



The Georgia Bulletin

1963 **50** YEARS 2013

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THE MARCH ON WASHINGTON



PHOTO BY MICHAEL ALEXANDER

Charles Prejean stands in front of Louis Delsarte's "Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Mural" at the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site in Atlanta. Prejean, director of the Office for Black Catholic Ministry, attended the 1963 March On Washington with others from St. Paul the Apostle Church in Lafayette, La.

After 50 years, remembering historic civil rights march

Archbishop Gregory, Charles Prejean reflect on "dream" | Pages 2-3

Pope denounces atrocities, calls for peace in Syria



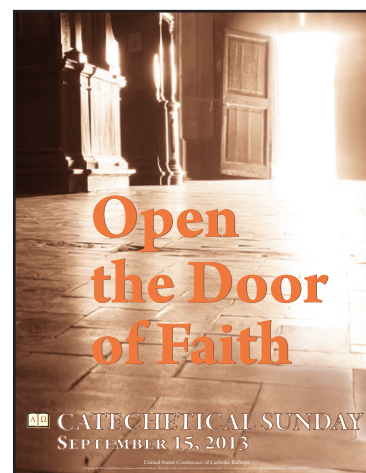
CNS PHOTO/AMMAR ABDULLAH, REUTERS

Civilians watch as workers remove debris and search rubble for casualties at building hit by shelling in the Bustan al-Qasr district of Aleppo, Syria, Aug. 21. Anti-government activist reported an upswing in attacks by forces loyal to President Bashar Assad and accused him of launching a gas attack that killed hundreds of people.

IN RESPONSE TO ongoing civil unrest in Syria, including a horrific chemical gas attack on civilians Aug. 16 that killed innocent women and children and bystanders, the U.S., along with other countries around the world, is weighing an appropriate response. Pope Francis called for the fighting to stop and asked the crowd there to pray that Mary, queen of peace, would intercede to stop the fighting. He said that the "terrible images ... push me once again to raise a voice so that the roar of the weapons would stop." **FULL STORY, PAGE 4**

Catholics head back to CCD

AS PARISH SCHOOLS of religion around the archdiocese open with the start of the school year, Amy Daniels, head of the Office of Formation and Discipleship, gave *The Georgia Bulletin* an in-depth interview about catechesis and faith formation. **FULL STORY, PAGE 14**



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Faith Formation: How to find true happiness and more

Gambian community connects through Sang Marie Page 10



New stewardship director in place Page 12

March set direction for his life's work

BY GRETCHEN KEISER

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Attending the March on Washington 50 years ago solidified the commitment of 22-year-old Charles Prejean to make "human betterment" his life's work. Prejean, 72, the director of the Office for Black Catholic Ministry, looks back on hearing Dr. Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech and the unfinished goals of the march.

How did you get to go to the March on Washington?

In 1963, I was 22 years old. I had just finished my summer session in college (at the University of Southwestern Louisiana in Lafayette). I was a senior. ... A former assistant pastor at my church, Father Albert McKnight, CSSP, and I remained very good friends. ... We worked in adult education programs and in starting a credit union as a source of loans for poor people who had trouble obtaining loans from local banks, especially black folks. ... We decided to go to Washington for the march. ... My younger brother, Fredrick, made a fuss about going and our parents let him go. We brought him and two other young parishioners in their late teens. We got there the day before. The priest had made arrangements for us to stay in a gym at a Catholic school, I believe. We slept on a mat on the floor.

What was it like that day?

We were all excited. The activism in the community was just beginning. The NAACP was being more vocal about voting rights. ... High school students were becoming more vocal about having demonstrations (against segregated facilities). We had had a demonstration at a local five and dime store. There was a groundswell of hope. (The Supreme Court decision) *Brown v. the Board of Education* had passed in 1954. Desegregation was beginning. The local college I was attending had just a few years before opened its doors to blacks. ... We still didn't play varsity football or even intramural sports. It was only partially desegregated.

... We never dreamed we could

have an opportunity to go to Washington for this event. We had heard about Dr. King and his work. ... We got up very early so we could get over there to get a decent place. ... We were still about 50 to 100 feet away from the podium. We were along the reflecting pool as it starts just off the Lincoln Memorial. There were microphones so we could hear all the speeches: John Lewis; the singing; of course, Dr. King's "Dream Speech." It was a very electric, very exciting moment for people. There were people everywhere. Folks were happy, joyous, kind to each other. There was no ruckus going on. Folks were excusing themselves if they bumped into you. There was a friendly atmosphere there.

I felt we were part of something historic that was happening. This was sort of like a culmination, the gathering together for jobs and freedom. We felt it was part of what was happening around the nation. ... We all came from poor communities. We knew things had to change. We were hopeful that things would change. I was hopeful when we got back, the college would be completely integrated. ... Even the younger ones felt there was a better future for them.

To a certain extent, some of that came true. We think there was a correlation with the passage of the following year of the Civil Rights Act. The Voting Rights Act was certainly impacted by the "I Have a Dream" speech.

Dr. King was certainly the motivational person, the right person at the right time to lead the movement itself. ... As Catholics, we didn't hear that type of rousing homily at that time. ... We were very impressed with that type of rhetoric and very moved by it. He was saying some terrific things. We weren't asking for anything exceptional. We were asking for what was normal as part of the human estate. What we wanted was what God intended for us. To hear a man of God, a preacher, say those things just confirmed what we all thought—God was on our side.

It was a different time. There was an electricity in the air. What was happening was in a sense a culmination of what happened over the years. It was a culmi-

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Charles Prejean

nation of efforts over time, over centuries.

How did it impact your life?

I think it confirmed in me a goal that I had, which was to work for human betterment. I had gone to the seminary first with that in mind. When I left the seminary, after determining God was calling me to be a layperson, I made some steps in that direction. ... That experience encouraged me and motivated me even more in that direction. I finished my undergraduate work and taught in a Catholic school for two and a half years. I was also volunteering in the evenings for a cooperative development. I was able to come in as a full-time person in a Lafayette community cooperative, the Southern Consumers Cooperative ... The cooperative business model gave ownership to its members and other benefits, that is, farmers benefited from economies of scale in purchasing and also marketing. ... The March on Washington was for "jobs and freedom." We, in our group, were more influenced by the emphasis on jobs and economic development. ... There were other folks doing similar things in the South and trying to raise funds. Interestingly, a number of us were soliciting support from some of the same foundations. These thought we could benefit from collaborating with each other so they asked the Southern Regional Council, a



CNS PHOTO/COURTESY OF LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Demonstrators walk with placards during the March on Washington Aug. 28, 1963.

progressive Southern organization, to convene a meeting for us. As a result of this, we, community groups working to develop cooperative enterprises in a number of Southern states, created a regional organization that we called the Federation of Southern Cooperatives (FSC). Its mission was to provide training and technical and marketing assistance and some financial assistance to those who were just starting cooperatives. Many were poor people just coming together. I served on the board of this organization and as its first chairperson. We didn't have any money to pay an executive director so the other members of the board of FSC asked me to get things started. I moved to Atlanta in January 1968. A few months later we received some grant money, sufficient enough to pay me a salary and bring my family here. ... As the executive director of FSC, I managed an operation that at one time had 110 cooperative members spread out over 11 Southern states with a budget of several million dollars. ... The organization still exists.

What is your perspective now?

Looking back from the perspective of 50 years, I've seen some changes. We can now boast of a more egalitarian society. More blacks are taking advantage of educational opportunities, as well as making advances in the business and professional community. At the same time, there are negative things still out there hindering

blacks from improving their conditions. For example, the recent voter suppression laws that some state governments are passing, and the recent Supreme Court nullification of a part of the Voting Rights Act, all seem to be efforts to restrict voting participation, particularly for blacks and other minorities. We made some gains and now these gains are being taken away. ...

Our democratic principles are goals and we are moving in the direction of realizing those principles. These are the ideals that we strive for. Human beings are good and bad. Sometimes the sinfulness in us affects the realization of those principles. Even in the absence of racism, I think you would have these struggles.

... I was drawn to the nonviolent principles. I thought love was a stronger force than hate and eventually it would prevail. It's important to look on the March on Washington in those ways: Dr. King's adherence to Gandhian nonviolent principles. Those are the principles that will change conditions. Those are the principles Christ taught us: Love of God and love of neighbor are our two greatest commandments. They are nonviolent principles. They are certainly Christian principles. There is still something to be learned by reflecting on that 50 years later.

The full interview is available at www.georgiabulletin.org

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Archbishop: Many 'great souls' advanced civil rights movement

ATLANTA—On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the historic March on Washington, Archbishop Wilton D. Gregory answered these questions from *The Georgia Bulletin* about its significance and his reflections as a Catholic and African-American then and now.

What is your memory of the original March on Washington, where you were, and how acutely aware you were of it and of Rev. Martin Luther King's speech at that time?

I was 15 years old and preparing to enter my junior year at the High School Seminary in Chicago (Quigley Prep Seminary South). While I did not travel to D.C. for the event, I was riveted at the television coverage. I realized that history was being made and the speech was thrilling to hear as it touched upon so many universal desires of people of color and of all those who had long worked for justice and equality. The speech itself was the crown of a drama that had been playing out across our nation in both the South and the North.

Although you grew up in the north, in Chicago, not under Jim Crow laws, did you experience discrimination in daily life there in the 1960s? Did you experience discrimination within the Church as a seminarian and young priest?

Dr. King once described the hatred and venom that he encountered at a protest march in a Chicago suburb as the most violent that he had ever experienced. The racism in the North was absolutely present, although not institutionalized as in the South. (Chicago) Cardinal (Joseph) Bernardin—a son of the South—once told me that he believed that racial harmony and friendship would occur much more quickly in the South than in the North because the institution of segregation was a public reality, whereas racial discrimination in the North was more concealed and surreptitious. It was the difference of treating a cancer that was self-contained and one that had metastasized and was more subversive.

I did encounter discrimination as a seminarian and as a young priest. Nevertheless, I also was fortunate enough to have discovered people who were brave enough to change, to undergo a transformation in attitudes, to experience *metanoia*. Some of my classmates had never experienced a black person before; some had few encoun-

ters of any people beyond their own ethnic enclaves. We were only 13 years old when we met and had a lot to learn about life. Some of them occasionally said things that were offensive, rude and insulting to me and to other kids who came from different backgrounds. However, when we encountered each other as individuals, there was an opportunity to discover just how much we had in common—contrary to what they may have learned in their homes and neighborhoods. My first two assignments (as a deacon and a newly ordained priest) were in economically upscale, wonderful suburban communities and I must say that there were a few unpleasant occasions, but in a short time, there developed a love and an affection between the people and me that remains a strong bond even today. Racism, after all, is built upon ignorance and unfamiliarity. When we encounter other people as people with their diversity intact, and not merely seeing them like ourselves, racism is often quashed.

Between 1963 and today, how has your understanding of the importance of Rev. King and the civil rights movement deepened?

The civil rights movement was much larger than any single individual—even Dr. King himself—since its success was dependent upon the witness of thousands of courageous individuals, some of whom gave their own lives as the price of its worth. Dr. King appeared on the horizon of history with his unique gifts that enabled him to articulate the aspirations of black people and all those who labored for justice and freedom. He, along with all of the great souls who spoke, wrote, sat-in, endured water hoses and vicious dogs, gave what little financial support that they had, opened their homes in welcome and their hearts in support to people who rode buses and walked for freedom, and, above all, those who died for the civil rights are the legacy of this great moment of freedom. The civil rights

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movement is a testimony of the courage of a pantheon of martyrs from Medgar Evers, to Malcolm X, to Viola Liuzzo, to James Chaney, Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman, to the little girls who died in the church bombing in Birmingham, to Dr. King and thousands of unnamed others. Those names punctuated my youth as the civil rights movement advanced toward freedom.

Dr. King's words: "I have a dream" and all people being judged "not by the color of their skin but by the content of their character" have entered American consciousness. There is still a gap between that vision and reality. Where would you evaluate that progress has been made? What is a high priority in your mind to address today?

We have made unquestioned progress on many fronts, including in the political arena, but we now face other challenges in the pursuit of justice. Violence against all forms of life has persisted, if not increased. We may no longer lynch people, but we euthanize the unwanted, experiment with fledgling human life, kill those we deem dangerous and expendable, we slaughter those within the womb as a perverted expression of freedom. We could certainly learn powerful lessons from nonviolence

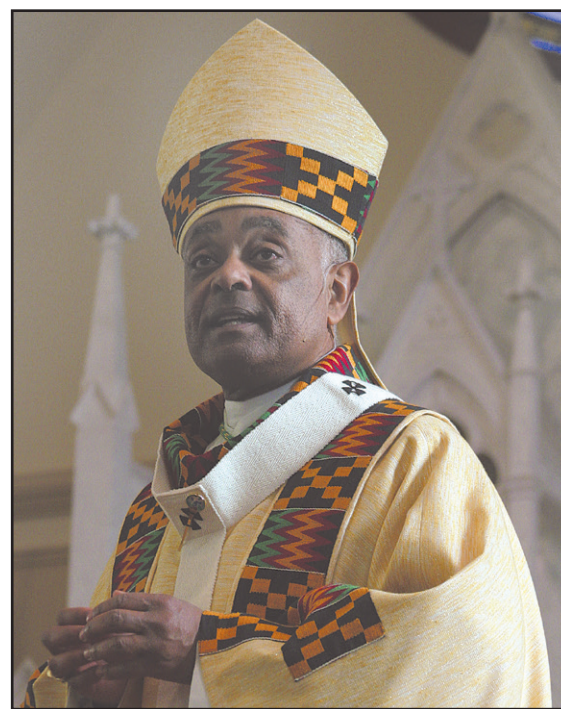


PHOTO BY MICHAEL ALEXANDER

Archbishop Wilton D. Gregory presides at the annual archdiocesan Mass in 2007 celebrating the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

in such a violent context, as we now seem to find ourselves.

The inspiration of Rev. King came from Scripture: the cry for justice of the Old Testament prophets, as one example, and the nonviolent way that Jesus lived and died while always proclaiming the Gospel, as another. From the perspective of 50 years later, what scriptural admonition and challenge for Americans would you highlight today as most urgent?

I closed my weekly column

this week with a citation from St. Luke's Gospel that calls us who have been given so much to realize that much is now expected from us. We live in a majestic land with so many opportunities that only places great obligations upon all of us to make a better yield on the privileges that we enjoy. Our youngsters, white, black, Hispanic, and Asian, all of our youngsters must be challenged to produce leaders who will guide us into a better and more secure future and they must achieve this dream by working together.

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LOOKING BACK

August 1963

1963 **50** 2013
YEARS



The Georgia Bulletin

■ The March on Washington was the lead story on the front page of the *Georgia Bulletin* of Aug. 29, 1963, and the editor, Gerard E. Sherry, went to Washington and wrote the news story, which highlighted Catholic aspects more than the historic words of the “I Have a Dream” speech. “Atlanta was represented by several hundred persons, including Dr. Martin Luther King, a leader of the March and president of the Southern Leadership Conference, and Dr. Benjamin E. Mays, president of Morehouse College,” the story stated. It added, “Catholics were prominent among the many religious groups participating in the March, including two archbishops, five bishops and several hundred priests, nuns, seminarians and other Religious.” Archbishop Patrick A. Boyle of Washington gave the invocation and Dr. Mays the benediction. It further noted that the march took place on Aug. 28, the feast day of two African saints, St. Augustine of Hippo and St. Moses the Black. Matthew Ahmann, executive director of the National Catholic Conference for Interracial Justice, spoke at the rally, saying, “The wind of the racial revolution has finally bent the reed of the conscience of our people.”

■ In the next edition of the *Bulletin*, dated Sept. 5, 1963, Sherry wrote a column about the March on Washington, saying that “more than 200,000 Negroes and Whites gave the greatest lesson in brotherhood that this country has witnessed in its entire history.” He said the day began with uncertainty about whether the original estimate that 100,000 people would come could be met. There were also concerns about possible disorders. But bus after bus arrived with people, he said, and the estimate was met and far exceeded. “Great sacrifices had been made by many of the marchers. Some gave up a couple of days’ pay; some would lose their jobs merely for exercising their right

to petition; some would lose their meager savings to pay for the trip; and most lost a couple of nights of sleep. What was said and done has been well reported by the nation’s press. What will be accomplished by it one must leave to the history of the immediate future. One thing is certain, the March cannot be ignored because it proved a basic point in our American society—men of good will, black and white, Catholic, Protestant, and Jew, can work together to further the American dream so eloquently spelled out at the rally by Dr. Martin Luther King,” the editor wrote. “Dr. King dismissed the hate mongers, even those of his own race, in the battle for racial justice. He talked about America the beautiful, the land of the free and the home of the brave. His was a message of conciliation, and we would be fools not to take it to heart,” Sherry wrote. “‘I have a dream,’ cried Martin Luther King, and it was shared by millions of his fellow citizens from all corners of the land. Men and women, black and white, the mighty and the lowly, all who are fed up with the snail-like progress toward equality,” the editor concluded in his column.

■ Another *Georgia Bulletin* columnist, Father Leonard F.X. Mayhew, said that he felt that no one in that present moment of August 1963 should “presume to judge an event that embodied so much of human value—so much suffering and so much dignity.” The gathering “of peaceful men ... voiced only noble aspirations and demanded only their rights,” he wrote. Father

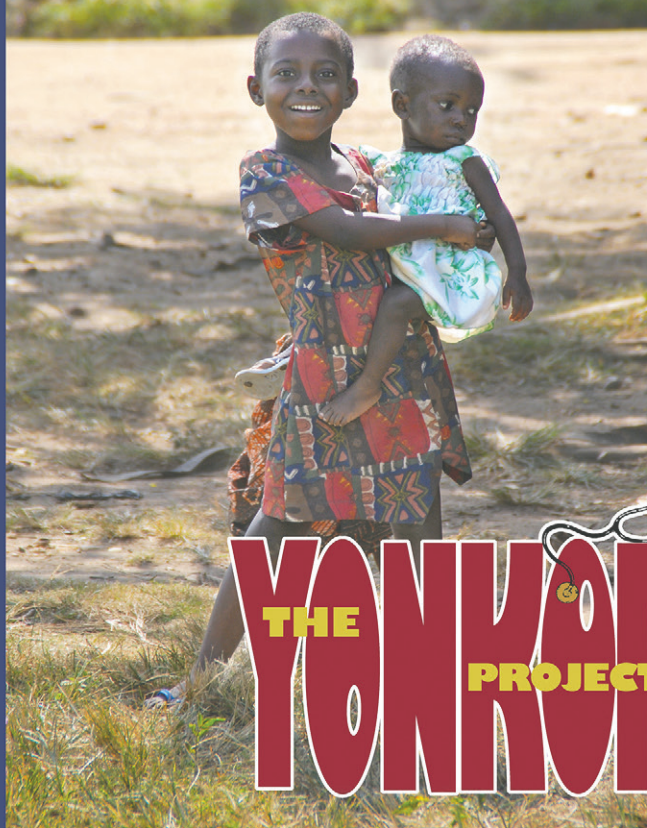


DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

Mayhew continued, “One of their leaders, Reverend Doctor Martin Luther King, reminded them that they must not hate those who mistreated them. He reminded them that unearned suffering is redemptive. He spoke to them of the strength of the freedom within each man’s soul. And they cheered him and went to their homes bravely.”

Father Mayhew concluded, “I do not pretend to know all that history will say of the events of August 28, 1963. But one thing it must say. It must say that seldom in the years since man began to walk this earth has there been such eloquent testimony to the dignity, the nobility, the potential for good within the human heart.”

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