

## Bible That Makes God's Word More Accessible to African-American Youth

by Allana Haynes, Catholic News Service

A new youth Bible released in 2014 contains illustrations depicting Jesus as an African-American.

The African American Youth Bible, modeled after the Catholic Youth Bible, contains commentaries, footnotes, and artwork geared toward educating young African-Americans about Scripture.

The Bible was developed by retired Bishop John H. Ricard of Pensacola-Tallahassee, Florida, who is president of the National Black Catholic Congress, and St. Mary's Press. It has been in the works for over four years.

"We wanted to have something that would appeal to our youth, and we wanted to make it as relevant as possible to their lives," said Bishop Ricard in a phone interview with Catholic News Service. "After many years of exploring, we thought that this would be an effective way of doing it.

"The Bible includes themes that would be relevant to African-American youth—including both African-American history as well as the history of the Catholic Church.



"The Bible was subject to a lot of research," said Bishop Ricard. "We did research on African-American history, we looked for documents and explored the church fathers and mothers and the extensive study of the Bible of those days, relying on the experience of African-American youth ministers.

"What makes this Bible different from other versions, are the specific themes that it deals with.

"In the Bible, it speaks of slavery and it seeks to explain more fully what it means to the history of African-Americans in the United States," said Bishop Ricard, who is rector of St. Joseph's Seminary, the Washington seminary of his order, the Josephites.

To develop the Bible, a team of more than 200 authors as well as an editorial board and illustrators were involved. St. Mary's Press, based in Winona, Minnesota, is a leading Catholic publisher of Bibles and religion curricula for Catholic teens.

Valerie Washington, executive director of the Baltimore-based National Black Catholic Congress, believes that the Bible will speak to the lives of black youth and will make the Word of God more accessible to them.

"We complain that many youths aren't in the church" and that their involvement "is not growing as much as we would like it to grow," she told CNS. "We want them to evangelize to their peers and we want to get the youth we have now to be more inclusive. We hope that the Bible will help them evangelize and grow in their faith.

"The Bible is targeted toward black youth between the ages of 14 and 22, but can be used by anyone.

"The Bible will help any group," said Washington. "It will help bring people closer to Jesus and allow them to learn about who he was. It will help them endure life's challenges and provide sources of confirmation and healing and will help enrich their lives.

"The Bible aims to give black youth a greater appreciation for Sacred Scripture and gives them a better understanding of the Lord's presence.

"We teach about Christ and we teach about God, and we hope the articles that we write about God will help explain those things better," said Washington. "We hope that they will understand how important the Bible is and how much more important it is than any other book that they will read in their entire life."