

Black Catholic History Month

Maximo "Max" M. Arzu

September 10, 1930 - January 29, 2021



In recognition of Black Catholic Month, St. Christopher has dedicated a Memorial Grotto/St. Martin de Porres and Acacia tree, honoring our beloved, Maximo (Max) Arzu; mass offered November 7, 2021, at 10:00 am. Brother Max rooted in love, always in our heart. Maximo (Max) was born in September 1930 in Dangriga, Stann Creek, Belize to his late parents, Marcelino and Cypriana Arzu. Max Arzu graduated from St. John's College and taught at primary and secondary levels in Belize before migrating to the U.S. Max joined USAF in December 1958, rising to the highest rank achievable by a non-commissioned officer Chief Master Sergeant. After 27 years of service, in June 1985, Max retired with honors including Bronze Star, Meritorious Service Medal, Commendation Medal, and Vietnam Campaign Medal. Max received multiple awards for his service to homeless veterans and their families while working for Riverside County.

He was also recognized by the Blood Bank for donating nearly 50 gallons over decades. Max volunteered as a suicide prevention counselor, while taking postgraduate psychology courses. Max was a leader in the ministry of Catholics of African descent and served in other ministries: Knights of Columbus, RCIA, and Ministry of the Word.

For years at St. Christopher Catholic Church, Max coordinated the Annual Diocesan Appeal and volunteered at the golf fundraiser. He was a founding member of St. Christopher's Divine Mercy prayer group, Diocesan Development Chairman and a 4th Degree Knight of Columbus. Max took responsibility to open the church in the morning for daily prayers and services and assisted regularly at Sunday mass. Max is survived by his loving wife Helen F. Arzu, children: Aloma Arzu, Angela Arzu, Pauline (Egbert) Higinio, Aynn Arzu, Allan Arzu (Celina), and Anthony Arzu (Crystal).

The Acacia Tree is native to Africa and is mentioned in the biblical books of Exodus and Isaiah. The Acacia, which is still found in many areas of Africa, has been a symbol of stability and resilience. Like the symbol of the cross, it continues to be a worthy symbol of the Black Catholic experience today, and it is an official symbol of the National Black Catholic Congress (NBCC).

According to the Pew Research Center, of the 200 million people of African descent in the Roman Catholic Church throughout the world, over 173 million of them live in the African continent. The largest percentage of growth in the Catholic population over the last 100 years, occurred in sub-Saharan Africa.



According to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, there are over 3 million African American Catholics in the U.S. Today, there are 250 African American priests, 437 deacons, and 75 men of African descent in seminary formation for the priesthood in the United States. There are five living African American bishops, of who two head U.S. dioceses. One of them, the Archbishop of Washington, Wilton D. Gregory, was elevated to the College of Cardinals on November 28, 2020. There are also 400 African American religious sisters and 50 religious brothers in the United States.

"Everything even sweeping, scraping vegetables, weeding a garden and waiting on the sick could be a prayer, if offered to God." St. Martin de Porres