



PARISH LIFE

Parishes across the Albany Diocese, from Athens to Wynant skill, share photos and news on recent events: Pages 12B

Vocations Views

A pastor speaks on his life during the "Year for Priests," as plans for a run to promote vocations gets underway: Page 3

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# THE EVANGELIST

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## GOOD FRIDAY CONTINUES



**THE SUFFERING OF** the people of the Haiti is far from over, as is indicated by men building improvised homes in Port-au-Prince. The coming rainy season threatens hundreds of thousands living in such flimsy shelters, and aid workers worry that the humanitarian crisis will only be compounded. (CNS photo/Eduardo Munoz, Reuters)

### RESURRECTION

## Haitians hope for country's renewal at Easter Mass

BY JESSICA STONE  
CATHOLIC NEWS SERVICE

Port-au-Prince, Haiti — Joel Samson showed up for Mass early Easter morning at what's left of Our Lady of the Assumption Cathedral in the center of the Haitian capital, just as he has on most Sundays for the last 16 years.

Joining about 250 faithful who gathered for the liturgy under a large white tarp in front of what was perhaps Haiti's best-known landmark to celebrate Christ's resurrection, Samson, 26, looked at the rose-colored walls of the cathedral.

It was hardly the church he has always known.

"Before the earthquake, it was

nice, really beautiful," Samson said of the cathedral. "But after what happened on January 12, everything has become bad inside. There's not even a seat for people."

### Passion time

The destruction of the cathedral symbolized the suffering of Good Friday to many of the worshippers. For them, suffering was nothing new.

Haiti is the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere. Throughout its history, despotic rulers have pillaged government structures and confiscated

HAITIANS HOPE FOR COUNTRY'S RENEWAL AT EASTER MASS, SEE PAGE 17

### BLACK CATHOLICS

## Talk to recall Sister Thea Bowman

BY BARBARA OLIVER  
CORRESPONDENT

Twenty years ago last week, Sister Thea Bowman lost her six-year battle with cancer. But the spirit of this educator, peacemaker and champion of human rights and Black Catholic culture continues to inspire people to shatter social barriers and achieve their human potential.

On April 15, her longtime friend Sister Charlene Smith, FSPA, will speak on the life and

legacy of Sister Thea at Siena College in Loudonville.

Sister Charlene is co-author with John Feister of the new biography "Thea's Song: The Life of Thea Bowman." The talk is sponsored by Siena's Franciscan Center for Catholic Studies and the Sister Thea Bowman Center for Women.

### Early life

The granddaughter of slaves, Sister Thea became the first African-American woman to

receive an honorary doctorate in religion from Boston College. This was a triumph for someone who had attended a substandard school in her segregated hometown of Canton, Miss.

Sister Thea went on to dedicate her life to providing educational opportunities to disadvantaged children. She was the first African-American woman to enter the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration (FSPA) in La Crosse, Wis.

Raised in a lively black Protestant tradition, Sister Thea early on was attracted to Catholicism and converted at the age of nine. Her parents had enrolled her in a school newly established by the Franciscan Sisters.

At age 15, when she told her parents that she wanted to join the Wisconsin-based religious order, her father tried to convince her to join an order of



SISTER CHARLENE (PHOTO COURTESY OF THEA COLLECTION, FSPA ARCHIVES)

TALK TO RECALL SISTER THEA BOWMAN, SEE PAGE 15



# Talk to recall Sister Thea Bowman

TALK TO RECALL SISTER THEA BOWMAN, FROM PAGE 1

African-American religious women in New Orleans. He told her that she would not be liked up north.

But Sister Thea's sense of determination and self-worth were already solid. She told her father that she would make people like her.

The spirit-filled gospel music and dance of her childhood became another part of the heritage she brought to Catholic prayer and worship, as she influenced Church leadership to accept the Black spiritual tradition as a valid expression of praise.

Sister Thea lectured across the country with a particular focus on the life of Black Catholics. She is immortalized in a stained glass window at St.

## GOSPEL INFLUENCE



Benedict the African Church on the south side of Chicago, along with other great women advancers of civil rights: Rosa Parks, Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth.

In an interview with The Evangelist, Sister Charlene shared a poignant memory of her friend: "When we were college students at Viterbo [University in Wisconsin] one summer, we were in a dramatic production workshop together.

"When we got to the makeup section, we decided to make each other up. We were in veils

at that time. I put white paint on her face and she put black on mine. We walked around that campus like that all day long and startled people. They didn't recognize me as black and her as white.

"This was a metaphor for her whole life. She was constantly trying to help people to see from another's perspective. It was a very amazing experience."

### Divine aid

Sister Charlene said Sister Thea knew she was entrusted with special gifts: "She knew

**IN SISTER THEA'S** last public writing, dictated three weeks before she died in 1990, she said of Holy Week: "Unless we personally and immediately are touched by suffering, it is easy to read Scripture and to walk away without contacting the redemptive suffering that makes us holy... Let us resolve to make this week holy by sharing holy peace and joy with the needy, the alienated, the lonely, the sick and afflicted, the untouchable. During this Holy Week when Jesus gave His life for love, let us truly love one another." Sister Charlene's talk will be April 15, 4 p.m., at Siena College's Key Auditorium. For information, call 782-6109. (CNS photo/Michael Hoyt)

she had been touched by the divine. She didn't know why it happened, but she knew she could touch people and help them to see things more clearly, differently — and she was going to do that for as long as she could."

Toward the end of her battle with cancer, Sister Thea remarked that she wanted to live fully until she died. Sister Charlene recalled the African-American spirituality which animated her friend's sense of mission.

"Her witness to the world," said the author, "was her reliance on a certain kind of wisdom and a redemptive power that came

through Black sacred song, because it was able to teach and inspire and challenge and transform everybody who was interested in walking together from here to heaven."

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