



# CATHOLIC COURIER

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## Sectional success

Aquinas Institute nips McQuaid Jesuit in a memorable Section 5 hockey final; and three diocesan basketball teams reach the sectional Final Four to highlight a busy weekend of high school sports. Pages 8-9.

## African Saints

St. Augustine of Hippo  
*Doctor of the Church*

St. Monica

Pope St. Victor I

St. Anthony of Egypt

*father of Christian  
monasticism*

St. Athanasius  
*Doctor of the Church*

St. Perpetua

St. Felicity

St. Benedict the Moor

Pope St. Miltiades

Pope St. Gelasius I

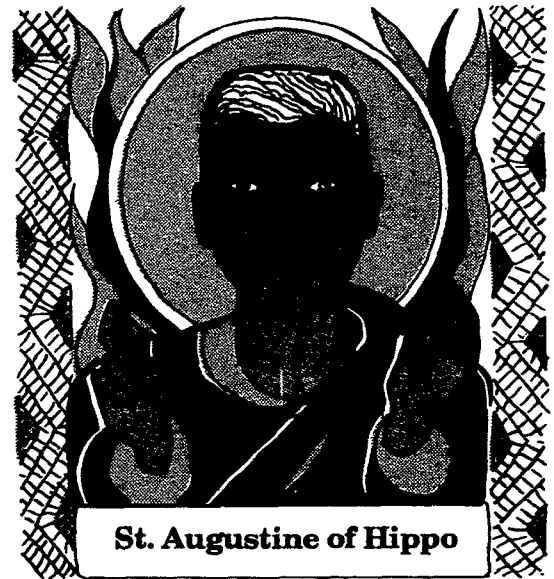
St. Cyril

*Doctor of the Church*

St. Moses the Black

St. Maurice

St. Cyprian



St. Augustine of Hippo

## Church roots run deep into Africa's fertile soil

By Lee Strong, Senior staff writer

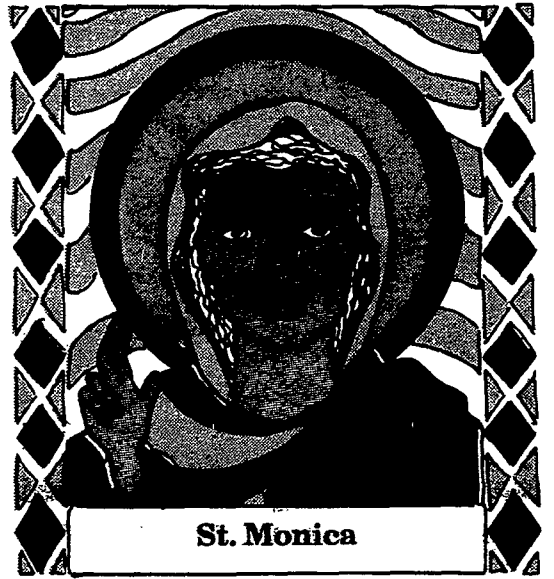
The above list is a veritable litany of saints who have left their mark on the Catholic Church — a mark the church feels to this day in such fields as monasticism, theology, social ministry and governance.

It is the litany of African saints — and it is only a partial list.

Some of these saints were black, some of mixed race and some, though of African birth, were of undetermined race.

Among them are martyrs, popes, doctors of the church, theologians, slaves and members of the nobility.

Many of these saints were key players in the church's formation during its first few centuries — a time when Catholic communities flourished in North Africa, Egypt, Nubia and Ethiopia, and when Carthage and Egyptian Alexandria were major centers of Christianity.



St. Monica

Each year during February — observed as Black History Month — the contributions and heritage of African Americans are recognized and remembered.

But many American Catholics — including the approximately 2.3 million black American Catholics — are unaware of the strong and deep African heritage in the Catholic Church.

"People are shocked when they find out, and I mean black people and white people," noted Jacquelyn Dobson, who, as director of the diocesan Office of Black Ministries, finds a constant need to educate fellow Catholics about black-Catholic history.

"These are people who grew up in Catholic schools learning about the saints, and never being told they were black," Dobson continued.

But when black Catholics learn about these saints and their impact on the church, "You see a real sense of pride," she added.

Awareness of African influence on the church has become known largely through the efforts of black Catholics, noted Beverly Carroll, executive director of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Black Catholics.

"It wasn't until black Catholics began to point out that a piece of history is being overlooked" that black Catholic history began to emerge, Carroll said in a telephone interview with the *Catholic Courier*.

Father Cyprian Davis, OSB, is one of the central figures in the rediscovery of black

Catholic heritage, Carroll said. His 1990 book, *The History of Black Catholics in the United States*, provided a scholarly basis for examining the past, she observed. "Heretofore, we never had a text that gave us information."

Speaking from his office at St. Meinrad Archabbey in St. Meinrad, Ind., Father Davis explained to the *Catholic Courier* that the work of rediscovering the African heritage of the Catholic Church began in the late 19th century with a series of five national black Catholic lay congresses.

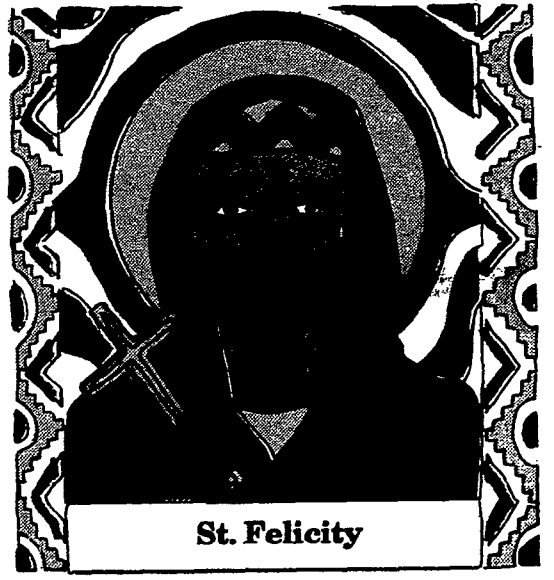
"When I first began to learn about the black Catholic congresses and the men who organized them, I found it amazing that laymen were taking the initiative," noted Father Davis, who teaches church history at the Archabbey. "They were taking the initiative because they were proud to be Catholics and because they believed that the racism in the Catholic Church had to cease."

These 19th-century leaders looked back to the early church, Father Davis said, observing, "They would speak of St. Cyril of Alexandria, St. Augustine, St. Monica as their progenitors. The significance for me was that they were doing exactly what other ethnic groups in the U.S. were doing — discovering their heritage."

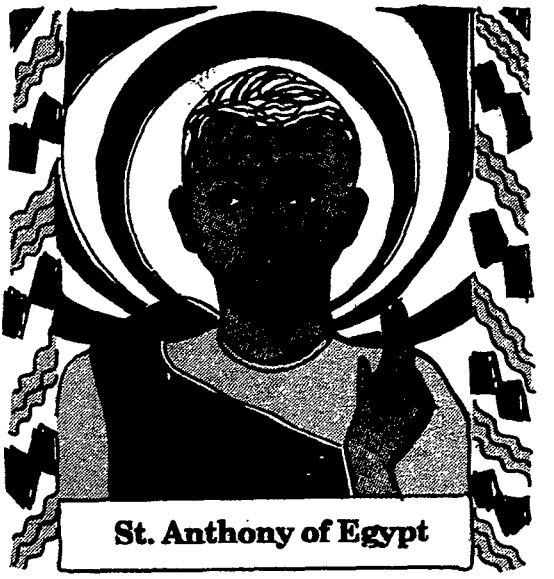
Carroll speculated that the reason this heritage was not widely known — and remains generally unknown even today — is that the information was suppressed.

"I don't know of any history books, any rel-

Continued on page 14



St. Felicity



St. Anthony of Egypt

Illustrations by Mary Kay Williams