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Ordained in 1886, Fr. Augustus Tolton, a former slave, is considered the first known black Catholic priest in the U.S. (CNS/Archdiocese of Chicago Archives)



by Dan Morris-Young

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Award-winning reporter [Caitlin Yoshiko Kandil](#) deftly outlines the challenges and realities of [securing African-American priest candidates](#) in the Los Angeles Archdiocese and in the process, the former U.S. Fulbright scholar also provides an overview of black clergy in the U.S. church.

Deaf since age 12, Melanie Paul of [St. Joseph Parish](#) in Hampton, Virginia, overcame her disability to not only have a successful career as a guidance counselor, but to [reach out to others in multiple ways](#) including overseeing animal-assisted therapy in health care settings for nearly two decades. The first deaf person to graduate from [William and Mary College](#), Paul is also an award-winning photographer and [expert daffodil grower](#).



Young Hailey McConnell is enamored with animal-therapy Shetland Sheepdog Lothair at Langley Air Force Base in Virginia. Melanie Paul, right, brings therapy dogs to the hospital once a week. (CNS/ The Catholic Virginian/Jennifer Neville)

[Parish-level and other grass-roots implementation](#) of Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical on climate change and care of the Earth, "*Laudato Si'*, On Care for Our Common Home," will be the focus of a series of conferences collaboratively offered by [Creighton University](#) and the [Catholic Climate Covenant](#) on the Jesuit university's Omaha, Nebraska campus. The first will be June 27-29.

[St. Mary Parish](#) in Opelika, Alabama, is taking a special collection as well as reaching out to victims of the powerful tornados that devastated Lee County, Alabama, a parish official told NCR. The monster storms made landfall March 3 about 20 minutes from the parish, killing at least two dozen people. Likewise, [St. Michael Parish](#) in nearby Auburn has put out requests for gift cards "of any amount" to aid storm victims. Archbishop Thomas Rodi of Mobile, Alabama, [issued a statement](#) March 4 asking "for prayers for those who lost their lives and for their loved ones, as well as for those who have lost homes and businesses." He said Catholic Social Services of the archdiocese had "reached out to the pastors of the affected areas."

While parishes across the country are taking part in a [new small-group program](#) addressing the church sexual abuse scandal, the Diocese of Allentown, Pennsylvania*, has encouraged the use of "[Healing Our Church](#)" for all its parishes during Lent. The six-week program was developed by [Renew International](#) which has been promoting small-group parish renewal since the 1970s.

An act of vandalism at [Holy Family-St. Thomas Aquinas Parish](#) in Brooklyn involving a statue of the Virgin Mary is being [investigated as a hate crime](#).

[St. Clare of Assisi Parish](#) in Coquitlam, British Columbia, hosted an annual Archdiocese of Vancouver youth office event, [Freedom](#), on March 8. The two-decade-old program seeks to make the Sacrament of Reconciliation more accessible to the 200-300 young people who attend. More than a dozen priests typically take part.

[Dan Morris-Young is NCR's West Coast correspondent. His email address is dmyoung@ncronline.org.]

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**This story has been updated to correct the diocese.*

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