

Black Catholics plan congress with focus on evangelization

By Teresa A. Parsons

Next May, black Catholics from all over the United States will convene in Washington, D.C., for a National Black Catholic Congress on evangelization.

Calling the national congress together at the Catholic University of America from May 21 to May 24, 1987, are the nation's 10 black Catholic bishops, the National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus, the National Black Sisters' Conference, the National Association of Black Catholic Administrators, and the Knights and Ladies of St. Peter Claver.

Between 1975 and 1985, the number of black Catholics in the United States has increased by 41 percent, thanks to evangelization and the migration of Haitian Catholics into the country. Still, an estimated 6-10 million American blacks have no formal religious affiliation.

While this is fertile ground for evangelization, social, cultural and economic factors challenge the Church to look beyond its traditional approach to the black community and evangelization.

In their 1984 pastoral letter, "What We Have Seen and Heard," the black bishops of the United States called national attention to the task of evangelizing black Americans and to obstacles and issues that will need to be addressed and overcome.

"Evangelization means not only preaching, but witnessing; not only conversion, but renewal; not only entry into the community, but the building up of the community; not only hearing the word, but sharing it," they wrote. "Pope Paul VI issued that call to the peoples of Africa when he said to them at Kampala in Uganda: 'You are now missionaries to yourselves.' And Pope Paul also laid out for all sons and daughters of Africa the nature of the response: 'You

must now give your gifts of blackness to the whole Church!'"

In preparation for the national gathering, each diocese in the country has been asked to form a coordinating team and to organize a regional assembly of black Catholics for prayer, study and reflection.

The Diocese of Rochester's day of reflection is Saturday, December 6, from 9:30 a.m. to 4:45 p.m. at St. Anthony of Padua Church. Not only black Catholics, but also members of the whole black community, churched and unchurched, and those ministers who serve that community are invited to attend the gathering.

During the morning session on December 6, Sister Patricia Haley, SCN, of Philadelphia, Pa., will offer a keynote speech on black Catholics and community. Sister Patricia is program coordinator for religious vocations and formation for the National Black Sisters Conference.

Later, participants will break into small groups to discuss five questions about spirituality and the call to evangelization. They will also be asked to develop five items they would like to be addressed at the national congress.

The whole assembly will then consider each group's suggestions and develop a final set of five agenda items. If approved by Bishop Matthew H. Clark, those items will be sent to the congress' National Coordinating Committee.

An unlimited number of delegates from each diocese may attend the national congress. However, only 10 people from each diocese will be recognized as formal, voting delegates.

For more information about either the National Black Catholic Congress or the local day of reflection, contact Jacquelyn Dobson or Clara Cowans at the diocesan Office of Black Ministries, (716)328-3210.



Bishop Matthew H. Clark

Along the Way

On this Sunday evening flight back to Rochester, I feel a certain sense of liberation. I have just finished seven consecutive days of meetings and am especially delighted to be going home.

From Sunday through Thursday, I attended a plenary session of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. From Thursday evening through today, I participated in a meeting with a committee of our conference developing a pastoral letter in response to the concerns of women.

There is much to be said about both meetings. But in light of the exceptional publicity given to Archbishop Hunthausen and the Archdiocese of Seattle before, during and after our meeting, I thought it would be appropriate to devote this column to some reflections on that issue.

The statement developed by Bishop Malone was his attempt to deal with a sensitive issue in a way that would 1) recognize the purpose and limitations of ours or of any episcopal conference, 2) honor the special pastoral care our Holy Father exercises in the whole Church, 3) offer personal support to our brother bishop and 4) offer the service of the conference to both parties should they both want our assistance in bringing healing and peace to a troubled situation.

Bishop Malone invited the bishops to comment on his statement and to make suggestions, but there was no formal amendment process nor was there ever any intent that the statement would be issued in the name of the conference. It was in the end what it was always intended to be—a statement by the president of our conference made in light of the intense and widespread interest in the Seattle situation.

In my opinion Bishop Malone developed as constructive a statement as was possible given the complexity and intensity of the moment. At least it opened the possibility of new ways in which to resolve the issue.

I left the meeting with several issues to think about. One was the fact that we discussed the matter in executive session. There are arguments pro and con regarding the decision to confine the discussion to a closed session, but I think the community at large would have had a much better sense of the issues had the session been a public one.

The second issue is one I mentioned here very recently. It is the serious need we all have to understand more about the local Church or diocese, the relationship of one local Church to another and the relationship of all local Churches to the Church at Rome.

We all rightly honor the place of the Church at Rome and of her bishop as having a unique and privileged place in our communion of faith. What we need in order to understand even more richly the ministry of the Bishop of Rome is a fuller sense of the local Church and the ministry of the diocesan bishop within that community. To speak for one is not to take away from the other, but I think that was part of the tension experienced in Washington this week.

Thirdly, I would mention that my views of the Seattle question expressed to our Diocesan Pastoral Council last month were confirmed in Washington. These views are that the Vatican intervention is severe and will not work.

Lastly, I want to mention that I stand in great admiration of Archbishop Hunthausen. Throughout the whole session, he manifested the kind of gentle spirit and thirst for peace I believe will be a major factor in fashioning a manner of dealing with the issues that will be much more satisfactory than the one presently in place.

Please continue prayers for our Holy Father, Archbishop Hunthausen, Bishop Wuerl and all our sisters and brothers in Seattle.

Peace to all.

Education takes top priority in survey of black Catholics

By Julie Asher

Washington (NC) — Black Catholics responding to a national survey said they see education in Catholic schools, leadership training for young adults and adults, and black spirituality and worship as essential to their full participation in the Church.

A total of 376 responded out of 2,200 black Catholics surveyed. The survey was sponsored by the National Office for Black Catholics and the National Black Lay Catholic Caucus.

It was prepared and distributed during August, September and October in 65 cities. Ages of respondents ranged from 15 to 93, with an average age of 48.

Survey results were released at a press conference Nov. 10 during the U.S. bishops' general meeting in Washington. Copies were given to the 300 bishops attending the meeting.

Black Catholics number about 1.3 million out of the U.S. black population of 26 million. There are 52 million Catholics in the United States.

Those surveyed rated education in Catholic schools the top priority in parish life, followed by young adult leadership training, adult leadership training, black spirituality or worship, and social action involvement.

About 89 percent said they felt racism was present in many levels of parish, school, diocesan and archdiocesan structures.

When asked if they had read the U.S. bishops' 1979 pastoral letter on racism, 64.1

percent said no, 33.8 percent said yes and 2.1 percent did not answer.

More than half of those surveyed — 56.1 percent — said they had read the 1984 pastoral letter on evangelization within the black community issued by the nation's 10 black bishops. There were 42.3 percent who said they had not read it.

The 1984 letter, "What We Have Seen and Heard," was a call for recognition of black Catholics, their involvement in leadership roles for evangelization, and a challenge to share their culture within the Church.

In response to the question "Has your parish, diocese or archdiocese been active in discussing these documents?" 47.1 percent said there had been no discussion while 43.1 percent said there had.

A little over 50 percent said blacks have made progress in the church, but more than 70 percent said young black Catholics do not have a high level of interest and motivation in Church life.

Almost 73 percent said they felt the Church was losing many young people to other denominations.

On another question, a majority of respondents said they favored an autonomous organization for black Catholics as opposed to an office within the U.S. bishops' conference.

The black bishops last year called for a permanent secretariat for black Catholics within the National Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Agency accepting applicants for Christmas aid program

The Salvation Army's annual Christmas program will accept applications through Thanksgiving (excluding Saturday and Sunday) during the hours of 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Families in need should bring verification of income, expenses and number in household to 60 Liberty Pole Way, Rochester.

Food and toys are available to make Christmas a special holiday for needy families.

Telephone applications for the home-bound and elderly will be accepted from agencies during the week of December 1.

Call (716)546-3944 for information.

Notice to readers

Our next regular publication date coincides with Thanksgiving Day, which is a postal holiday. Therefore, subscribers will not receive the Courier-Journal until Friday, Nov. 28. Have a happy and peaceful Thanksgiving!

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