



MONSIGNOR THOMAS PAUL HADDEN

Monsignor Thomas Paul Hadden¹ was born on 31 May 1929 in McCauley Hospital in Raleigh, North Carolina. Clarice Mallette Hadden and Rev. G. Hadden were his parents. His Father was a Methodist Minister. It was a small private hospital owed by Dr. Lewyn McCauley, one of four or five colored physicians in the city. His parents were separated. His mother was a hardworking and dedicated woman who fed and clothed her children by working at home as a seamstress and also “stretched curtains” for the wealthy white women of the town.

Monsignor Hadden entered the first grade at Saint Monica Catholic School across the street from his home. The Mission had opened in 1930. It was initially under the pastorate of Father Charles Hannigan, a Josephite priest who had several Colored Missions in the Diocese of Raleigh. The Dominican Fathers took over the Mission and The Sister of the Immaculate Heart of Mary served as faculty. Later after integration, the Dominican Sisters joined forces with the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. In 1967 Saint Monica merged with Cathedral Elementary and by 1972 Saint Monica Catholic School was closed because of problems with asbestos and lead based paint. Thomas Paul was highly influenced by several of the nuns and priests during the very early years of his life. He describes the “charismatic influence” of a priest, in particular, Father Otis T. Car, O.P.

There is a very fascinating aspect to Monsignor Hadden becoming a priest. He is very quick to credit the Catholic schools with providing a chance at a quality education for African American children. Without the schools that were built by the first bishops of the Diocese of

¹ Monsignor Thomas P. Hadden biography was given in a personal interview by Father Marcos Leon-Angulo, June 2, 2003.

Raleigh many of the black children would have remained uneducated, or “poorly educated.” Monsignor Hadden recalls that it was during his fifth and sixth grade years that converting to Catholicism began to really become a large part of his thought processes. But he did not actually convert until he was in the eighth grade. When asked how his family felt about his decision he describes how he attended two churches for a time, often going to church three different times on a Sunday so as not to miss Mass, but also fulfill what he felt was an obligation to attend his father’s church. Finally, his mother told him that if he held such a desire to be Catholic that he would “attend church three different times on a Sunday,” then he “should and would convert to Catholicism.”

Just before his fourteenth birthday, Monsignor Hadden’s mother died. There was great discussion about what would happen to him. Before she had passed away, his mother had asked his brother, Charles to take charge and look after Monsignor Hadden. Still, there was a huge dispute in the family concerning who would take care of him. Finally, Charles announced firmly that he was twenty-one years old and was responsible enough to honor his mother’s wishes. The matter was settled. Since his father passed when he was fifteen, Monsignor Hadden may not have found it as easy within his home when he decided to become a priest. But his brother, sister-in-law and his sister are credited with caring for him and assisting him on his journey.

Education was always a very important part of life in the Hadden’s family. Monsignor Hadden’s choice to convert to Catholicism, and his ultimate goal to become a priest set the course for his future plans. He enrolled in an African American Catholic School in Portsmouth, Virginia called Our Lady of Victory. This marked a new beginning for him and was to start him on the path that would ultimately lead him to Rome and the priesthood. Our Lady of Victory parish had been founded by Father Nicholas J. Habets. Fr. Habets was from Holland. As the Church was trying to establish a relationship with African Americans in the Southern states, the Most Reverend Andrew James Louis Brennan, the bishop of the Diocese of Richmond had approached Habets about founding a school for African American children. Fr. Habets was asked to start this “Colored Mission” as a personal act of reparation for his native land’s involvement in the slave trade. Holland had provided the transportation for slaves from Africa to the Southern United States when other countries would not. Our Lady of Victory was founded in 1931 as a result of the request.

Monsignor Hadden became very much attached to Sister Mary Elizabeth Thompson and Sister Martha Yardley. Sister Martha became a mentor to me and I continued to visit her after her retirement in Emmetsburg, Maryland. “The mystery of God is present in many ways,” continued Monsignor Hadden. “After having the deep private thoughts of becoming a priest, I entered the Sacristy to prepare for my duties as altar server at Our Lady of Victory Parish. With the thoughts I had been having, I could barely believe that the celebrant for that Sunday was a colored priest.” He was introduced to Monsignor Hadden simply as “Father Lane,” a personal friend of Father Habets.

Monsignor Hadden was intrigued by the presence of the African American priest and asked where he had studied. Father Lane responded that he had been forced to study in Prague, Yugoslavia where being a man of color was not seen as such a handicap. Seeing that the young Monsignor Hadden was interested, Father Lane discussed the many hardships he had faced because of the color of his skin.

After the celebration of Mass, Father Lane approached Monsignor Hadden and said, “You seem to be a pious young man.” He continued with a question, “Have you ever thought of becoming a priest? Monsignor Hadden replied, “Of course.” He told me I should pursue the dream even though it would be difficult.”

Monsignor Hadden approached Father Habets who told him that if he really wanted to pursue his goal, than the seminary he should attend would be the Divine Word Seminary in Bay Saint Louis Mississippi. Monsignor Hadden wrote a letter to the seminary and weeks later received a reply. The reply was enclosed with literature about the order and the seminary as well as information of becoming a foreign missionary. The idea of becoming a foreign missionary did not interest Monsignor Hadden. He began to look for other places and started writing letters to the Salvadorian and the Josephite Communities.

Thomas Paul was disheartened over and over again. The Salvadorian community responded that they were not accepting any “colored candidates” until they could build a “colored seminary.” The reason given was that they had accepted one black man and “the poor fellow had a nervous breakdown.” The memory of this incident still brings a look of pain to the face of Thomas Paul. “I responded to their letter,” he said. “I asked them, suppose some

German or Irish seminarian candidate would have a nervous breakdown after being accepted. Would they still be accepting German and Irish Seminarians?” He smiled and continued, “Obviously there was no response to my last letter.” The second option, the Josephite community, answered that they only accepted “colored candidates” from their own parishes. Again Thomas Paul saw the need to respond, telling them that he did not understand their statements since he had only seen white Josephite Priests. Once again, as with the Salvadorian community, there was no response to his second letter.

Sister Martha Yardley, both friend and mentor to Monsignor Hadden, was visibly upset by what was happening, but she remained silent. Monsignor Hadden had received the letters and responded to them around the month of April. Soon after, when school closed for the summer, Sister Martha was sent to Baltimore for a summer program. Monsignor Hadden smiled remembering his friend. “She visited the Josephite Motherhouse and spoke with the leader of the order about my experiences” he said. After this private meeting with Sister Martha, Monsignor Hadden was invited for an interview. Sister Martha offered to pay his Greyhound fare to Baltimore. “I may have been a teenager,” he said; “but I knew I was entering the lion’s den.”

Later on, while visiting Raleigh and his old home parish, Saint Monica, Monsignor Hadden spoke with the Dominican Provincial Superior about the seminary. Once again the response was negative. “They were not accepting colored vocations, but maybe they would in the future. I should ‘hold on to the dream.’” It is easy to imagine the dream may have seemed a nightmare to a less dedicated young man. Returning to Portsmouth, Virginia for his junior year, Monsignor Hadden continued to discuss his very limited choices with Sister Martha and Sister Mary Elizabeth. Exhausted from hearing the denials and the excuses he decided it was time to follow the advice of Father Habets. He applied to The Divine Word Fathers. The summer after his junior year, his brother, Charles, moved back to Raleigh, North Carolina. The fall of that same year Monsignor Hadden left for the Saint Augustine Seminary in Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi as prospect candidate for the Divine Word Community. The move was a new and wonderful experience for him. The campus was theologized for Divine Word candidate members. The student body was all colored. The teachers were tough and demanding. This new environment was an exciting experience for him.

In 1955 Bishop Waters sent Monsignor Hadden to the North American College in Rome to complete his studies. It was in Rome that Monsignor Hadden learned the true universality of the Church. For a young man from the southern part of the United States, where Catholics were a minority, this must have seemed very huge. He was ordained on December 20, 1958, in the chapel of the Immaculate Conception of the North American College. The rector of the seminary, Bishop Martin O'Connor, conferred the ordination ceremony. Monsignor Hadden holds the honor of being the first African American to enter, to graduate and to be ordained from the prestigious North American College in its hundred years of existence.² Bishop Waters' desire for unity was steadfast and he saw an opportunity with the young priest, Thomas Paul Hadden. In his efforts to unite the parishes and integrate the schools in New Bern, North Carolina, Bishop Waters assigned Monsignor Hadden to assist Father Anthony Kobacic. Father Anthony was pastor of Saint Joseph, the African American parish and school in New Bern. The white congregation attended Saint Paul Church and school. As the schools and parishes were integrated, Saint Paul became the grammar school and Saint Joseph the high school. One incident that was not well received and was a mistake by any stretch of the imagination was when the pastor, Father James Noonan, of the Saint Paul parish opted to change the name of the high school from Saint Joseph to William Gaston, the main benefactor to build the Saint Joseph's Parish. Fr. Noonan thought this name change might make the school more acceptable to his white parishioners.³

History teaches that one can make the difference if one has a vision. In that day and time, Monsignor Hadden was making his way in a world that was predominantly white, a world that very clearly was trying to push him away. His intentions were to bring peace and harmony to the hard situation. Monsignor Hadden had to find at his own pace, the terms to work for it. By only his presence as an African American priest, he was well accepted by the Black community, yet rejected by the white parishioners.⁴ If Monsignor Hadden had been a less patient man, in fact, a less honest man, he may have walked away from the assignment and even turned his back on his vocation. Instead, he honored the call he had heard and worked long and hard in a system that had not learned tolerance. His quiet, gentle manner has brought him far.

² Reverend Monsignor Hadden, interview by Reverend Marcos Leon-Angulo, April 6, 2002.

³ Crow, 145.

⁴ Monsignor Thomas Paul Hadden telephone interview with Rev. Marcos Leon-Angulo July 10, 2011.

As time passed and the world moved on and changed, the world outside the Church also made monumental strides in civil rights. In remembering Bishop Waters, it is important to note that his actions took place before those same actions in the United States government occurred. The changes that were taking place in the world at large did not alter feelings of people who held to an outdated hatred for far too long due to the parish integration. African Americans parishioners saw that almost every white church was still open while black churches were closed. The African Americans felt that their black parishes were not worthy to welcome white parishioners. The struggle was always to succeed in a world that was predominantly white, to be accepted in a world that had said for generations achievement was difficult because of skin color.

As Catholics, we look at our own heritage and say the Church was far more accepting of all people regardless of skin color, but the reality was different. Not all of us were welcomed or accepted in the new parish community because of our skin color. There is a darker side in the church. White parishioners did not open their hearts and minds as readily as the Church to welcome black parishioners in their communities. African Americans questioned a system that did not welcome them because of their skin color. Looking back, it is easy to understand how it was even harder for them to feel welcome in a world where their culture was not accepted. Overcoming the fact that their skin color was different was, of course, the first obstacle. This was the obstacle Monsignor Hadden lived.⁵

Bishop Waters did not give up the idea of integration. Perhaps he learned much from the first attempt. Many were still opposed to the loss of churches and schools among African Americans. Waters did try to understand why African Americans as well as whites had reacted so strongly.⁶ His dream and goal was unity and to that end he worked tirelessly. He continued his condemnation of segregation and firmly stated that African American Catholics could attend Mass wherever they wished, even in white parishes, and approach the communion rail without waiting to be last. But, a good number of African American parishioners left the Catholic Church because they were not welcomed in the white parishes.⁷

⁵ Personal Reflections of Monsignor Thomas Paul Hadden given to Rev. Marcos Leon-Angulo January 2008.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

Since Monsignor Hadden was an African American priest, part of his early ministry was to welcome many African American parishioners back into the Church, but he was one man. Time would prove that one man, with the right spirit and the heart for unity, could accomplish much. His active participation in the Civil Right Movement showed to the community that he was one of them in the battle for equal rights.

Between 1962 and 1965 Bishop Waters attended all four sessions of the Second Vatican Council. Later, he was accused by some of the diocesan clergy of holding church property worth millions of dollars while some parishes were deeply in debt. Twenty percent of the diocesan clergy called for his resignation.⁸ Obviously, there were many unhappy with his ideals and his practices. Fortunately, even though there were many setbacks that must still be overcome today, there was also progress.⁹

The relationship between Bishop Waters and Monsignor Hadden was very collaborative. Bishop Waters' strong influence on his diocesan faithful and the experience of Monsignor Hadden created a further vision to serve the African American community. Bishop Waters planted the seed for the leadership of Monsignor Hadden to establish a diocesan office to coordinate and to serve the African American community.

The Second Vatican Council brought many good things to the universal church. In 1968 Father Herman Porter extended an invitation to all black Catholic clergy for an important meeting. This event was prior to the meeting of the Catholic Clergy Conference on the Interracial Apostolate. More than 60 black clergymen including Rev. Monsignor Hadden and Bishop Lawson Howze from North Carolina gathered to discuss the racial crisis and decided to form a permanent organization called The Black Catholic Clergy Caucus.¹⁰ They sent a statement to the bishops criticizing the church but clearly expressing their love, devotion and hope in the church. The caucus remains active today.¹¹ As time passed it was necessary for the Diocese of Raleigh to establish an office to better serve the growing African American community.

⁸Crow, 145-146.

⁹ Moore, 73-74.

¹⁰Reverend Monsignor Hadden, interview by Reverend Marcos Leon-Angulo, April 6, 2002.

¹¹ Ibid.

Monsignor Thomas Paul Hadden has enormous love for his community and his Church. His concerns lead him to action rather than thought and talk when he considered the social need of the poor, oppressed and marginalized. Bishop Joseph Gossman, in recognition of his pastoral ministry, gave Monsignor Thomas Paul Hadden the Bishop's Medal in the line of Melchizedek in 1986. Two year later, in 1988, Bishop Gossman appointed Monsignor Hadden vicar for the African Americans in the Diocese of Raleigh.

In the year 2000, Thomas Paul Hadden retired. He recalls the phone ringing one afternoon when he was taking what he described as a "rare, well-deserved nap." He said he heard the familiar voice of Bishop Gossman on the phone saying, "Tom this is bishop Gossman."

"Yes, Bishop," Thomas Paul said he responded, "What can I do for you?" "Well, I just wanted to call and let you know that the Holy Father has named you a Prelate of Honor, and no one deserves it more than you do," the bishop said.

Thomas Paul's voice rose slightly as he imitated his response on the phone that day. "really, Bishop! Well that's nice. Thank you for letting me know." Then he laughed and said after he hung up the phone he sat straight up in bed and said aloud, "Did he say Monsignor?"

Indeed he did earn and receive the honor. Then in 2002 Thomas Paul was called out of retirement to serve as director of the African American Ministry and Evangelization Network after the retirement of Sister Maxine Town, S.A.

"In 2002, after the resignation of Sister Maxine Towns, S.A., as director, Bishop Gossman called me out of retirement and appointed me as Director," said Thomas Paul. "His instruction was to take eighteen months to study and devise a plan to revitalize the ministry. Father JaVan Saxon was a member of the Study Committee appointed by Bishop Gossman to confect the Plan. He was aware that many of our African Brothers and Sisters were coming into the Diocese of Raleigh, and he recommended that the title of the Office be changed to The Office of African Ancestry Ministry and Evangelization. After the eighteenth month period, Bishop Gossman appointed Mrs. Martha Bailey as director to implement the approved plan."

The African Ancestry Ministry and Evangelization Network (AAMEN) continued to grow and thrive under the direction of Mrs. Bailey. The plans that had been laid out were

implemented and continue to be implemented today. However, there have been more changes. Bishop Gossman retired in 2006 and Bishop Michael f. Burbidge assumed the position. The new bishop quickly realized the asset the diocese had in Reverend Monsignor Thomas Paul Hadden.

“Life is full of changes. We often don’t like changes because the familiar ceases to be and newness intrudes into our lives. But we face them with faith and hope. Change has come recently to The Office of African Ancestry Ministry and Evangelization. Mrs. Martha Bailey resigned after six years of ministry to the Diocese of Raleigh. During Mrs. Bailey’s tenure the ministry has been brought forcefully to the front in the Diocese and in the nation.

“Outreach to all ages was revitalized. The outreach to the youth was rejuvenated by the Ambassadors of the Word program. Mrs. Bailey became involved in the Youth Department programs. She fostered Right to Life issues. HIV/AIDS were also part of her ministry. The Ngambi for Young Adults, which began under Father Martin Carter, was continued and updated. For the elders, Harambee was begun. It focused initially on yearly pilgrimages to places of Catholic and African American interest.

He briefly reflected on the years of dedication that had gone into the evangelization of African Americans into the Catholic Society, and discussed the process of change, too, among the people of the South. He then turned his attention to the future of the Ministry: Bishop Burbidge, since assuming the mantle as Bishop of Raleigh, has given his full support and encouragement to the ministry. Now we pray for Bishop Burbidge as he seeks a new Director for African Ancestry Ministry and Evangelization.”

Bishop Burbidge quickly found a replacement. Mrs. Lauren Green serves as the director of AAMEN, and Reverend Monsignor Thomas Paul Hadden continues as Vicar to the Ministry. When the comment was made the he has worked very hard since his retirement, Hadden remarked the he was, indeed, looking forward to his “next real retirement.”

In 2008, Rev. Msgr. Thomas P. Hadden celebrated his Fiftieth Anniversary of Priesthood with a Jubilee Mass at Sacred Heart Cathedral on Saturday, December 20. Approximately thirty priest Concelebrated the liturgy in the presence of Most Reverend Michael F. Burbidge. Reverend Monsignor Gerald L. Lewis was the homilist.

Msgr. Lewis spoke of “how Mary accepted the Announcement that she was chosen to be the Mother of the Savior. He said, ‘As we look forward to the greatest gift god can give us, we look back to another call more than 50 years ago.’ Msgr. Lewis spoke of the influence the Immaculate Heart of Mary sisters and Dominican priest at Saint Monica’s Parish in Raleigh had on young Thomas Paul and the call he accepted to serve God.”

Bishop Burbidge ended the celebration with a heartfelt thanks to Thomas Paul Hadden. His words were clear and concise: “In his remarks, Bishop Burbidge expressed gratitude to Bishop Water for inviting Thomas Paul Hadden to serve as a priest in the Diocese, noting, ‘What a great fit the Bishop gave to us. ‘One of the greatest characteristics of Msgr. Hadden’s priesthood Bishop Burbidge said, “is that of being a Priest who in word and deed, throughout the years, especially in times when great courage and perseverance were necessary, Msgr. Proclaimed that no matter what our race, gender or background, we are one body, united as brothers and sisters in Christ, that can never be separated or divided.’”

Every priest should aspire to respond to the vocational call as Reverend Monsignor Thomas Paul Hadden has. In fact, every person should aspire to have the kind of spirit that this man has shown. Monsignor Thomas Paul Hadden finally retired on August 26, 2011.

After months of deliberation, he moved to an assisted living facility, St. Joseph of the Pines, Southern Pines, NC. He missed being in Raleigh and being in close proximity to his many priests friends and parishioners, but appreciated that he no longer had to be responsible for cooking his own meals each day. He lived there for less than a year, when he died after a sudden, brief illness on Monday, Oct. 8, 2012. Msgr. Hadden was 83 years old.