

Senate Resolution 919

By: Senators James of the 35th, Rhett of the 33rd, Seay of the 34th and Henson of the 41st

A RESOLUTION

1 Honoring Father Augustus Tolton; and for other purposes.

2 WHEREAS, Father Augustus Tolton is the first publicly recognized Black Roman Catholic
3 Priest in America, born to Peter and Martha Tolton on April 1, 1854, in Missouri, and
4 labored in the field at just seven years of age alongside his brother, Charley; and

5 WHEREAS, Father Tolton labored among us during times of contradiction that proved to be
6 both beautiful and paradoxical; and

7 WHEREAS, both of his parents were slaves, and Augustus and his two siblings had the
8 knowledge of the Catholic faith bestowed upon them while being taught how to live it; and

9 WHEREAS, Father Tolton attended St. Boniface's parish school, which was an all-white
10 school, and his presence there was not well received; and

11 WHEREAS, he was burdened with many threats at school from other students, and as a
12 result received his daily lessons after school in order to avoid the torment and insults thrown
13 upon him by his peers; and

14 WHEREAS, Father Tolton was eventually taken out of school, until Father Peter McGirr
15 made it possible for him to return to Catholic School; and

16 WHEREAS, he began to work at a tobacco factory, and before going to work he would serve
17 at Mass; and

18 WHEREAS, Father Tolton applied to various seminaries throughout the country, but was not
19 accepted because they were not ready to accept a black student; and

20 WHEREAS, no religious order or seminary would allow Father Tolton to join, but during the
21 interim period of his waiting to be accepted to one, he was able to receive temporary tutoring
22 that would allow him to prepare for seminary school; and

23 WHEREAS, on February 15, 1880, Father Tolton left Quincy in order to go to Rome, in
24 which he arrived on March 10 of the same year; and

25 WHEREAS, he studied at seminary in Rome for six years, during which time he had a very
26 positive experience; and

27 WHEREAS, Father Tolton celebrated his first Mass in Quincy at St. Boniface Church on
28 July 18, 1886; and

29 WHEREAS, he was assigned to be pastor of St. Joseph's Church and school, and many
30 people were drawn to his beautiful homilies, spiritual guidance, and sense of goodness; and

31 WHEREAS, it is abundantly fitting and proper that the faith, determination, and bravery of
32 Father Augustus Tolton to overcome all odds and become the first publicly recognized Black
33 Roman Catholic Priest in America be appropriately recognized.

34 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE that the members of this body
35 honor Father Augustus Tolton.

36 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Secretary of the Senate is authorized and directed
37 to make appropriate copies of this resolution available for distribution to the public and the
38 press.