

January 17, 2022

His Holiness, Pope Francis
Apostolic Palace
00120 Vatican City.

Dear Pope Francis:

We urge you to immediately canonize six African American candidates for sainthood. We are asking that you name as saints Pierre Toussaint, Mother Henriette DeLille, Father Augustus Tolton, Julia Greeley, Mother Mary Lange, and Sister Thea Bowman by using your *santo subito* process.

These six candidates for sainthood were either born into slavery or they educated the enslaved at great personal risk to themselves. Their lives were miracles of generosity of spirit, sacrifice, and survival.

Many of us American Catholics are embarrassed that the highest church authorities have not recognized any African American saints, and yet they have canonized 11 white Americans. We know there is a process for canonization, but this process is not working for Black Catholics and supporters. The process is reaping unfair, uneven results. If you add up the years since each of the six African American candidates died, they have been waiting a total of 714 years for even one of them to be named a saint!

People who are Black in America have endured unearned suffering since the first enslaved persons arrived here in 1619. However, African Americans have remained faithful to the Catholic Church over centuries of enslavement (including by church officials), racial segregation (including within the church), mass incarceration, and mass poverty. It is long past time for the Church to recognize that it has treated whole groups of faithful people as second-class members and to demonstrate its own faithfulness to Black American Catholics. By canonizing these six current candidates for sainthood, you would make a very strong statement of reckoning, reconciliation, and repair.

You are the pope who has canonized the most saints (899) in Catholic Church history. For many of us, sainthood delayed is sainthood denied. Please treat the six African American candidates for sainthood fairly by redefining and rectifying the process and canonize them immediately. If not now, when? If not you, who?

Sincerely and respectfully yours,

