



# *Celebrating February as* **Black History Month**

## **St. Joseph Society of the Sacred Heart, Fathers and Brothers, aka the Josephites, Another Chapter of the Archdiocese of Baltimore Story**

*By Very Rev. Thomas Frank SSJ, Vicar General*

### Timeline:

- 1829 Foundation of the Oblate Sisters of Providence in Baltimore
- 1864 American Bishops from the Basilica of the Assumption in Baltimore request assistance from the Pope to evangelize and minister to the African American Community.
- 1866 Cardinal Vaughn founding the Mill Hill Josephites in England.
- 1870 The Declaration by Pope that St. Joseph was the Patron Saint of the Universal Church
- 1871 Mill Hill Josephites arrive in Baltimore in response to the American Bishops request to evangelize and minister to the African American Community.
- 1888 St. Joseph Seminary opened at St. Mary's St. and Pennsylvania Ave., Baltimore, MD.
- 1893 22 Mill Hill Josephites in the United States and Cardinal Vaughn writes requesting the Josephites to either return to Mill Hill and be foreign missionaries, form an American Religious Order or join an American diocese. Five remained, including Fr. Charles Uncles SSJ first African American Roman Catholic Priest ordained in the United States, to form a multi-racial religious community of men under the auspices of the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

- 1932 The Josephites were approved as a distinct Secular Institute of Apostolic Life under the auspices of the Vatican.

From its beginnings Josephites established parishes, schools and high schools because education was considered the primary key to social and economic opportunity and overcoming of racism. Throughout the South during the segregated Jim Crow years that after the Civil War, Josephites preached the Gospel, lived out the spiritual/corporal works of mercy, and with parishioners established food pantries and church credit unions, helped found the Knights of Peter Claver, participated in the Civil Rights to overcome segregation, engaged in community organizing efforts against bank red-lining, discrimination by labor unions, unequal funding of public schools, for voting rights, and equal housing. Josephites participated in Black Lives Matter efforts on behalf of the still unrealized goal of racial equality.

The Josephites hosted the National Office of Black Catholics, until the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops(USCCB) established a National Office. Bishop John Ricard SSJ former Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Baltimore played a major role in the establishment and growth of the National Black Catholic Congress and Pastoral Plan. National Catholic Conference for Interracial Justice(NCCIJ) was hosted at St. Joseph Seminary for many years. The Josephites established the Josephite Pastoral Center 50 years ago to support African American pastoral needs and leadership. By 1970 They were one of the American Catholic Church pioneers that started the Permanent Diaconate Formation programs for the Archdioceses of Baltimore and Washington, DC and the Diocese of Richmond, VA. Initiated to foster African American Pastoral Leadership by training and seeing ordained African American Permanent Deacons. In addition, for the past 40 years the Pastoral Center produced Josephite African American Catholic History and Art's Calendar. An enduring contribution was the founding in 1951 of St. Augustine High School for African American young men in New Orleans, LA. Alumni spread all over the nation have distinguished themselves in Ministry, Law, Higher Education and Public Service, Medicine and Music, Professional Athletics and Business.

In the last twenty years, the multi-racial Josephites have become international and added members from West/Central Africa, especially Nigeria after a lengthy relationship with the Missionaries of St. Paul whose ministry they initially sponsored in the United States. From five founding American Members in 1893 to the current 60 members, Josephites continue their relevant missionary

service to, with and for the African American Community from Baltimore, MD to Los Angeles, CA. May God grant us the blessings of vocations to the Josephites in the years to come until the day there is no need.