

"The Church will have its glory and triumph in the colored race, and, for aught I know, be the salvation of this nation." So stated the Rt. Reverent A.A. Curtis, Bishop of Wilmington, Delaware, in his dedication sermon for St. Peter Claver Church on September 9, 1888. Founded by the Josephite Fathers, it was the first parish in the world dedicated to St. Peter Claver, the "Apostle of the Slaves," who was canonized on January 15, 1888 by Pope Leo XIII.

The parish, founded from the St. Francis Xavier parish, was created to serve black Catholics in the western section of the city, and to provide training for students at St. Joseph's Seminary. Father Charles Randolph Uncles, the first black priest trained and ordained in the United States, was formed here as well as at St. Mary's Seminary. Housed in the old Whatcoat Methodist Episcopal Church on Carlisle Street, the parish remodeled its building in 1905, retaining only a portion of the original structure.

St. Peter Claver himself was born in Verdu, Spain, in 1580. As a member of the Society of Jesus, he sailed in 1610 to Cartagena, Colombia, where he worked for 44 years among slaves. Despite the horrible conditions within the slave ships, he entered them to feed, bathe, and doctor the slaves. He also taught and baptized them; by the time of his death he had converted more than 300,000.