reflect on our lives, our faults, our accomplishments, and our love for one another as we eagerly anticipate the Resurrection of our Lord.

Why 40 days? Different reasons come forth from biblical history. Some say it reflects the 40 days and 40 nights of rain and the Great Flood, with Noah building the ark and following God’s directive to gather the species, two of each kind, bringing all on board to a safe place. After the rains, and the drying of the land, they were greeted by a rainbow, and the start of a new life on earth. Others point out that the Lord spent 40 days and nights in the wilderness, praying and fasting in preparation for what he knew was ahead of him. Still others suggest that it may be the 40 hours that our Lord lay in his tomb, prior to His Resurrection. Regardless of how many may view the different ideologies, this period of time brings forth the promise of salvation and everlasting love from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

For all of us, Lent provides us with an opportunity to reflect on how we have lived our lives, as well as an opportunity to pause and spend time in prayer and adoration of our Lord. Coming from a fast-paced world, we have the opportunity to slow down, and take time to pray the rosary, walk and pray the Stations of the Cross, and engage in praying novenas and special prayers asking for strength, patience, and courage as we move forward with our lives. We also have the opportunity to take part in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, asking for forgiveness for our sins, and the strength to continue to be strong and resolute in our roles as Catholic Christians. Lent is also an opportunity to reflect on our parish and our fellow parishioners, and give thanks for all they bring as a part of our larger “Church Family.”

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We would ask that, if possible, that you take some time to read and reflect on the stories in this edition of the newsletter, and our fellow parishioners' experiences as they navigated through life's journey's and challenges. Coming together in our parish family, they provide so much to allow us to better understand early beginnings and what challenges they faced. Their experiences, and the time they spend with us on Sundays, will make us all stronger as Catholics, and as a parish. As we prepare for the Resurrection of the Lord on Easter Sunday, let us take time during this season of Lent to share our love and support of each other as a parish family, and as members of Christ's church.