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Mass to honor 3 prominent African-American nuns

November 16, 2013 12:08 AM



Sister Thea Bowman

By Peter Smith / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Roman Catholics will gather at St. Paul Cathedral in Oakland on Sunday to honor the legacies of three women whom some are promoting to be named the first African-American saints.

Bishop David Zubik will preside at the noontime Mass along with others who have participated for years in the Race and Reconciliation Dialogue Group involving the

cathedral and the parishes of Benedict the Moor and St. Charles Lwanga. Concelebrating will be the Revs. David Taylor, Carmen D'Amico and Kris Stubna.

"We are really excited" about the Mass, said Cecile Springer, who has long been involved in the efforts. Part of the racial reconciliation, she said, involved recognizing that while much of Catholic devotion focuses on European saints, they are not alone.

St. Augustine and his mother, Monica, are among many saints with African roots. But the three being honored Sunday are the first black women from the United States to be considered in the long process toward sainthood. Other American holy persons of color have also been objects of devotion, such as St. Kateri Tekakwitha, a 17th-century Native American who was canonized in 2012.

Those to be honored at the Mass are Mother Mary Elizabeth Lange, founder of the Oblate Sisters of Providence in 1829 in Baltimore, the first religious order for women of color; Sister Henriette DeLille, founder of the Sisters of the Holy Family in 19th-century New Orleans; and Thea Bowman, a 20th-century Franciscan Sister of Perpetual Adoration and a nationally known speaker, singer, liturgist and advocate of black spirituality who visited inspired Pittsburghers during visits here.

"We are delighted that we can celebrate the lives of these three holy women whose lives are now a source of inspiration to all of us in the Church and whose process of canonization can be assisted by our prayers," Father Stubna said.

A reception will be held in conjunction with the Mass, held at the cathedral at 108 N. Dithridge St.

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