

# Rochester delegates to attend National Black Congress

By Teresa A. Parsons

Ten men and women from the Diocese of Rochester will take part in developing a pastoral plan for black Catholics at this week's National Black Catholic Congress in Washington, D.C.

Rochester's delegates will join nearly 1,500 others from 107 dioceses who will gather May 21-24 at The Catholic University of America for the first such event in the United States since 1894. The theme of the congress is "The Development of Our Pastoral Vision."

Inspired largely by the black Catholic bishops' 1984 pastoral letter, "What We Have Seen and Heard," the congress will celebrate the historical contributions black culture has made to the Church, as well as the vision black Catholics dream for their Church in the future.

Participants will also identify common problems and seek solutions for such nationwide concerns as the breakdown of family and moral structures, the alienation of young people, continuing manifestations of racism in the Church, and the need for more effective evangelization in the black community.

As one of Rochester's delegates, Betty Marian Anderson is "overjoyed" at the opportunity to meet other black Catholics from all over the country.

"I think that when we get together and put all our ideas together, we will all be stronger," she said. "When we come back, we're going to put whatever plans are set forth there into action ... It doesn't do any good to go to these things without coming back and acting on them."

Local delegates represent a total of three parishes and a variety of occupations. Included are educators and community service workers, engineers and businessmen.

"I am very pleased with the people who make up our delegation," said Jacqueline

Dobson, who will attend the congress by virtue of her position as executive director of the diocesan Office of Black Ministries. "They bring a lot of experience from different walks of life. They are people (who) have grown up in the community and who have walked and talked with the black community."

In addition to Anderson and Dobson, members of Rochester's delegation are: Eli Danzy Sr.; Robert Laird; Denise Lourette; Freida McCray; Linda Rosier; Donald Toyer; Jean Pryor; and Margaret Williams.

To prepare for the national event, black Catholics in more than 100 dioceses throughout the country organized local consultations. An estimated 34,000 of the nation's 1.3 million black Catholics responded in some fashion, due at least in part to support from sponsoring organizations such as the National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus, the National Black Sisters' Conference, the National Association of Black Catholic Administrators and the Knights and Ladies' Auxiliary of St. Peter Claver.

In Rochester, more than 50 members of and ministers to the black community gathered last December for a diocesan day of reflection. Participants nominated local delegates to the congress and identified five suggested agenda items drawn from the day's discussions. Those items, along with similar submissions from other dioceses, have since been compiled in the national congress's 72-page working document.

Items identified as chief concerns in Rochester's black Catholic community were: increasing black leadership on the parish and diocesan level; building the black family and community; serving youths with programs, services and leadership training; and bridging the gap between young and old; evangelizing the unchurched and nominal Catholics; and providing employment opportunities, education and training for black Catholics.

Youth-related issues are of particular interest to Anderson, a teacher at Edison Technical and Occupational Education Center and a parishioner at Immaculate Conception Church.

"We need to do some serious planning to make sure that our youth are included in the Church, that they feel comfortable in the Church," she said. "In the Diocese of Rochester, we have some very exciting young people. They're like an automobile — all you need is a key to turn them on."

Eli Danzy, the grand knight of the local chapter of the Knights of St. Peter Claver, agrees that the needs of black youth ought to be a priority.

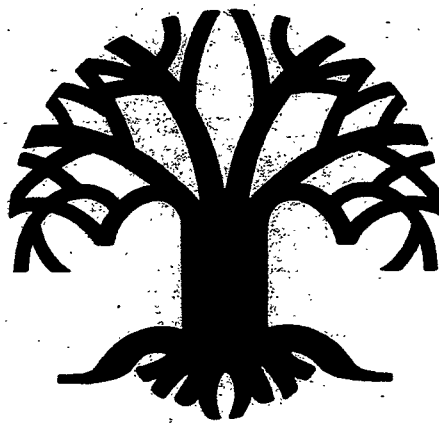
But he is even more concerned about the failure of the Church to effectively evangelize in the black community. A parishioner and former community-outreach worker at St. Bridget's Parish, Danzy lamented the fact that priests and religious seldom visit parishioners in their homes any more.

"The reason I speak highly of home visitations is because that's how I became a Catholic," he said. "The diocese used to send seminarians out to working in the community. I don't see that happening any more."

Danzy believes the Church has gradually relinquished what was once a leadership role in the black community.

"The diocese is not really pressing the issue," he said. "I don't know what the problem is, but I wish we could put our hands on it."

All the delegates will have the chance to do some hands-on work with the problems they perceive at the local level once they return from Washington. Armed with the pastoral plan the national congress will develop, they will be responsible for implementing those portions seen as applicable to the Diocese of Rochester.



*"Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying whom shall I send? Who will go for us? Here I am: I said, send me!"*

Isaiah 6:8

"In looking over the working document, I was surprised to see our five items reflected in other people's thoughts around the country," said Donald Toyer, an engineer at Eastman Kodak. "It's nice to know you're not alone."

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