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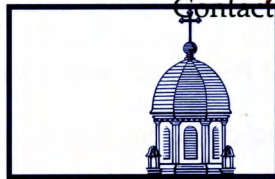
Black Catholic History Month Focuses Attention on One of Nation's Largest, Yet Under promoted, Groups of Christians

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NEWS RELEASE**BLACK CATHOLIC HISTORY MONTH FOCUSES ATTENTION
ON ONE OF NATION'S LARGEST, YET UNDERPROMOTED, GROUPS OF CHRISTIANS**

DAYTON, Ohio — Although there are as many black Catholics in the United States as there are Catholics in Ireland, St. Martin de Porres isn't as well-known as St. Patrick. African-Americans account for about 3 million of the nation's Catholics, yet their history and contributions to the Catholic church aren't widely celebrated.

Black Catholic History Month, celebrated in November, focuses attention on the nation's third-largest group of black Christians (behind Baptist and African Methodist Episcopal). At the University of Dayton, a weeklong celebration of community service, liturgy and music, lecture and discussion aims to raise awareness of the gifts of black people to the Church — from the African popes and theologians of the early church to the 200 million Catholics of African descent worldwide today.

"Pope Paul VI encouraged people of African descent to 'share your gift of blackness with the church.' Sharing our gift of blackness is what the celebration of Black Catholic History Month is all about," said the Rev. Paul Marshall, S.M., of the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, who will celebrate a liturgy in the African and African-American traditions at UD Nov. 3. "The appreciation of black life, culture and people is a part of being Catholic. Many non-black Catholics need this experience, and many non-white Catholics feel the necessity of offering their gift."

Nov. 3 celebrates the feast of St. Martin de Porres (1569-1639), the son of a Spanish knight and a Panamanian free woman of color. Martin, a lay brother of the Dominican order in

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Lima, Peru, cared for the sick without regard to race or social status and helped establish an orphanage and hospital for abandoned children. Known as the "father of charity," he is the patron saint of race relations and social justice.

"For a long time he was the only black saint on the church's calendar," Marshall said. "Because of his skin color he was allowed only to be a humble domestic brother. Yet, God used him to be the presence of Christ especially among the poor. ... His virtue and renown stood in direct contrast to the racism of his order and of his society," Marshall said.

UD events during Black Catholic History Month include:

- Nov. 1 and 2: Two days of community service at Founders Family Center, 1930 Fairport Ave. The Founders Family Center, a collaborative effort of eight Catholic religious orders, works to enhance the well-being and stability of families and neighborhoods in Northwest Dayton.
- Nov. 3: The feast of St. Martin de Porres, patron saint of race relations and social justice. A liturgy in the African and African-American traditions, celebrated by the Rev. Paul Marshall, S.M., of the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago and featuring the choir of St. James-Resurrection Parish in Dayton, will be held at 6 p.m. in the Sears Recital Hall in the Jesse Philips Humanities Center on campus.
- Nov. 4: "American Catholic Theology and the Race Question: 1925-1950" will be presented by Cecilia Moore, UD assistant professor of religious studies, at 7 p.m. in Sears Recital Hall. Moore, a representative from St. James-Resurrection Parish in Dayton to the Archdiocese of Cincinnati's Black Catholic History Month committee, has also written a series of bulletin inserts on black Catholic history being distributed this month in parishes.
- Nov. 6: A group of UD students, faculty and staff will take part in the Black Catholic History Month liturgy sponsored by the Archdiocese of Cincinnati at 1 p.m. at St. Peter in Chains Cathedral.

The UD observance of Black Catholic History Month includes a student discussion on what it means to a black Catholic student on a predominantly white campus.

For more information on activities, call Kathleen Henderson, office of diverse student populations, at (937) 229-3634.

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For media interviews, call **Cecilia Moore** at (937) 229-4449 and **the Rev. Paul Marshall, S.M.**, at (773) 324-8000 or by e-mail at pmarsh7461@aol.com.