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**BLACK CATHOLIC EDUCATION FOUNDATION**

# SISTER thea bowman NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2017

## Forging a Different Path



My name is Ericson Lopez and I am an African-American student from Pawtucket, Rhode Island. Many have little hope for kids who come from this former mill town; for many, life is working full-time or attending community college. But I knew that I did not want to work long hours for little pay like my family and the people around me.

### ERICSON LOPEZ

I saw a different path for myself, a path of going to school, and becoming someone important. When I applied to Assumption I knew that it was the environment I wanted to be in to continue on my road to success. Upon acceptance, I realized that financial aid would barely pay half of tuition. This was my breaking point - all that I've done in 18 years felt like it was slipping away.

My dreams of earning a degree and attending Assumption seemed out of reach. I soon called my old manager and told him I was not going anywhere that I was ready for work. That night I cried not a sad cry but a hopeless cry - a cry for help, a cry for a ladder outside thick walls of dreadful labor. My parents kept trying though. They called and called and never gave up. I believed that there was no way of going to Assumption, until September 6th.

My father received a call from Assumption informing him that there was one more scholarship for which I was eligible, the Sr. Thea Bowman Scholarship. The feelings that went through my body were unexplainable, my blood rushed through my body like a waterfall. I did not know how to process this and most importantly, I did not know how this was possible. This scholarship not only provided me with a bridge to continue my education, but a life lesson. That even at the last straw, you must never give up. The Sr. Thea Bowman scholarship is the only reason that I am at Assumption College.



**FRANCESCO C. CESAREO, PH.D.**

## From the President

Family is central to the celebration of Christmas because God chose to manifest Himself to the world in the context of a family. The love God has for His creation gave birth to His Son within a family. God could have manifested Himself in so many countless ways, yet He chose to come among us and take on flesh in the form of a baby entrusted to the loving care of Mary and Joseph, two simple people whose faithful love to and for one another allowed them to open their hearts to receive the greatest of gifts. At that moment, Mary and Joseph put aside their concerns, needs, worries, and doubts, even if for a little while, and with loving trust a family came into being, with all its moments of challenge, imperfections, love and hope. Hence, the family is central to Christmas.

Besides recalling our own family, Christmas also affords us the opportunity to recognize the broader communities to which we belong, whether at school, work, or organizations. These communities can also sustain and support us in ways similar to families. This is certainly true of the Sr. Thea Bowman Foundation and the students who become part of the Foundation's family. While the Foundation and its partner colleges and universities provide scholarships that open educational opportunities to its recipients, it is much more than money. The Foundation offers love and hope to these students in the same way a family does by providing for their physical, emotional, and spiritual needs. What motivates the Foundation is love – love for the students it supports despite the challenges they have encountered or the circumstances from which they come. That love is grounded in the fact that we are all brothers and sisters in Christ who came into the world that first Christmas to show us how to love. Just as Christ's birth brought hope to a fallen world, so too the Foundation gives hope to these students as their lives are transformed by the education and spiritual formation they receive.

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## In Their Own Words: Meet the Scholarship Recipients From Loss to Understanding & Success



JUSTIN DUMAS

My time as a university student has not been easy, but this fact has proven the importance of the college experience. As a high school student, I spent years struggling to find balance and academic inspiration. So, when I was accepted to Duquesne University it marked an opportunity to redefine myself as a student.

Just before the start of my freshman year, I was forced to endure devastating news, the passing of my mother. I began my first year with a confluence of emotions: frustrated and anxious, but inspired nonetheless. Losing such an important person sparked what would become a burning desire for understanding.

Through my first few semesters I fought to find direction for my studies, but also met people who would grow into my closest friends. We cultivated strong relationships that encouraged discussion of new ideas and perspectives of the world. At this point, I encountered the Sister Thea Bowman Foundation. I saw many similarities between how Sr. Thea had touched the world and how my mother, as a woman

of deep faith, had touched the people around her. Shortly after, my aunt became an art teacher at Sister Thea Bowman Middle School in Pittsburgh. It became clear that forces beyond myself were helping to build resources – and inspiration – for my education.

School had come to offer me great connections with others, and a means to pursue understanding in the world. I fell in love with words, language, information, and Scripture alike. The Foundation certainly helped to fuel my pursuit of insight. This, coupled with a lifetime interest in the arts, helped me to find an academic identity. For the first time, my life passions and my studies became one in the same.

While my time as a student at Duquesne was far from perfect, it did change and encourage me as a person. I graduate having been challenged and affirmed, but mostly instilled with gratitude. Thank you for the means to pursue understanding beyond myself, for the people I have met, and the person I have become.

## Foundation to Honor Messengers of Matrimony

At this year's Annual Scholarship Dinner (see back page for more information), the Sr. Thea Bowman Foundation will honor Terri and Andrew Lyke, founders of the Arusi Network, a nonprofit organization that educates African-Americans on the skills and benefits of Christian marriage. Through the Arusi Network, they have served thousands of married couples through their programs.

The Lykes have served as advisors to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Marriage and Family and from 2011 to 2015 Andrew was the Director of the Office for Black Catholics in the Archdiocese of Chicago. In that role he founded and published the monthly online magazine *The Drum: The Beat of Black Catholic Chicago*. He also hosted the weekly radio show *God's Praises Tell: The Voice of Black Catholics*. As the Coordinator of Marriage Ministry for the Archdiocese, a role he served from 1999 to 2009, he was the principle author of *In the Spirit of Cana, the Marriage Ministry Guidelines* for the Archdiocese of Chicago.

They are also authors of a recently published book, *Marriage on a Lampstand: Exploring a New Paradigm for*

*Modern Christian Marriage*. In the book's foreword, Shawnee Daniels-Sykes, Ph.D., associate professor of theology and ethics at Mount Mary University shares, "married for 41 years, this book bears the fruits of their labor as they focused on a Healthy Marriage Initiative Project. In their new book, I find that Lyke and Lyke

offer new strategies for effective ministerial outreach to families from their seasoned experiences as marriage ministry educators and pioneers in marriage ministry."

The authors state, "This book is written at a critical time in Catholic Marriage and Family Ministry with the unprecedented collaboration between the National Association of Catholic Family Life Ministers, the National Association of

Black Catholic Administrators, the National Black Catholic Congress, the Black and Indian Mission Office, and Arusi Network. Though we are only at the ground floor of that collaboration, we are hopeful about its fruits."

To order a copy of their new book, please visit <http://www.arusi.org>.



### From the President Continued

As we celebrate this Christmas season and the Holy Family at the heart of this season, we are grateful for all those who make up the Thea Bowman Foundation family – our Director, Mary Lou Jennings, trustees, benefactors, partner colleges and universities, and most especially the students whose lives are touched and who are at the heart of all that we do. May you all be filled with the graces and blessings

come from the birth of Christ this Christmas and throughout the New Year.

Merry Christmas!

Francesco C. Cesareo, Ph.D.

President, Assumption College

Board President, Sr. Thea Bowman Foundation



## Guided by Faith and Love



I have been a Sr. Thea Bowman student for three years. My story begins in January 2014, when I received an acceptance

**BRIANNA TODD** letter for the pre-pharmacy program at Duquesne University. Despite a rewarding first semester at college, during the second semester, I ran into a problem: lack of money. Having to work two jobs and without any other source of income I soon came to the conclusion that I wouldn't be able to stay at Duquesne. The jobs interrupted my studies, and overall made life difficult for me. All of that changed when the Financial Aid Office helped me apply for the Sr. Thea Bowman Scholarship. Thanks to this Scholarship, I could continue my pursuit of a college degree and I dropped one of my jobs so that I could devote more time to my studies.

Two years later, as a junior, I was well on my way to graduating with a bachelor of science

in chemistry. However, on Easter 2016 I discovered I was pregnant, and soon after, homeless due to living in dorms. I was lost and helpless, but through the counseling from my mentors in the Sr. Thea Bowman Foundation, I was introduced to the Aid for Women. This organization generously provided housing, parenting classes as well as the opportunity to earn my degree. Aid for Women housed me at one of their residential programs called Heather's House. I was provided counseling and life skills classes to make me a better parent to my son. This organization also incorporated into its programs teachings of the Catholic faith – it gave me hope as I prayed for strength to stay strong and determined. Similar to the Sr. Thea Bowman Foundation at Duquesne, I was able to network and connect with mothers going through similar situations as myself. Currently I am attending DePaul University and will be able to graduate with my degree in chemistry. Without the Sr. Thea Bowman Foundation I would not have been able to provide my son a life better than my own.

## No Challenge is Insurmountable

My name is Autumn Bishop. I'm a single mother of three wonderful children. Kevin, my oldest, is 16 and has special needs. Amaya is thirteen and Ailani, my youngest, is 7. Over these last 16 years I have managed to graduate high school and earn an associate degree while trying to balance my responsibilities as a mother. Strongly influenced by my Catholic faith, I wanted to choose a school with a religious component. I entered La Roche College a few years ago and did well until I ran out of funds. I felt hopeless. I had worked so hard to set and pursue my educational goals, and this obstacle seemed insurmountable. Life continued, but I was stagnant, desperately searching for a way to interrupt the cycle of poverty that had plagued my family for generations. One day I ran into an old friend. She was also a single mother and expressed her elation



**AUTUMN BISHOP**

as she told me about enrolling in Duquesne University. She shared that if it weren't for the Sister Thea Bowman Black Catholic Education Scholarship, she would not have the opportunity to pursue a college degree. My feelings of stagnation and desperation transitioned to happiness for

her and hope for my own future.

I now have an opportunity to lead by example and serve as a role model for other single mothers and most importantly, my children. Soon, I will reenroll at La Roche to finish my bachelor's degree in psychology. The road has been rough, but I can finally see the light at the end thanks to the Scholarship and its generous donors. I'm so grateful to have been a part of the Foundation and I look forward to giving back in gratitude for what has been given to me. They have taught me never to give up and reminded me that God always makes a way.



**MARY LOU JENNINGS**  
executive director

For more than 28, the Sister Thea Bowman Foundation has placed and graduated students in Catholic higher education at partner institutions across the country. While we are a national foundation, the efforts of

the Foundation have been centered in and around Pennsylvania with Pittsburgh being our home. Within the last year, however, our ministry has begun to embrace young African-Americans living in and around Chicago. With the help of Fr. Dennis Holtschneider, CM, President of DePaul University, and many other individuals, the Foundation now finds itself with a second home. Presently, we have one student at Loyola University of Chicago and another student beginning her studies at DePaul University in January. Yet another student living in Chicago has decided to attend Duquesne University in Pittsburgh.

The Foundation is focused upon the intellectual formation of its students and their spiritual formation. To strengthen the latter, we are beginning a Catholic African-American spiritual formation program in January 2017 under the guidance of Teri and Andrew Lyke, two prominent Catholic teachers and authors who knew Sr. Thea. Their focus will center on helping our students discern their vocation through marriage by teaching them about relationships, love, commitment, and the beauty of matrimony. Those who learn from them develop a new understanding of self and the gift of self as it is applied to marriage. This was something important to Sister Thea Bowman, who taught me this lesson many years ago.

In the summer of 1984, Sr. Thea and I discussed the mission and ministry of a Foundation that would bear her name and carry forward her legacy. Sr. Thea was not only a brilliant woman, but also a woman of wisdom, which was expressed clearly in the mission she envisioned for the students who would be served by the Foundation. She articulated this mission simply, yet profoundly in these words to me, and in her wisdom she expressed to me her thesis of mission for our students: "Walk with us. Don't walk behind us and don't walk in front of us; walk with us." Her words inspired me to reflect deeply on the beauty, on the genius and on the culture of each African-American young person we are asked to inspire. It called for a deep understanding of each student with the development of an attitude to listen. With every passing day it is my hope that all of us working within this Foundation will always make an attempt to take each student where they are and to listen to them so that we can walk with them and understand their God-given genius.

With this writing, I share with President Cesareo my best wishes and prayers for a holy and blessed Christmas. Our Lord comes to us in a very special way as we celebrate this beautiful feast of the Incarnation and it is during this time of light and hope in Christ that all of us here within the Sr. Thea Bowman Foundation express to you our gratitude for the many examples of light and the hope that you have given to our young African American students through Catholic higher education.



# Save the Date

Save the Date – Annual Scholarship Dinner, Pittsburgh, March 23, 2017

The Sr. Thea Bowman Foundation will host its 21st Annual Scholarship Dinner at the East Club Lounge at Heinz Field in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania on Thursday, March 23, 2017. Cocktail hour begins at 5:30 p.m., dinner at 6:30 p.m.

Attorney John McGinley will serve as this year's Honorary Chair. McGinley, a graduate of St. Bonaventure, served on its Board of Trustees, including a term as chair from 2004 to 2012. He holds a law degree from the Duquesne School of Law and is synonymous with many charitable endeavors that benefit the Church and the faithful.



JOHN MCGINLEY



Sometimes people think they have to do big things in order to make change. but if each one would light a candle, we'd have a tremendous light.  
-Sr. Thea Bowman

## GIVE HOPE

Thank you for your past support of the Sr. Thea Bowman Scholarship Fund and the students the Fund supports. Donations of any amount are welcome – and encouraged – to provide financial resources for African-American students to pursue their goal of a college education.

### DONATE BY MAIL:

Please make a check payable to Sister Thea Bowman Foundation and mail to:  
Sister Thea Bowman Foundation  
c/o Mary Lou Jennings  
Executive Director  
4870 Woodridge Drive  
Hermantown, MN 58811

THANK YOU FOR GIVING  
THE GIFT OF HOPE!

You may also donate online at  
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