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Illustration by Steve Erspamer, SM, from *A Retreat With Thea Bowman and Bede Abram: Leaning on the Lord*, by Joseph A. Brown, SJ. Used by permission of the artist and St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1615 Republic Street, Cincinnati, Ohio 45210.

## Black leaders' legacies live

Just thinking of Sister Thea Bowman puts a smile on Mary Coley's face.

The parishioner of Immaculate Conception Church in Rochester noted in a Feb. 17 interview that she had woken up that day not feeling well — perhaps due to the lupus she has.

"I thought I'd stay in bed all day," she said. "Then I thought of her ... she managed to sing and just live every day and be happy. Yeah, that made me get up."

Sister Thea Bowman, a Franciscan Sister of Perpetual Adoration, the order's only black nun, died of cancer at 52 in March 1990. In constant pain her last two years, she continued to teach from a wheelchair and from bed. Today her memory is kept alive through studies and such events as diocesan retreats the Office of Black Ministries presents — which Coley has attended.

Jacqueline Dobson, office director, plays Sister Bowman. A friend, Arthur Brown, plays the late Father Bede Abram, OFM

Conv. The first black priest in the Franciscan Province of St. Anthony of Padua, he died at 49, a year after his friend and colleague Sister Bowman. The characters are retreat "directors."

"They are people worthy of being celebrated in terms of their belief systems, their philosophies," Dobson said. "They were two people who very much embraced what I embrace — that is, a phrase coined in 1984, 'authentically black, truly Catholic.'"

That phrase comes from "What We Have Seen and Heard," a pastoral letter on evangelization issued that year by the 10 U.S. black Catholic bishops. In the letter, they stated that liturgical celebration in the black Catholic community "should be authentically black. It should be truly Catholic."

### Traveling pulpits

Such celebrations were a mission of both Sister Bowman and

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STORY BY KATHLEEN SCHWAR