

National Black Catholic Seminarians Association



Attn. to Bro. Cursey J. Calais II, SSJ

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Dear Friends,

NBCSA Juneteenth Statement

On this day 156 years ago, the last African-American chattel slaves were freed in the United States, pursuant to General Order No. 3 issued in Texas by Gen. Gordon Granger of the Union Army.

On this day 156 years ago, there was no such thing as an openly Black Catholic priest in the US.

On this day 156 years ago, William Augustine Williams, the first openly African-American Catholic seminarian in history, was living in Baltimore, having returned from 8 years of priesthood studies in Rome, rendered null due to virulent racist opposition to his prospective ordination.

On this day 51 years ago, Black seminarians across the United States banded together to form what is now known as the National Black Catholic Seminarians Association, the group to which we now belong as members.

Among our number is the ancestry of slavery, unpaid toil and enduring faith, from which has sprung a well of vocation and purpose. Among us are also the sons of the motherland, those who have chosen to take up the yoke of service by laying all things behind, crossing the sea to achieve their goal of orders most holy.

We were founded in a time of upheaval, at the tail end of a movement that changed the Black Catholic Church forever, and the work of which is still yet to be completed. Like the Clergy Caucus, Sisters' Conference, and Deacons Association before us, we were founded for the purpose of Black uplift and Black liberation.

This past year has been one of Black abuse and Black suppression. Of fear and suspicion, violence and reprisal, darkness and confusion. Many await Juneteenth anew.

Some have said: where is the Church? Others haven't bothered to even ask. We, representing a fair portion of the Black seminarians in this country, feel compelled to say: "Here we are."

These were the words once on the lips of a prophet, and prophecy is truly the call of the Black Catholic today—especially the Black Catholic minister and minister-to-be. These are the words of a servant.

We, as the National Black Catholic Seminarians Association, stand with all those fighting for true freedom, and to confess that freedom in Christ compels us to speak out against hate, police brutality, state executions, voter suppression, racial terrorism, mass incarceration, misogynoir, misandrynoir, and the rank heresy of racism.

We—Africans, Americans, and African Americans—confess that we stand on a legacy of Black Catholic faith, resilience, ingenuity, resolve, and defiance. We remain in that balm, and aim to spread it to the world.

As we approach the altars of cathedrals nationwide, prepare to don holy ointment for the service of the Kingdom, and house ourselves in the bosom of the Magisterium, we implore our brother and sisters in faith to stand with us as we cry out: "Oh, *Freedom!*"

Sincerely,

Bro. Cursey J. Calais II, SSJ

President of NBCSA