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The Sharecropper's Son



Bishop Curtis
Guillory, SVD

Bishop Curtis Guillory, SVD, graduate of Divine Word College, knows poverty. He also knows the power of a good example, such as those set by his deeply religious parents who sharecropped property near a small farming community east-northeast of New Orleans.

Guillory was the eldest of seventeen children who helped work the farm and went to school when they could. They attended Mass every Sunday, prayed the rosary every night and helped their neighbors often.

"We were very poor, we were barely making it on the farm," he recalled. "But we had strong religious values lived out in the family, on the farm and in the neighborhood."

Religious life opened up to him by a vocation director from the SVD minor seminary in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi—home of the first Catholic seminary in the U.S. to educate and ordain African-American priests. Attracted by further education and the internationality of the SVD, he enrolled. Then, in 1964, he

rode a Greyhound bus north to Epworth, Iowa, to join the first class to enter DWC.

"It was really 'living by faith and not by sight,'" he said, referring to a passage from Saint Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians. His faith sustained him as he went from his familiar, hot-and-humid, African-American rural south to the unknown, primarily Caucasian, hot-and-humid, cold-and-frigid, rural north.

Graduating four years later and ordained in 1972, he went on to study Christian Spirituality and Jungian psychology and do parish and formation work before being called by Rome in 1988 to be the auxiliary bishop of Archdiocese of Galveston/Houston and later Bishop of Beaumont, Texas, the first African-American to hold that position. He is hoping to retire after 30 years in those offices, where the example of the worldwide SVD has served him well.

"As missionaries, we're all over so we get a better sense of the universality of the church and a better understanding of cultures," he said. "I think the SVD confirms a sense of community."