

Sister Antona Ebo , a member of the Sisters of Mary, later the Franciscan Sisters of Mary, broke a host of seemingly insurmountable racial barriers within the Church. She was one of the most visible links between Catholicism and the modern Civil Rights Movement.

Born in 1924, she was raised a Baptist but was drawn to Catholicism in her teen years and was received into the Catholic Church. S. Antona became the first African- American admitted to Holy Trinity High School, and upon her graduation she sought to enter a Catholic Nursing school. But her applications were denied solely on the basis of race. She eventually enrolled in St. Mary's Colored Infirmary Training School in St. Louis, the nation's first and only black Catholic Nursing School.

In 1944, the Sisters of Mary lifted their ban on black members and Antona became one of the first three African -American women accepted into the historically German order. Their admission did not translate into sincere acceptance. Antonia endured much discrimination from her white sisters and superiors. In 1947 she and four other black members of the order professed their first vows in a segregated ceremony. She became the first African-American woman to administer a hospital in the U.S. Despite fierce resistance to her presence in the Order, S. Antona refused to abandon God's call on her life or accept white supremacy as normal in the Church.

S. Antona gained a reputation for her outspokenness about racial injustice in society. After watching "Bloody footage of the violence on Selma's "Bloody Sunday", she remarked "I would go to Selma if I wasn't wearing this habit." However, she was selected by her superiors to go to Selma which was a turning point in her life. But it was by no means the end to her fight against systemic racism. As she told a reporter, "Yes I am a Negro , a Nun, and a Catholic and I'm here to bear witness".

In 1968 S. Antona joined with 154 black sisters and began the National Black Sisters Conference. She served a President of the Conference and won the Harriet Tubman Award for her outstanding service and leadership.

S. Antona Ebo died on Nov. 11, 1917. She endured a lifetime of hardships marked by great personal tragedies and anti-black racism. Her life and legacy show us the uncommon faithfulness of black religious women in the face of discrimination and are part of the proof that remaining silent about white supremacy and the violence it engenders must never be as option.