

## New York symposium celebrates black Catholic identity

An historic occasion, a call to action, a celebration of accomplishment and a personal challenge. These were some of the reactions of local delegates to a Sept. 9 symposium marking the first anniversary of "What We Have Seen and Heard," the pastoral letter written and issued last September by 10 black U.S. bishops.

The gathering of seven of the black bishops as well as several other U.S. bishops and an audience of 650 priests, religious and laity at the Harlem parish of St. Charles Borromeo in New York City was one reason the event assumed historic significance to local delegates. "To be in the presence of those seven black bishops is a whole new experience in terms of black Catholics," said Sister Frances Sweeney of Immaculate Conception Church, one of 11 parish and diocesan representatives from Rochester.

Because of space limitations, organizers said they had to turn down another 1,000 would-be participants. Cardinal John J. O'Connor, who sponsored the event, said he would seek to make it an annual gathering.

"It was very exciting, very upbeat. There were people there waiting and listening to hear something and they heard it," said Robert Dinkle, a delegate from Immaculate Conception Church in Rochester. "If there was any doubt on the part of any of the participants about this particular symposium, coming there and feeling what I felt and the fact that 1,000 people got turned away (means that) I bet they won't miss any other symposia that come up about 'What We Have Seen and Heard.'"

The keynote speaker, Father Edward X. Braxton, director of the Catholic student center at the University of Chicago, called for his fellow black Catholics to join other blacks in combating such community problems as the growing number of pregnancies outside marriage.

"Recent figures suggest that 57 percent of all the black children born in America are born to unwed fathers and mothers," said Father Braxton in his address.

"Black Americans are justifiably proud that we have not accepted the abortion mentality that accompanies so many unwanted pregnancies in this country," he said. "However, we are facing a crisis. Our young people must be effectively taught the importance of growing to maturity, obtaining an education, securing employment and getting married before they begin their families."

He said that a pattern of "three generations of unwed mothers in a single family" may be the single greatest internal obstacle to the growth and economic stability of the black family in America.

Father Braxton praised the 1979 pastoral of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops on racism, "Brothers and Sisters to Us," for its "landmark" stands on fostering vocations, expanding Catholic schools in the inner city, promoting affirmative action in dioceses and religious institutions and

**'We can't even begin to appreciate ... the multicultural Church that we are until we admit that, yes, we have been guilty of racism.'**

Sister Frances Sweeney, Immaculate Conception Church

avoiding support of racism through church investments. "There is no need to say more," he said. "The need is to do what we have said."

Father Braxton made several recommendations for future action, including:

- A deepening of commitment to evangelization in the black community. By the end of the century, the number of black Catholics in the U.S. could be doubled, he suggested.

- Giving priority to Catholic schools in the black community, with emphasis on "value formation."

- Efforts to ensure that church documents such as the 1984 pastoral of the black bishops became known and studied. "Many black Catholics have never seen or heard of 'What We Have Seen and Heard,'" he remarked.

Although speakers at the symposium acknowledged that very little had been done about the changes sought by black Catholics as described in the pastoral, Rebecca Gifford, associate director of the diocesan Division of Urban Services, pointed out the significance of the letter's very existence. "It seems like such a small thing in a way, but realistically it had not been done before. There had not even been a voice to Catholics who are black, or very little (in the way of such a voice). The idea that we have a story to tell — with a capital S — is very important," she said.

Locally, response to "What We Have Seen and Heard" over the past year has been concentrated on reading and studying the pastoral letter, both at the diocesan level and at Immaculate Conception Church. There, parishioners joined in a series of liturgies, dealing with the letter piece by piece during Black History Month. "This was for our parish a real moment that we wanted to capitalize on because we wanted to see if some of the things we've seen and heard were in line with what everybody else may have seen and heard," Dinkle said of the symposium.

Two retreat study sessions on the letter were held to inform diocesan staff and board members of the Office of Black Ministries, according to Jacquelyn Dobson, executive secretary/director. Her aim was to prepare staff at the diocesan level to respond to inquiries and requests for information on the pastoral.

"I see it as a consciousness-raising letter," she said, pointing out that for some black Catholics, it still feels a little funny belonging to what appears to be a white church. "It (the letter) says that we (black Catholics) have a history that goes back just like other folks ... you can feel so much pride after reading it," she added.

Although it is a pastoral letter, Gifford warned that "What We Have Seen and Heard" should not be reduced to a theme. "A lot of times a pastoral letter comes out as if to say it's time to look at this topic and see what we can do about that," she noted. "This is our experience, not an extraneous issue. And I think what we've seen and heard about our past is that we have not been aware of this experience."

Auxiliary Bishop Eugene Marino of Washington remarked at the symposium that although the black bishops' pastoral emphasizes opportunities, it also notes that a principal obstacle to black evangelization is "the racism that lingers in our church and in our society."

Local delegates echoed Bishop Marino's remarks. "We can't even begin to appreciate ... the multicultural Church that we are until

we admit that, yes, we have been guilty of racism," remarked Sister Frances Sweeney of Immaculate Conception.

Urban Ministries' Gifford added: "We have to critically reflect on our own experience and say 'Where is the racism? What have we seen, what have we heard, and what have we been deaf to and blind to?' ... We're talking about a conversion experience."

And too often, the delegates agreed, what has already been accomplished is overlooked. "The letter was timely, but what they're saying has been part of what we've been trying to do here all along," said Dobson of the Office of Black Ministries, the first such office in the country.

"There is a lot of black leadership growing in our diocese," added Father Paul Brennan, pastor of Immaculate Conception Church, noting the Diocesan Pastoral Council, formation days and regionalism as positive influences. "Little by little, that voice is growing, I think," he said.

Black History Month and Martin Luther King Day celebrations, the development of good working relationships with Baptist and Pentecostal denominations and the development of what Father Werth described as "decent cultural liturgies" at Immaculate Conception and St. Bridget's were cited as other examples.

"God knows we have a long way to go, but we are certainly far ahead in the reflection process and in what we're doing," Father Werth said. "We need to continue to affirm that we have made some strides. There are already a lot of good things happening ... I just have this feeling that so many of the black Catholics aren't aware even of what we're doing ... there are just so many black Catholics in the diocese that are unchurched."

Compiled from NC News Service and local reports.

## Priest produces filmstrip, booklet on black bishops' pastoral letter

Bay St. Louis, Miss. (NC) — A filmstrip on the black bishops' 1984 pastoral letter, "What We Have Seen and Heard," has been produced by Divine Word Father Jim Pawlicki, media center director for the Society of the Divine Word in Bay St. Louis.

The filmstrip on the pastoral on evangelization is being distributed by the Josephite Pastoral Center in Washington, which has marketed Father Pawlicki's religious education filmstrips since 1978.

The joint venture began when Father Pawlicki said he was making filmstrips he "couldn't distribute," and the Josephites had the means to distribute filmstrips "they couldn't produce."

With the filmstrip, the center is distributing a 40-page study guide on the pastoral, "A

Companion Piece to Help Understand and Implement the Black Bishops' Pastoral Letter."

The study guide, which has been available since October, 1984, was commissioned by the black bishops. According to Josephite Brother Damian Wilson, associate director of the pastoral center, the study guide includes discussion and liturgy materials and suggestions for adult and youth religious education programs and classroom curriculum.

The filmstrip and study guide are available for \$30, and the study guide is available for \$4, through the Josephite Pastoral Center, 1200 Varnum St. N.E., Washington, D.C. 20017.

## Bishops' committee hears concerns of women, plans pastoral response

By Mary Claire Gart

Chicago (NC) — A committee of U.S. Catholic bishops considering a pastoral letter on women heard diverse and sometimes conflicting advice from different national Catholic women's organizations at a hearing in Chicago Aug. 23-25.

Depending on who was speaking, the committee headed by Bishop Joseph Imsch of Joliet, Ill., was told at various times that the bishops should:

- Promote stronger family values.
- Lead the pro-life fight.
- Back the Equal Rights Amendment and equal pay for equal work.
- Promote ordination of women.
- Teach clearly why it is impossible to ordain women.
- Help reconcile women alienated by male-dominated church structures.
- Ignore such claims of alienation because they reflect a bias of a small but vocal minority.

Sister Mariella Frye, staff coordinator for

the committee, said that the committee agreed at a meeting following the hearings to issue a brief statement clarifying its plans.

The statement itself was not yet drawn up as of Aug. 27, she said, but its basic thrust was that even if the committee decides against writing a "pastoral letter," it will make some clear form of "pastoral response" to the many pastoral issues being raised by women in national and diocesan-level hearings.

"They're not bound to a pastoral. If a better way can be found, they might address it that way," said Sister Frye, a Missionary Helper of the Sacred Heart.

The hearings in Chicago drew representatives of groups as diverse as National Marriage Encounter, the National Right to Life Committee, Women for Faith and Family, the Consortium Perfectae Caritatis, and the U.S. division of the Grail.

"We're just in the listening stage," Sister Frye said during a break in the hearings, held in the O'Hare Hilton at Chicago's O'Hare

airport. "A handful of dioceses have already held consultations, but many dioceses are just beginning to hold hearings this fall," she said.

Her advice to women speaking at diocesan hearings, she said, was that they should "just be open and honest and express how they feel."

At the national level, Bishop Imsch's committee held a preliminary hearing in Washington last March, at which it asked Catholic women's groups what general directions they thought the pastoral should take.

For the Chicago hearing the committee asked speakers to address three basic questions: what contributes to alienating women in society and the church today, what contributes to reconciling them, and what particular issues should the bishops address.

Helen Hull Hitchcock, wife of conservative Catholic historian and columnist James Hitchcock and founder of Women for Faith and Family, objected to the questions about alienation and reconciliation raised by the committee, saying that these "imply a state of oppression, or at least exclusion," which "is simply untrue."

The idea that women as a group are alienated from the church or from the rest of society "reflects the bias of a vocal, disaffected minority," she said.

She presented the committee with a computer list of nearly 17,000 names of women who have signed her organization's "Affirmation for Catholic Women" and said that more than 3,000 other signatures had come in but were not in the computer list yet.

The declaration affirms "distinct roles for men and women" and backs church teaching and discipline on issues of marriage, family

life and the role of women in the church and in society.

Another witness, however, Mary Bohlen of the Grail, an international Catholic women's movement, said that she had finally left the church after many years of active involvement because of the frustration and alienation she felt at the inability of women to participate fully in its life.

"While the situation of women in society is far from perfect, demonstrable progress has been made.... The same cannot be said for women in the Catholic Church," she said.

Representatives of the Theresians, an organization of Catholic women promoting vocations, and of National Marriage Encounter, a support organization for Catholic couples, also cited inequality of women — and particularly lack of access to ordained ministry — as major causes of alienation of women in the church.

"It is so humiliating" for Catholic women to be "second-class citizens in our own church," said Patricia Mullen, one of three Theresian leaders giving testimony.

"The church is impoverished because the gifts and talents of all its members are not being used. There is a concentration of decision-making, leadership and authority with men," said the National Marriage Encounter testimony presented by Polly Hessel and Nancy Beaudry, both of Green Bay, Wis.

Mrs. Hitchcock said, however, that the "loud voices of dissent" on such things as the ordination of women serve "to undermine the authority of the church, to damage the effectiveness of the magisterium (church teaching authority) and to weaken the Catholic faith."

Let the Courier-Journal assist you in wishing your family, friends and relatives a Happy Birthday or Anniversary, or extend congratulations for Graduation, a Job Promotion, or whatever occasion you may be celebrating:

Just send in a photo (recent, or from days-gone-by), and a few special words you would like to say (30 word limit). The cost is \$25.00.

Send all material to: The Courier-Journal, 114 South Union St., Rochester, N.Y. 14607.

The Courier Journal will return all photos if accompanied with a self-addressed, stamped envelope, but is not responsible for photos damaged in the mail.