

PARISH CONNECTION

A Publication of the Office of Intercultural Ministries

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC
ARCHDIOCESE OF
ATLANTA



RESILIENCE

BLACK CATHOLIC SPIRITUALITY DURING TRYING TIMES

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ROMAN CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF ATLANTA

WINTER 2020

PARISH CONNECTION

*Quarterly newsletter connecting parishes
and ministry with our Black Catholic
communities*

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 03** Letter from the Editor
- 04** His Eminence Cardinal Wilton D. Gregory
- 05** Most Rev. Gregory J. Hartmayer, OFM Conv.
- 06** "But God!" A reflection on resiliency, health and wellness
by LaSheka Beaman Morris
- 09** A Witness to show the world
by Rev. Jeffery Ott, O.P.
- 10** Giving Thanks Daily: A reflection on living with COVID-19
by Mary Jane Cooper
- 11** Moments of Grace: Reflections from our communities on living with COVID-19
by Candis M. Hunter, Ph.D., MSPH, REHS
- 12** Sheltered in Place: A Black Catholic theological reflection
by Rev. Msgr. Edward B. Branch, D.Min
- 16** Ecce Sacerdos Magnus:
Remembering Fr. Chester Smith, SVD
by Rev. Urey Mark
- 18** Coronavirus update for Catholic Charities of Atlanta supporters, partners and clients
- 19** Black Life Matters, Black Prayers Matter
by Mr. Ashley Morris, Th.M.
- 20** Black Catholic history website information



MISSION OF PARISH CONNECTION

*To inform, educate and celebrate spiritual growth through
Catholic African heritage and tradition as a witness of
the cultural diversity of our universal Church.*

ON THE COVER

This issue of Parish Connection asks readers to reflect on how faith sustains us during these moments of experiencing the dual pandemics of the novel coronavirus and racism. The cover photo contains a message posted on the marquee of Sandusky Church of Christ in Birmingham, Alabama. The message appropriately reads, "Faith makes things possible—not easy," a sentiment echoed throughout the many contributions featured in this issue. Photo: Mr. Ashley Morris, Th.M.

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

We've come this far by faith, leaning on the Lord. Trusting in His holy word, He's never failed me yet. Oh, can't turn around, we've come this far by faith.

My sisters and brothers in Christ, it is our sincerest hope that this *Parish Connection* newsletter greets you in love, hope and encouragement in these particularly turbulent times. This periodical, a vital tool of communication that has served our Atlanta Archdiocesan Black Catholic communities for many years, returns to you and our parishes following a five-year hiatus after the creation of our Office of Intercultural and Ethnic Diversity in 2015. Numerous parishioners questioned the unceremonious disappearance of the newsletter, fearing that its sudden absence was yet another sign among many of a perceived growing indifference to the needs and concerns of Black Catholics among the hierarchy of our local and national Church.

Black Catholic communities in our archdiocese continued to praise God and thrive in those five years without the newsletter, five years that saw changes ranging from the triumphant to the turbulent, the peaceful to the perplexing, and all things imaginable in between. The newsletter's absence created an inability to share in the Good News or grieve in the great losses of those precious moments with you all. We humbly offer our most heartfelt apologies to you, our readers and supporters, as no explanation will suffice for failing to accompany and connect our communities on our collective and individual journeys towards the Kingdom of Heaven. However, the challenges that hindered the production of this publication since 2015 were more of administrative hurdles and inconveniences than pastoral indifference to the Black Catholic communities in Atlanta. We pray that you all will join us as we thank God for giving us the strength to leap over those hurdles while preparing us for the new opportunities for growth presently facing us.

Those opportunities for growth come at a unique time as much has occurred during those five years. The renaming of our ministry as the Office of Intercultural Ministries, the appointment of Mrs. Lucia Luzondo, JCL, MAPT as the office's new director, the installation of the Most Reverend Gregory J. Hartmayer, O.F.M. Conv. as the seventh Archbishop of Atlanta, and the elevation of our previous Ordinary, His Eminence Cardinal Wilton Gregory, as the first African American Cardinal in our Church are just a few of the changes that have occurred in the most recent year.

On the other hand, the COVID-19 pandemic, the reality and effects of social distancing and quarantining, the unjustified back-to-back murders of several unarmed Black women and



men, the rise of national and global protests fighting injustice and the inequitable treatment of people of color, and the results of our recent Presidential election have fundamentally altered what we once knew and celebrated as "normal." It seems as if the once "tranquil" waters of life have been sufficiently "troubled" in these past five years, let alone these past few months.

We must be careful not to dismiss the beautiful, pastoral, moral, charitable, and hospitable responses to all that has afflicted us, and it is necessary to highlight those responses to sustain the momentum needed to keep us moving forward. As people of faith, we have pledged to live

this reality to inspire and empower one another with the right witness of what it means to love God, one another, and to follow Christ. Deeply ingrained in our very being is the will to push forward despite all that life throws at us. The God-given gift of faith we have is the source of that resiliency, for God works in all circumstances good or bad, big or small. How fitting we now find ourselves in circumstances that require us to live this resiliency because our lives honestly depend on it!

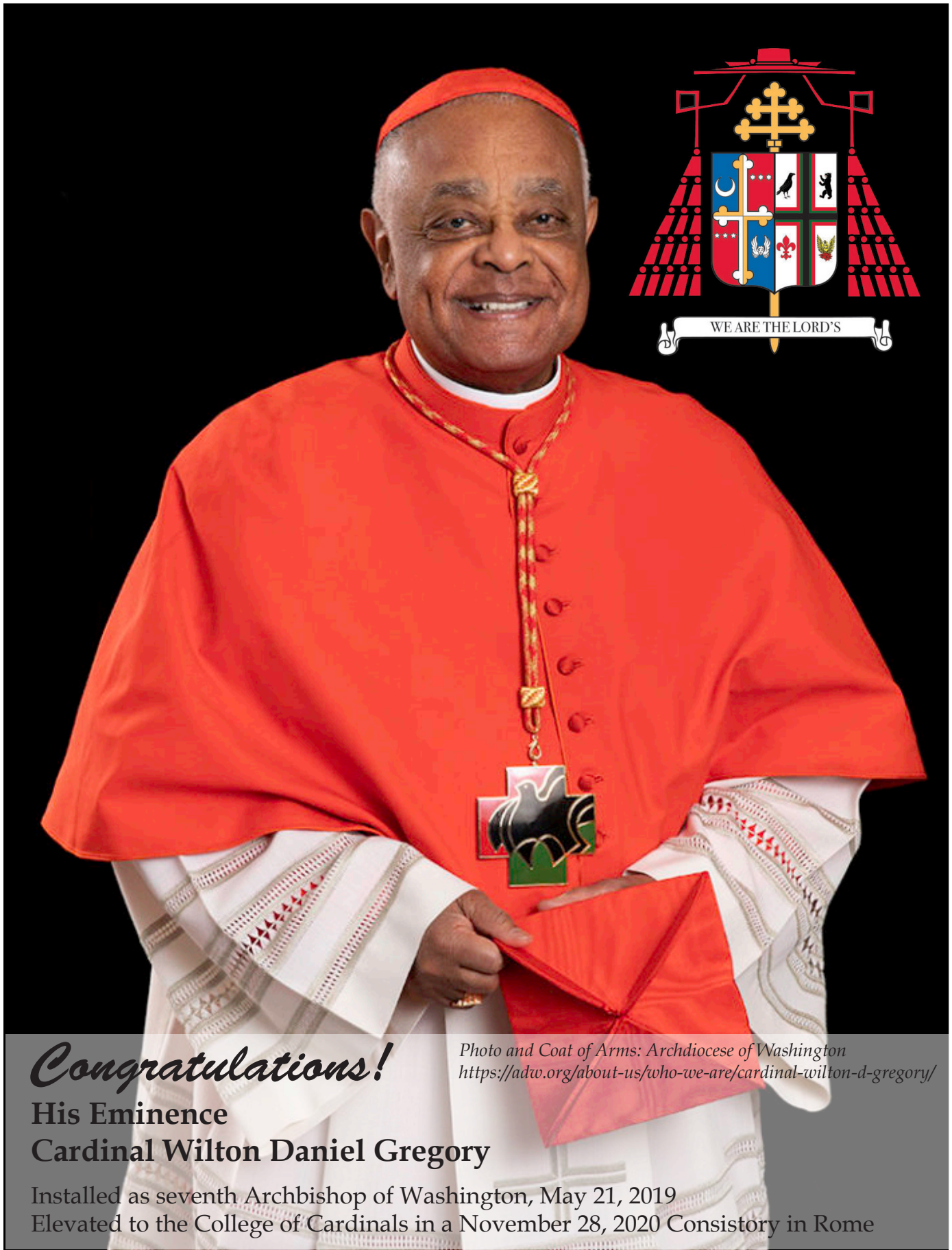
Our five-year hiatus and our current circumstances have humbled us all in many ways, affording us the chance to reflect on what we perhaps considered "normal." We have a rare *sankofa* moment to take what is good from our past in order to have a fruitful future. That is our faith—our resiliency—put into action. For a society and world gripped in newfound social distancing, upheaval, and injustice, we cannot afford to limit our experience and expression of Christ to a building once a week.

It will be tempting, perhaps even alluring, for us to "return to normal" once we fully emerge from our quarantined states or when the protests die down. We should recall the words of Jesus as told to us by the Luke the Evangelist, "No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God." (Lk 9:62) Likewise, the prophet Isaiah states, "See, I am doing something new! Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?" (Is 43:19)

We must strive to be Christ-like instead of simply receiving Him in the Eucharist. Our ability to adapt, to grow, to be resilient in these troubled times is the surefire way the peace and love of God through Jesus Christ, in fellowship with the Holy Spirit, will be seen and bear fruit today, tomorrow and forever.

Ashley Morris

Ashley Morris, Th.M.
Editor-in-Chief, *Parish Connection*
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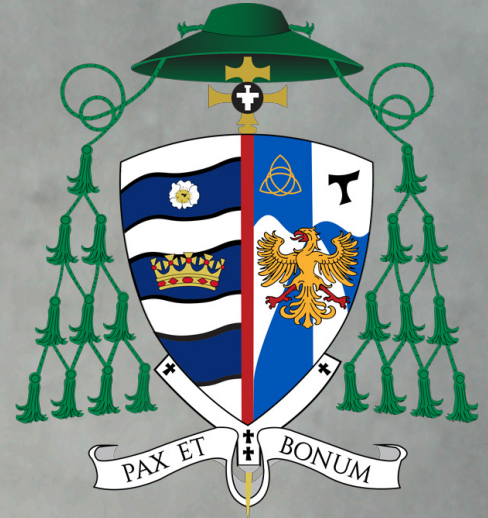


Congratulations!

**His Eminence
Cardinal Wilton Daniel Gregory**

Installed as seventh Archbishop of Washington, May 21, 2019
Elevated to the College of Cardinals in a November 28, 2020 Consistory in Rome

*Photo and Coat of Arms: Archdiocese of Washington
<https://adw.org/about-us/who-we-are/cardinal-wilton-d-gregory/>*



Welcome!

**Most Reverend
Gregory J. Hartmayer, OFM Conv.**

Installed as seventh Archbishop of Atlanta
May 6, 2020, The Cathedral of Christ the King

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC
ARCHDIOCESE OF
ATLANTA





LaSheka Beaman Morris
*Health Coach and Faith-based
 Nutrition Advisor/Owner
 L.B. Morris Consults*

I am supposed to write about resilience and health, but I am having trouble picking myself up out of my bed because yet another dead body with black skin has been welcomed into God's kingdom. Not the one here on earth we are supposed to be creating but the one in heaven, the place we go once we are done here. God has given me the mantel of health and nutrition but these days it is hard to talk about eating kale when I am worried about dying from a silent and deadly virus. It is hard to be crazy about cruciferous vegetables when it makes me feel crazy to see us underestimating this virus because some grew tired of the inconvenience of prioritizing first the health and wellness concerns of others.

It is hard to express my love for lentils when I watch others carelessly carry on with their lives as though my life, my daughter's life, and my 68-year-old mother-in-law's life are without value. Instead of being encouraged to think outside of ourselves, we have seen the politicization of wearing masks, one of our best protections we have against

“But God!”

A Reflection on resiliency, health and wellness

LaSheka Beaman Morris

the virus. A line drawn in the sand between their “rights” or my life brought me to harsh realization ... I guess I do not matter.

Even still, I am supposed to write about hope as one life after another is taken away from us, if not by COVID-19 then by the spirit of racial hatred. Hoping is hard to practice nowadays.

How many of us are stricken with anxiety when we leave our homes knowing COVID-19 disproportionately affects Black people? How many of us sink into a deep and dark depression every time racial injustice steals another Black body? How many of us remain haunted by the publicly displayed murder of George Floyd? How many of us are terrified every time a family member coughs? How many of us have had flashbacks of Ahmaud Arbery's murder in the middle of the street? How many of us are still recalling old hashtags memorializing countless numbers of sisters and brothers taken too soon? How many of us are triggered every time we hear new statistics about the rising numbers of positive COVID-19 cases or hear another personal account from a healthcare worker?

“Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a mental health condition that's triggered by a terrifying event — either experiencing it or witnessing it. Symptoms may include flashbacks, nightmares and severe anxiety, as well as uncontrollable thoughts about the event. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a

disorder that develops in some people who have experienced a shocking, scary or dangerous event” (NIH, 2019). Although I am not a therapist, I believe collectively and individually we are suffering from PTSD. I believe we Black people have PTSD and have had it for more than 400 years, and because of this, I can safely say that we are not well.

According to the World Health Organization, “Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (WHO). Furthermore, the Oxford dictionary says wellness, is “the state of being in good health, especially as an actively pursued goal” (MERRIAM-WEBSTER DICTIONARIES, 2020). When I speak about health and wellness, I am always speaking about the whole person, as health and wellness is more than just eating an occasional salad.

I look at health and wellness in three parts: the whole person being healthy, ensuring achievement of that the state of good health, and the continued and active pursuit of that very state. The last part, the active pursuit of a good health state, is the phase we are in right now. We cannot consider being well or healthy if our mental and social well-being is not up to par. Our mental and social well-being will not be up to par if we live in fear our losing our lives and our loved ones to invisible diseases and racial injustice, or remain traumatized by the constant “shocking, scary and dangerous events” that keep happening.

Currently, we must continue our active pursuit of good health by fighting racism, wearing masks (and washing our hands regularly), and by praying hard. Moreover, yes, we must pursue eating a healthy diet and incorporating physical activity in our lives. We have to continue to pursue good physical health so that we are around to pursue good mental health and social well-being. We must continue to fight for our own social and mental well-being so we can physically be here to focus on our overall health. In all instances, one goal cannot exist without the others. The third part of health and wellness, the act of actively pursuing the goal of good health, involves an incredible amount of resilience. It is deciding to fight to be well despite the troubles facing us on a daily basis.

Black people in America have been doing that for more 400 years. How? But God!

With all this going on, all the evil, darkness, and hate in the world ... but God! But God, we have seen people of all ethnicities, races, and backgrounds all over the world stand up and say "NO!" to racism despite the existence of COVID-19. The COVID-19 numbers hit 2 million this weekend, but God, we have two vaccines in distribution for this invasive virus, the fastest process to a vaccine in history! Resilience is the "but God" in our lives.

God is with us as He has always been with us—from the crowded, disease infested slave ships to the insufferable extreme conditions of working in the fields, through Jim Crow laws and Black Codes up to today. He was with David, Solomon, Elijah, and now us. God is with us, and



PHOTO: Diana Simumpande on Unsplash.com

“God is with us, and His love continues to give us strength because ‘God is our refuge and strength (Psalm 46:1).’”

His love continues to give us strength because “God is our refuge and strength (Psalm 46:1).” During this pandemic with the war on racism and the fight to be well, I do not feel abandoned by God. I feel His heart hurting, as His children are hurting. I believe He breathes with His Beloved children especially those who are breathless, be it by the novel coronavirus or by a knee on the throat. In fact, the resiliency that is but God is powerful enough to sustain us in the fight against in our genetic codes!

I am currently learning about Epi-

genetics as a part of obtaining my Masters degree of Science in Nutrition and Wellness. Epigenetics mechanisms control the way genetic info is used and maintained as heritable altered gene expression levels and patterns not caused by the original DNA sequence (NIH, 2020). Added chemical compounds that regulate single gene activity is epigenetics (NIH, 2020), and epigenetic change can be developmental and or environmental (Franke, 2014). Environmental influences, such as pollution or a person’s lifestyle, diet, or stress, can influence gene expression (Franke, 2014). All of this is to say that pollution, stress, lifestyle, diet and the environment can change your and your offspring’s genes. This also means that trauma, disease, mental illness and even the effects of second-hand smoke can affect your overall health.

Studies have shown that children experiencing adversity are at risk of permanent brain alteration, modified gene function and epigenetic alteration. Stress-related diseases often result from long-term health and developmental impact (Li-Tempel et al., 2016). The body’s response to toxic stress affects the neuroendocrine-immune network and leads to abnormal long-term cortisol response. This, of course, increases the risk of poor health outcomes. Adverse effects on the immune system,

Continued on Page 8 ...

Continued from Page 7 ...

digestive system, brain and heart can all be affected by chronic toxic stress (Head & Kelly, 2009). However, not everyone who has experienced adversity is likely to endure poor health outcomes due to resilience. (Head & Kelly, 2009). Resilience! But God! Although we are born or live in polluted cities, our parents and grandparents suffered from high blood pressure or diabetes, or your ancestors experienced trauma ...," But God! God said and says to us, "Because I gave you

"[God] gave us resilience and peace that surpasses human understanding. I genuinely believe God embedded resilience into our DNA."

resilience, because I AM your resilience, life does not have to be that way."

Resilience is the capability to adjust properly to adversity regardless of one's life experiences. Resilience plays an essential role in combating toxic stress caused by high cortisol levels (Franke, 2014). God said, "And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7). People have always wondered how Black people have endured so much for so long it is nothing but God! He gave us resilience and peace that surpasses human understanding. I genuinely believe that God embedded resilience into our DNA. Yes, we have experienced trauma for 400 years ... But God ... He has given us the strength, hope, and fight to continue to "actively pursue the goal of good health," and of wellness.

It is for no other reason but God that we will keep getting out of bed, we will keep praying, we will keep our masks on, and despite what troubles may come, we will be well as we always have.*PC*

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UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF
CATHOLIC BISHOPS



**RESOURCES FOR CATHOLICS
DURING COVID-19**

Many dioceses, parishes, and Catholics begin to feel the effects of remaining at home due to the coronavirus. The USCCB has created a list of resources for Mass, prayers, catechetical material, and reflections to assist in our continued spiritual development while living with the virus. The list includes:

Resources for families, parishes, and dioceses

Links to online Masses

Migration and refugee resources

Rights of persons with disabilities to medical treatment during the COVID-19 Pandemic

and much more!

Please visit the USCCB's website for more information by scanning the QR code below with your cell phone, tablet, or smart device.



“A Witness to Show the World”

Reflections from our communities on living with COVID-19



Rev. Jeffery Ott, O.P.
Pastor,
Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church

As I write this reflection, I am beset by a smoldering rage. George Floyd has been killed by the Minneapolis police. It disturbs my spirit to know that not even a pandemic can stop the brutality of hatred against black men and women by those hired by the local government who are supposed to keep everyone safe. It is disturbing that a white woman in NYC’s Central Park made a 911 call and falsely reported a birder who happened to be a Black man. And it’s only by the grace of God that Chris Cooper was not harmed by the police. These are the times that try our souls.

These are also the times of a global pandemic that has changed the texture of our lives for the foreseeable

“We must witness as followers of Jesus to the dignity of black men and women—and all humanity. That witness will show the world what it means to be church more than any gathering can ever do.”

future. This is the time of keeping safe within our homes and staying physically distant from one another in an effort to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. And it has been a time for reflection and challenge about how we are called to be church when we cannot gather for the celebration of Mass or any of the sacraments. As a priest pastor, I have been buoyed by the resilience of my parishioners. And on the whole the people of God entrusted to my care have been supportive, creative, hopeful, compassionate, generous, charitable, and kind. What a great witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

Live stream Masses and virtual meetings and ministry seem like they are here to stay. And what a blessing! We can connect with one another and share everything from our praise reports to our sorrows. And speaking of sorrows, this virus has impacted the black community and communities of color at almost twice the rate of the white population. The dynamics of the pandemic

lay bare the inequities of our health and economic systems. And as a black Catholic community the pandemic is a call to justice. We must stand ever faith-filled on the side of those who are most affected by this disease.

As we celebrate the solemnities of the Trinity and the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, we are reminded, perhaps, in a novel way, what Jesus really means to us. We are exhorted by the words of John 3:16: “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone ...might have eternal life.” The lives of black men and women in the U.S. continue to be threatened not just by the ravages of COVID-19 but by the hands of deprived human beings who have forgotten their own humanity. We must witness as followers of Jesus to the dignity of Black men and women—and all humanity. That witness will show the world what it means to be church more than any gathering can ever do. *PC*



A CENTURY OF WITNESS A FUTURE OF COMMITMENT
OUR LADY of LOURDES
CATHOLIC CHURCH

FOUNDED THROUGH
THE GENEROSITY OF
SAINT KATHARINE DREXEL



Mary Jane Cooper
Parishioner,
Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church

It was the third week in March and my niece, Lisa, called me to say that she thought my 78-year old mother may have Coronavirus. She explained that she wasn't eating, had a runny nose, a bad headache, wasn't moving around much and also had a bad cough.

My first thought was that I may need to get in my car and drive ten hours to see about my mother. On second thought, that may not be the best plan of action, considering I had been sick myself for the past couple of weeks with very similar symptoms.

When I spoke with my mom on the phone, she said that she was okay. She said she had a headache and didn't have much of an appetite. She told me that it was allergies and she'd be fine. She refused to call her doctor or go to the hospital. I tended to believe her because I was recovering from what appeared to be something triggered by allergies to the pollen, I thought.

I called my mom every day and

Giving Thanks Daily

Reflections from our communities

on living with COVID-19

she sounded good. She seemed irritated that I continued to ask if she had eaten every time. My sister lives in the same town in North Central West Virginia. She was calling mom daily offering to take her to see a doctor. Mom refused every time.

Meanwhile it was mentioned on national news that West Virginia was the only state without any confirmed COVID-19 cases. The statement turned out to be questionable, at best. People were sick but testing was limited, hence, no confirmed

including my mom. My mom's friend and choir member, Mrs. Viola Horton passed away. Ms. Vie was the first death in West Virginia due to COVID-19.

My mom babysits my niece's children while she works a night shift at the hospital.

She was told by her supervisors that she couldn't return to work until her grandmother was tested. Although my mother had begun to feel better, she tested positive for COVID-19.

"I pray daily, giving thanks that my mom and I were able to overcome it. I ask for strength, peace, and comfort for those continuing to fight and for their loved ones."

cases.

My mom, a member of Morning Star Baptist Church, along with eleven other choir members boarded the church van on March 15 and traveled to Everetttsville, WV.

They went to celebrate the pastor's anniversary. Apparently, the church was in attendance of 90-120 people, many from various churches around the tri-county region.

A day later the CDC advised against gatherings of more than fifty-people. One day after that, the Governor declared a state of emergency. Two weeks later, several people who had attended the service became ill,

SHE BEAT IT!!! By the grace of God.

I had an antibody test recently and tested positive. Maybe it's in our genes or maybe God has more work

for us to do. I pray daily, giving thanks that my mom and I were able to overcome it. I ask for strength, peace and comfort for those continuing to fight and for their loved ones. We serve an 'Awesome God & He Reigns'. *PC*

For more information or updates on protecting yourself and others from COVID-19, please visit the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) website at the following link:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>



Candis M. Hunter, Ph.D., MSPH, REHS
Environmental Health Scientist,
Centers for Disease Control and
Prevention

Note: The content and opinions in this piece are the author's and do not represent the opinions or policy of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the US Public Health Service, or the Archdiocese of Atlanta.

During Zoom calls every morning, my CDC colleagues report COVID-19 cumulative case and death statistics and discuss public health action steps to confront the ongoing pandemic. In particular, communities of color are disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 illness and death, and targeted actions are needed to address these disparities. As these staggering COVID-19 statistics are shared, I often reflect on the lives, families and communities behind those statistics.

My primary role on the COVID-19 public health response has been related to data and research. My focus has been on activities ranging from conducting quality assurance and control of airport and quarantine screening data; contributing to CDC guidelines related to cleaning and disinfection, building water systems, and food processing plants; and responding to inquiries about cleaning

Moments of Grace

Reflections from our communities on living with COVID-19

and disinfection. Most of this work has been conducted via teleworking, and my deepest appreciation goes to the front-line workers such as healthcare workers, grocery store workers and others who literally put their lives on the line for us.

Like many others, this pandemic has forced me to examine my values and priorities. First, this pandemic has made me clearly realize that I was never in control and how often I use busyness or other distractions to avoid negative feelings. As a planner and chronic goal-setter, I have really struggled with this season of uncertainty. God is teaching me to “Commit

over self-reliance. I have been humbled in multiple ways to recognize that God’s grace is sufficient, and His power perfected in weakness (2 Cor. 12: 9).

As my husband and I juggle work activities with our active 2-year-old daughter at home, we are thankful to experience her growing vocabulary, potty-training adventures, nap avoiding tactics and curiosity. We’ve been able to take more walks with her around our neighborhood and experience the beauty and resiliency of God’s creations in nature. I have enjoyed the opportunity to connect to others through YouTube church

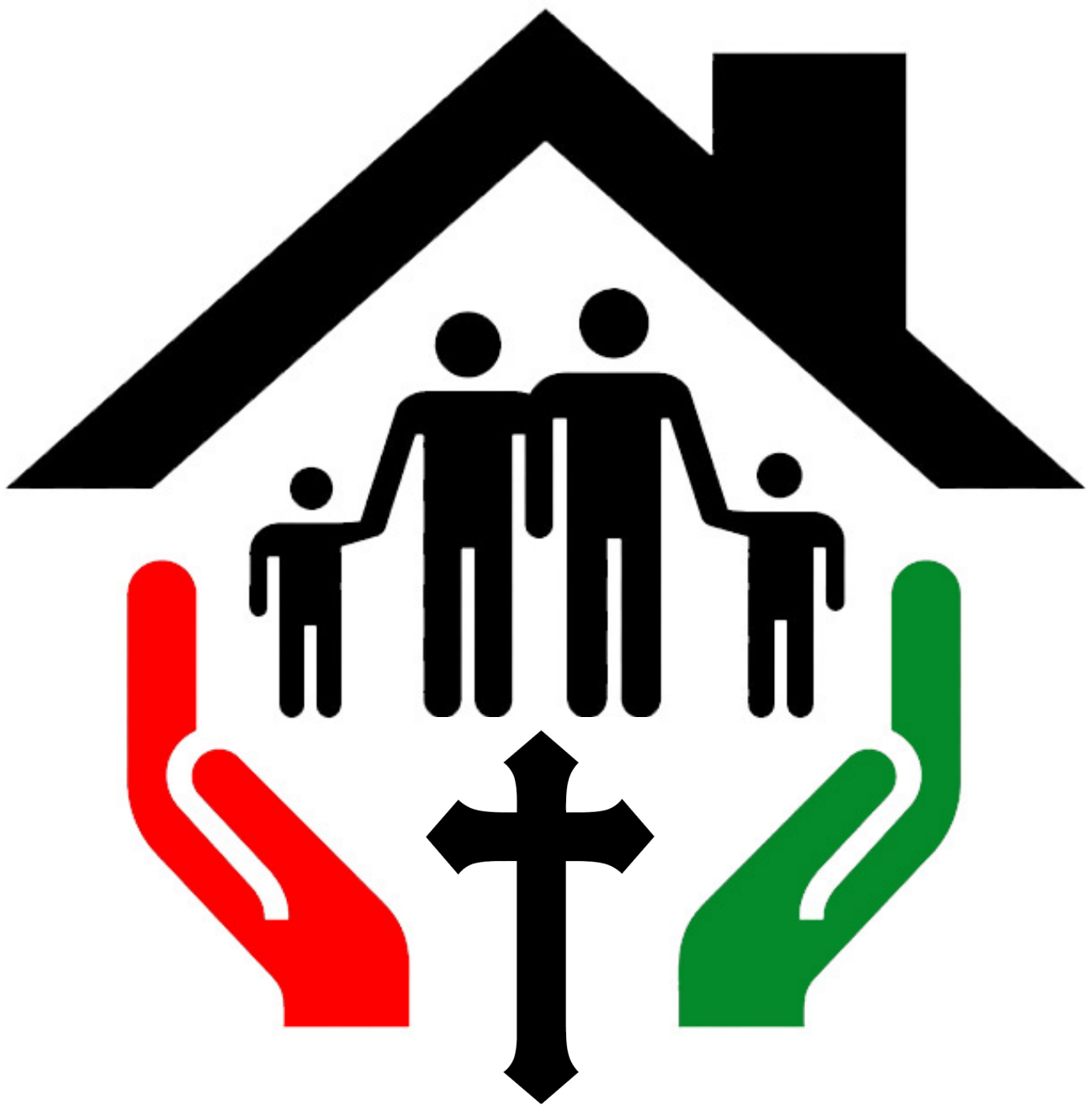
“Every day, I recognize I have a choice to choose selflessness over selfishness, seek gratitude over complaints, and embrace vulnerability over self-reliance. I have been humbled in multiple ways to recognize that God’s grace is sufficient, and His power perfected in weakness.” (2 Corinthians 12: 9)

to the Lord whatever you do, and he will establish your plans.” (Pro. 16:3).

Secondly, my education, job, or any other societal titles cannot truly define me. The only constant identity to grab on to is my identity in Christ, and so I reflect on who God says I am through His Word.

Third, I am confronted with how my attitude and decisions impact others. Every day, I recognize I have a choice to choose selflessness over selfishness, seek gratitude over complaints and embrace vulnerability

services, video chats and chats with neighbors from a distance. These moments of grace have been a beacon of light in the darkness of the pandemic. May we continue to let our light shine by following CDC’s guidelines of social distancing (e.g., maintaining physical distance between persons in community settings) and protective measures (e.g., handwashing, cough etiquette, face coverings and cleaning/disinfection). *PC*



Sheltered In Place

A Black Catholic theological reflection

by Rev. Msgr. Edward B. Branch, D.Min
Archdiocese of Atlanta

“Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. ²Jesus answered, ‘Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? ³I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. ⁴Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? ⁵I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.’” (Lk 13:1-5)

For quite some time the country and the world have been sheltered in place. This has been a period of imposed monasticism. It is time for us Catholics to seize a tradition very much identified with us of considering the question, what is God doing with us in the midst of all this? Are we being punished with this virus? Because of my illnesses of the past year and a half I have been sheltered in place and have long ago dusted off what I am here proposing to you, the practice of doing a theological reflection on present events. Theological reflection gathers what one knows about God from the scriptures and the long standing values of the people of God (tradition) and come to some conclusions on the basis of what we have seen and heard about what God wants of us in the present moment. During this time of sheltering in place because of the virus, I ask what “word” from God comes to mind as we ponder our crisis condition.

There are not a few in the religious community who do not hesitate to proclaim that this is all retribution

on God’s part for our human infidelity. We hear that not infrequently from some of our fundamentalist brothers and sisters. But New Testament tradition takes us in another direction. The Gospel of Luke (Luke 13: 1-5) recalls Jesus response to two tragedies in His own time when some pious people wanted to say Galileans who were murdered and their blood poured on their sacrifices were being punished for their sins. And that the tower of Siloam falling on eighteen people in Jerusalem was a result of their sinfulness. Jesus was trying to say that they are not being punished but everyone should take the opportunity to do what is right and attend to right relationship with God to avoid permanent eternal disaster. We are not being punished for our sins directly but we ought to take this opportunity to rethink and renew our relationship to each other and to God. What we have been awaken to during this time is our dependence on each other regardless of geography, income, age, or religion.

Theologians call this recognizing our contingent reality.

Everything in creation depends on the beings and circumstances around it to continue in existence. Most of us in the western hemisphere are so busy from day to day and week to week with our personal values and dreams that we forget what Taillard De Chardin says in the Divine Milieu, “Our lives are like the hair on my head when put to the fire of a match, gone in an instant.” The fact is, stuff happens. Tragedies occur. God does not make them happen but He uses them to bring about good ends. God uses them to have us recognize the only non-contingent reality, Himself, and think about what God may be doing with us.

The cure of the man born blind in John 9 is also a case-in-point. Jesus says directly, He did not sin, and his parents did not sin. This happened so that God’s son might be glorified and “that the work of God might be displayed in his life.” So that people might believe in Jesus. God can even use man’s intended moral evil to effect His good ends. As the death of Jesus was a minute of triumph of evil, so the Resurrection is a pledge that some day evil will be gone and tragic events will end forever.

So what ought we make of this present COVID-19 situation? We are crossing one million deaths around the world. Of the 500 plus thousand deaths in the United States, 40 percent are African Americans and Latino and Native Americans. As politicians battle back and forth, this does not bode well for the widows and orphans in this national boat buffeted by unemployment, sickness, hunger and death. Jesus councils us not to look for blame as has become the practice in recent days but to seek to render mercy. Unlike the disciples in the boat with Jesus, we are not calling out to Jesus, “don’t you care what

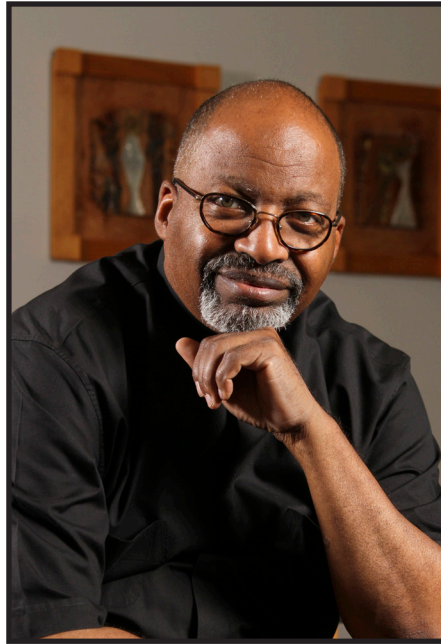
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happens to us.” We are called to reflect on what might be our part in the process of God’s providing for our health and salvation. We are called to reflect on how we might walk on water. How we might do what seems impossible. We are being asked to take some of this time sheltered in our proverbial boats with Jesus to think about the issues in our communities that are creating the conditions for 40 percent COVID-19 among us e.g., our dietary issues, our failure to confront our public officials about taking care of local deficiencies like pollution and food deserts that leave us and our children immunology compromised and exposed to disease.

Our Black Catholic history will remind us of God’s habit of saving us from disaster if we will but research our very deep past. Stephen Bullivant recently wrote a book, *Catholicism in a Time of Coronavirus*. He reminds us of what we had forgotten, this is not the first time a pandemic ravaged the known world. Not three hundred years after Jesus, St. Cyprian and his Deacon St. Pontius in Carthage in what is today Tunisia report a horrifying experience which reads very much like what is going on now. People were not sheltering in place in those days but were fleeing the very crowded city. The very maligned and misunderstood Christians, like the first responders of our own day, didn’t flee but stayed and comforted the sick, buried the dead. They ushered in a response that has become a hallmark of our Catholic reality, hospitals, orphanages, old age homes. Our tradition rejects the notion that God caused the pandemic but we have

long held that this was a moment in which God inspired the Christians to do what they could do no matter how simple, and thus laid a foundation of trust and credibility for future centuries. One thing is certainly about the days of Cyprian and the 16th century plague chronicled by St. Charles



REV. MONSIGNOR EDWARD B. BRANCH, D.MIN

Photo: Michael Alexander, The Georgia Bulletin

“While we cannot claim that God made this event happen, we can gather that God is moving us to do some things differently during this pandemic that will last for a long time.”

Borromeo in 1575, when it was over, nothing was the same in worship life, service or Christian self understanding.

While we cannot claim that God made this event happen, we can gather that God is moving us to do some things differently during this

pandemic that will last for a long time. First among these changes will be an appreciation of the fact that being Catholic means much more than receiving communion once per week or for that matter, the notion that the devout Catholic is the person who is a daily communicant. Being deprived of entrance into the church buildings and deprivation of the sacrament of the Eucharist for weeks now is occasioning the evolution of different ways of being communities, Masses on the internet are giving opportunity for Christians to interact with each other and take advantage of all manner of reflective and teaching instruments.

Some church communities have developed cadres of lay reflectors and presenters who are bringing fresh approaches to response in worship as well as care of those shut in. Perhaps after this period of universal monasticism, we will all appreciate the Eucharist as not so much something we receive as someone we become. We are forced to ask ourselves, are we identifying with the Eucharist or hiding behind it.

There is no question that when sheltering in place is declared over, none of us will be the same. Hopefully we won’t blame God for those things that happened because we didn’t think, and pray, and write our congresspersons, or vote,

or otherwise apply ourselves to solutions. The smoldering ashes in Minneapolis can call to mind those times we settled for the status quo and public servants were left to their bad habits.

We in the Black Catholic Community can relate to the apostles in

the boat in the Gospel of Mark. We are tempted to say “Lord, don’t you care about us?” Sometimes we have to ask how much we care about ourselves. Too many of us want to leave the business of taking care of those in trouble or in crisis and instructing the young in the faith to the priest or the deacon. The fact is, like our teachers in our public schools, we have to evolve new ways of passing on the faith to our families. We Black Catholics need to learn to home church as well as home school.

This pandemic seems to expose the myriad paradoxes at work in our western capitalist world. What African Americans have been saying for centuries seems now being uncovered without mediation. The most important among us are the least well fed and the most exposed to the virus: bus drivers, ticket takers, grocery delivery people, hospital workers, maintenance workers in our hospitals. Reminders of what the gospel teaches are now given us these days by the poor among us asking forgiveness while the “Lazarus” types advertise their necessity and dip into the public til first. Our desperation in these days must turn our heads back toward our mission in the world, to spread the gospel, first taking care of the widows and orphans. *PC*



**Pan African
Catholic
Organization of
Atlanta
(PACOA)**

We invite our African brothers and sisters to contribute articles and information of your community’s events and programs to the newsletter. Please email amorris@archatl.com for more info.



*“Hold Up the Light:
Authentically Black
and Truly Catholic”*

**Institute for Black Catholic Studies
Xavier University of Louisiana**

Summer 2021 Sessions

June 25 - July 16, 2021

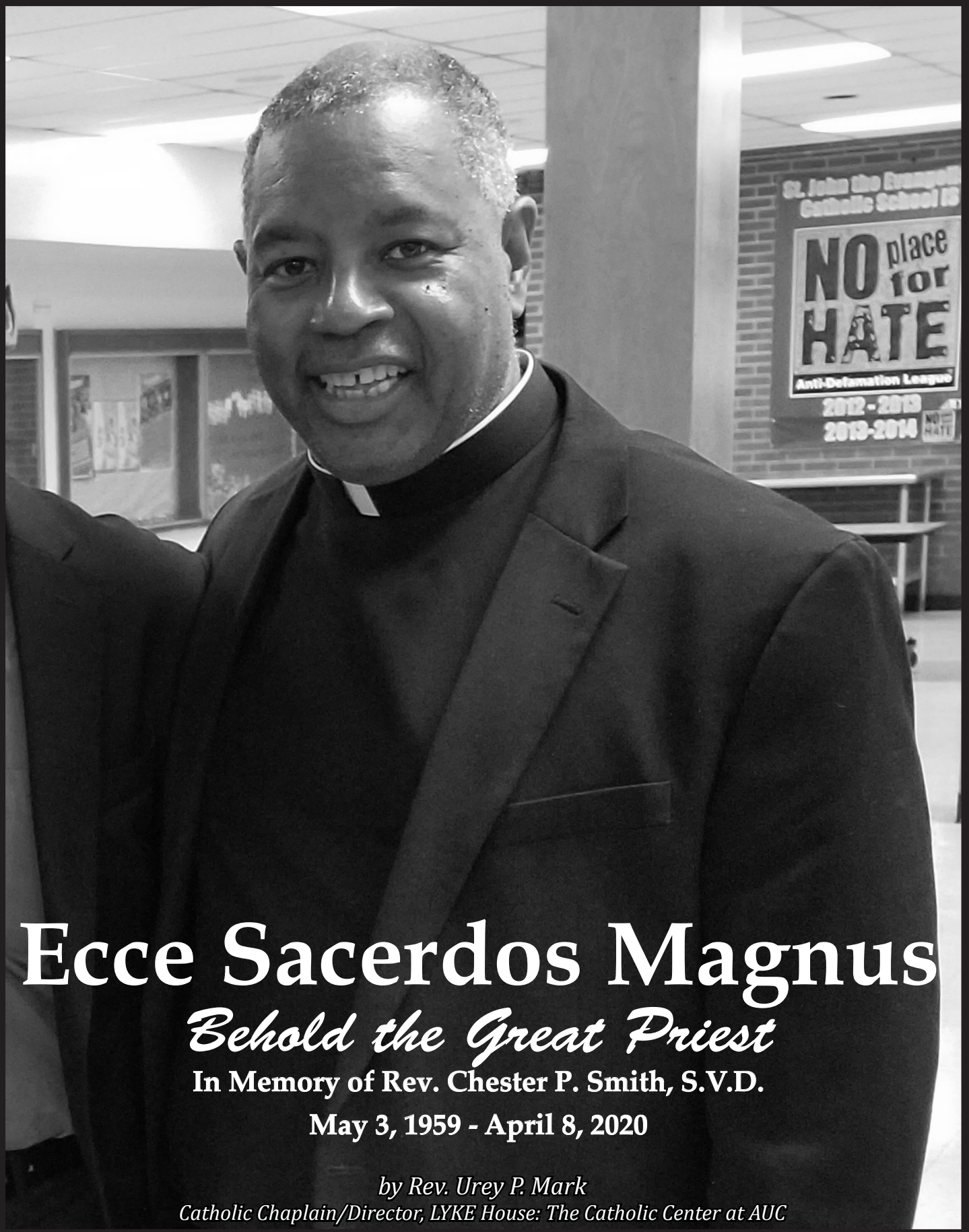
The Institute for Black Catholic Studies is a graduate theology program and school of pastoral ministry that meets each summer for three weeks on the campus of Xavier University of Louisiana. The Institute offers a collaborative learning environment rooted in academic study, community life, prayer and worship. The Institute’s mission is to form culturally competent Christian disciples—scholars, administrators, clergy and religious, seminarians, parish and diocesan ministers, church volunteers, and the faithful—to effectively evangelize in the 21st century.

Find out more program information
by contacting the IBCS at:

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XAVIER UNIVERSITY OF LOUISIANA**

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Ecce Sacerdos Magnus

Behold the Great Priest

In Memory of Rev. Chester P. Smith, S.V.D.

May 3, 1959 - April 8, 2020

by Rev. Urey P. Mark

Catholic Chaplain/Director, LYKE House: The Catholic Center at AUC

“Precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of His faithful servant.” (Ps. 118)

On Thursday April 16, 2020, with heavy hearts, love and grief, we laid to rest in the peace of Christ our dear brother and friend, Fr. Chester P. Smith, SVD. Behold a Great Priest who has served God and the Church well as a Roman Catholic Priest for the most part of his 60 years and 11 months of life.

My dear friends, we always feel the death of a good priest very differently from any other. In our sorrow and grief, we feel that we have lost not just the man but also his unique way of manifesting God—the voice that spoke of God, the hands that blessed and consecrated sacred species and spirit that comforted the people of God. We have lost a brother, a friend of loyalty and a priest of God.

As a priest, Fr. Chester understood the nature of the Catholic priesthood, what it meant to be a Black Catholic Priest in the U.S. Catholic Church. As a brother, he knew what true brotherhood was, and as a friend, he was a friend of loyalty. All God’s people who encountered him loved him, and he generously shared God’s love and friendship to all.

“Father Chester P. Smith and his brother Fr. Charles were the first African American twin priests in the U.S.”

At my priestly ordination, Fr. Chester vested me with the stole and chasuble and he stood by me in ministry to the end. In my first priestly assignment at St. Nicholas Parish in St. Louis, Missouri, Fr. Chester and I made a pastoral covenant that he would do Mass at St. Nicholas every third Sunday of the month. He and

his brother Fr. Charles were faithful to our covenant, which lasted seven years and five months. He was there from the start

and last day of my ministry when we transferred the parish back to the Archdiocese of St. Louis on Nov. 2, 2014. We had Christ-Kwanzaa as an annual celebration in December, and the twins supported St. Nick’s community with their unequivocal missionary zeal.

On October 20, 2019, Fr. Chester blessed the LYKE House as the guest homilist on the 20th Anniversary Dedication Mass and Lifetime Achievement Award celebration for Rev. Msgr. Edward Branch. Fr. Chester preached one of his finest homilies that day; little would we realize that it would be our last Eucharistic celebration with him.

“No one lives for oneself, and no one dies for oneself. If we live, we live for the Lord and if we die, we die for the Lord. So whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s.” (Rom. 14:7-8)

Fr. Chester is with our Lord.

Therefore, it is with gratitude to God, the Smith Family, and Fr. Chester himself for the great gift he had been to us, to the Black Catholic Community, to the U.S. Catholic Church, and to the Universal Roman Catholic Church.

Now Divine Master, may You let Your servant rest in peace ... for his eyes have seen the Salvation which you have won for all people.

May Fr. Chester rest in the peace of Christ, and may God Bless the Smith Family and grant them Divine consolation.

With love and honor, Your Brother in Christ, Fr. Urey P. Mark. *PC*

IN MEMORIAM

We pause here to honor the women and men in our communities that have died in the last five years. While not an exhaustive list, we pray for all those who have died, that they may rest in peace with the Lord.

Charles “T’Chale” Prejean, III
Sep. 11, 1993 - Feb. 2, 2016

Rev. Charles Nwora Okeke
Apr. 11, 1956 - Mar. 5, 2018

Deacon Hilliard M. Lee, Jr.
Mar. 14, 1942 - May 8, 2018

Sr. Patricia Haley, SCN
Aug. 22, 1945 - Nov. 27, 2018

Rev. Jerome LeDoux, S.V.D.
Feb. 26, 1930 - Jan. 7, 2019

Rev. August Thompson
Jul. 7, 1926 - Aug. 11, 2019

Rev. George Clements
Jan. 26, 1932 - Nov. 25, 2019

Deacon Leonard P. Lockett
c. 1953 - Apr. 25, 2020

Most Rev. George V. Murray, S.J.
Dec. 28, 1948 - Jun. 5, 2020

Dr. Kirk P. Gaddy, Sr.
May 23, 1965 - Jun. 20, 2020

Ms. Kenya Malene Griffin
Feb. 10, 1971 - Nov. 12, 2020

Mr. Kenneth W. Louis
Sep. 12, 1956 - Nov. 18, 2020

Rev. JohnPaul Ezeonyido
Nov. 30, 1970 - Dec. 25, 2020

Mrs. Henrietta L. Jones
c. 1942 - Nov. 18, 2020

Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. May they and all the souls of the departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.



Coronavirus Update

for Catholic Charities Atlanta Supporters, Partners, and Clients

HOW CCA IS SERVING CLIENTS

CCA continues to conduct our important work by serving clients remotely through email, phone and teleconference calls:

- **Resources and Assistance** - Please call United Way 211 or visit their website at <http://211online.unitedwayatlanta.org/> You can also call our information and referral specialist at 770-429-2369 and leave a message or email us at help@cctlanta.org.
- **Public Benefits (Food Security)** - If you have questions about eligibility go to ga.gov (verification documents and case status info for all benefits: food stamps, Medicaid and TANF) is available here. Existing clients can continue to receive services by calling 770-790-3107 or emailing help@cctlanta.org.
- **Veterans** - Veterans seeking assistance should call 770-790-3119, and our staff will help you navigate available resources.
- **Mental Health Counseling** - CCA continues to work with current clients. Our ability to accept new clients is limited at this time. If you would like to be on our waitlist, please call 404-920-7745.
- **Housing Counseling** - CCA continues to work with existing clients. If you need assistance with foreclosure prevention, please call 770-790-3112.
- **Refugee Resettlement** - CCA works with clients to help them understand COVID-19 and the precautions they need to take to keep their family and neighbors safe. We assist parents with how to manage virtual learning for their children and provide supplemental education material. We also provide job placement services and assistance for individuals who have lost their jobs due to shutdowns.
- **English Language and Civics Classes** - Current students will finish out the year via distance learning. To be on the waitlist for next semester beginning in July, please call 770-790-3104.
- **Immigration Legal Services** - CCA continues to serve existing clients. Our ability to accept new clients is limited at this time. If you would like to be on our waitlist, please call If you 678-222-3920. We are happy to speak with you about your family petition, naturalization application, or if you have been the victim of a crime. Unfortunately, we are unable to take any asylum cases, immigration court cases, or cases of minors.

HOW WE CAN HELP

- **Donate Gift Cards** - COVID-19 is causing a financial disruption with our families. You can help these families bridge the gap of lost income during this financial crisis by donating gifts cards that they can use for groceries, essentials, and gas. Please mail \$25 gift card donations for groceries (Kroger, Walmart, and Target) or for gas to: Catholic Charities Atlanta, Attn: Mission Advancement, 2401 Lake Park Drive, SE, Smyrna, GA 30080
- **Shop Online: Noonday** - Make your dollar count by shopping the Noonday Collection where 30% of sales in April go to support the work of Catholic Charities Atlanta. Follow this link to start shopping: <https://bit.ly/NoondayCatholicCharities>. Noonday partners with Artisan Businesses to create opportunities for women who are vulnerable, empowering them to earn income.
- **Shop Online: Amazon** - Your everyday purchases through Amazon Smile can benefit CCA. Follow this link & sign in to your Amazon account: <https://smile.amazon.com/ch/58-1097003>. You will be automatically linked with CCA and a percentage of your shopping directly supports CCA programs and services
- **Shop: Kroger** - CCA is part of the Kroger Community Rewards Program. To get started, you must sign up with your Kroger Plus Card. Select CCA as the organization you wish to support, and once you're enrolled, you will earn rewards for CCA every time you shop and use your Plus Card. Register online at krogercommunityrewards.com. Our NPO number is 54963.
- **Make a Financial Donation** - We have seen a surge of individuals needing assistance as the crisis continues to unfold. Support CCA now by making a donation. Every dollar donated goes to help our local neighbors in need. Please help us address emergency needs by making a gift today at <https://give.catholiccharitiesatlanta.org/donate-now>. You can note in the comment field "COVID-19 Response."

BLACK LIFE MATTERS

Ashley Morris, Th.M.

Our current issue of *Parish Connection* arrives at a time when our attention returns to confronting the insidious and pervasive sin of racism. The back-to-back, unnecessary murders of several African American women and men between February and June of last year caused great distress and outrage in the hearts of not only African Americans, but also in the hearts of sisters and brothers from vast cultural backgrounds around the world. The most publicized murder among them, the death of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, prompted mass protests and demonstrations for justice and equality on an unprecedented global scale.

It would be remiss of us to ignore these signs of the time and not speak prophetically and emphatically of our rejection and condemnation of the evil and sin of racism. Our voices and hearts join with you in fighting those "...social [and institutional] structures of injustice and violence..."¹ disproportionately affecting our African American communities, as well as any action, rhetoric, or mentality that normalizes the implicit or explicit dehumanization of people of color. As the U.S. Bishops stated in their 2018 Pastoral Letter Against Racism, *Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love*, "To do justice

requires an honest acknowledgment of our failures and the restoring of right relationships between us. It requires a determined effort, but even more so, it requires humility; it requires each of us to ask for the grace needed to overcome this sin and get rid of this scourge."²

To this end, we dedicate the next issue of *Parish Connection* to robust, informative, insightful and encouraging conversations regarding our fight for justice. We hope to highlight local and national Catholic demonstrations and initiatives as a means of sharing the best practices of our efforts to combat racism. We are particularly interested in featuring information on programs and efforts that build up intercultural competency and skill development and promote activism in our communities via Catholic Social Teaching.

First Corinthians 12:24-26, in part, states the following, "... But God has so constructed the body as to give greater honor to a part that is without it, so that there may be no division in the body, but that the parts may have the same concern for one another. If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy."³ It is a great disservice and exhibition of cruel jest to conclude that all lives

matter while simultaneously failing to acknowledge or respond to the systemic racism, prejudice, exceptionalism, supremacy and privilege that reduces the importance of Black life. We join our voices with yours in affirming the undeniable God-given value of Black lives and experiences as vital to our communal experience of a truly universal ("catholic") Church. The next issue will not be a "one-shot" piece on racism, but rather will continue a perpetually dynamic dialogue on our responses to the ever-evolving, despicable and systemically dysfunctional institution of racism.

We also pray that through the intercession of our Blessed Mother Mary, Sister Thea Bowman, FSPA, and Servant of God Father Augustus Tolton, for the conversion of those whose hearts have been stained and hardened by racism, and that the souls of the victims of racism, violence, excessive force, and abuse may rest in eternal and perfect peace. Amen. *PC*

FOOTNOTES

¹ USCCB, *Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love*. 2018, p. 5

² *Ibid.*

³ *Holy Bible*, 1 Corinthians 12:24-26

BLACK PRAYERS MATTER



BlackCatholicHistory.com

In their latest pastoral letter, *Open Wide Our Hears: The Enduring Call to Love*, the United States of Catholic Bishops directed Catholic educators to participate in anti-racism work by developing curriculum relating to racism.

Subscribers to **BlackCatholicHistory.com** have taken an important step in complying with the directive of the USCCB through the inclusion and usage of this valuable tool as a part of their school's anti-racism toolbox.

INTERNATIONAL

BlackCatholicHistory is the internationally taught K-8 curriculum supplement which enriches Social Studies, Religion and English/Language Arts lesson plans. It emphasizes the universality of the Church and devotion to the Blessed Mother under the title Our Lady of Kibebo. This program can be utilized in Catholic elementary schools, parish R.E. programs, and Catholic home school groups. BlackCatholicHistory is currently taught in Catholic schools across the United States and in Uganda.

HISTORICAL

The program's material spans the history of Black Catholics from Catholicism in Africa during the early centuries of the Church to present day canonization processes of African-American candidates soon to be the Church's first African American saints. The material is produced in grade-appropriate handouts to be integrated throughout the year in Social Studies, Religion and Language Arts curriculum. Guides provide specific suggestions on inclusion of this material in the current curriculum guidelines.

CURRICULUM

The material is accessed through the website BlackCatholicHistory.com. Categories on the website include American History, African History, Saints, Blessed Mother and Let's Meet...(interviews with inspirational Black Catholics). New material is produced and posted yearly. Teachers have access to the entire program and could utilize handouts as best fit to the particular need/ability of their students. Older students could access the material themselves if approved by faculty.

For additional information on how to become a part of the BlackCatholicHistory family of schools, contact:

Kaye Crawford, Th.M.
kayecrawford@blackcatholichistory.com

The *Parish Connection* is an official communication resource of the Office of Intercultural Ministries of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta. It is published quarterly and is used to inform parishes and organized immigrant Catholic communities throughout the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta about local, national and regional spiritual and social matters that are of particular interest and importance to Black Catholics and to Catholics in general.

We are always interested in what our readers think, and we welcome your opinions and thoughts about the newsletter in general or on specific articles and issues. If you would like to submit an editorial for publication in a future issue of the newsletter, please submit it in brief (300 words or less) and include your name, postal address, and daytime phone number. Please note that your submission may be edited for length and clarity.

Letters can be submitted via email to **Mr. Ashley Morris, Th.M. at amorris@archatl.com**

Subscriptions

The *Parish Connection* is available to parishioners of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta electronically via our archdiocesan website. Physical copies are also available for parishioners. If you would like a physical copy, please contact:

Graciela Mulero
404-920-7585
gmulero@archatl.com

or write to us using the following address:

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 Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta
 Attn: PC Subscription Request
 2401 Lake Park Dr.
 Smyrna, GA 30080

African & Caribbean Catholic Communities

African Catholic Community of St. Lawrence

Pat Okpala & Emika Ani: 770.895.5545

African Community of St. John Vianney

Lawrence Nnebe: lnnebe@hotmail.com

African Parishioners of St. Thomas the Apostle

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Cameroon Catholic Community

Fr. Henry Atem: henatem@yahoo.com

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Divine Grace

Justin Irie: 404.509.7213

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Joseph Ngi: 404.454.9605

Ethiopian Ge'ez Rite Community

Fr. Kidane Miriam: kid200918@yahoo.com

Francophone Catholic Movement of Atlanta

Joseph Ngi: 404.454.9605

Denis d'Almeida: 404.539.9821

Gambian Christian Organization

John Ndow: jjndown@gmail.com

Ghanaian Catholic Community

Peter Yaw Boateng-Poku: 404.427.5687

Haitian Catholic Community

Sunday Haitian Mass

at Sts. Peter and Paul at 1:30 p.m.

Contact the parish office: 404.241.5862

St. Josephine Bakhita

Catholic Faith Community

Thomas Fagbamiye: 678.230.2530

Kenyan Catholic Community

David Ndiba: 404.729.1857

Nigerian Community of St. Philip Benizi

Sebastian Ukpai: sebastianukpai@yahoo.com

Nigerian Igbo Catholic Community

Chris Okofor: coka@bellsouth.net





Corpus Chirsti Catholic Association of African Families

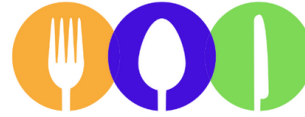
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