

Black Catholic Congress focuses on families

African-American Catholics and the larger U.S. Catholic Church should develop programs to strengthen African-American families and help them cope with "pressures and issues of our modern society," according to pastoral statements approved by delegates at the seventh National Black Catholic Congress.

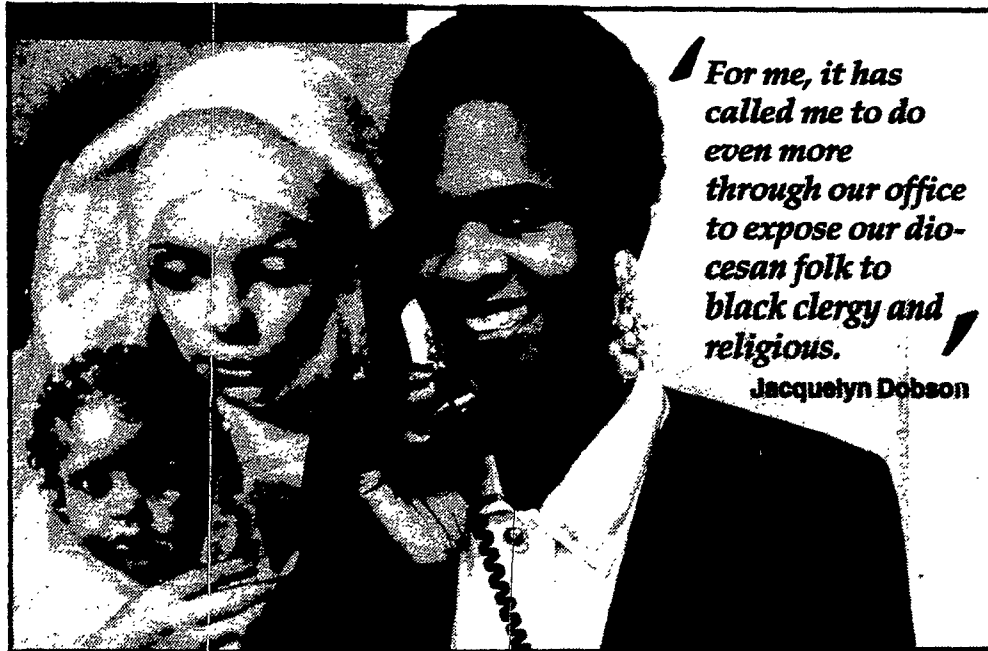
Meeting in New Orleans, delegates passed eight public-policy statements and 11 pastoral statements during the July 9-12 congress, which focused on the African-American family as well as improving the status of the African-American male in U.S. society.

Almost 2,700 people, including 91 of the nation's bishops, attended the congress. Fourteen representatives from the Diocese of Rochester were among the participants.

Jacquelyn Dobson, diocesan director of the Office of Black Ministries, said diocesan delegates will meet this fall with Bishop Matthew H. Clark and other diocesan officials to discuss the congress and possible implementation of some of its proposals in parish and diocesan ministries.

Among the gathering's participants, 1,140 were voting delegates who approved recommendations which — among other things — call on the government for a stronger national family policy and changes in welfare, health care and employment and job-training practices, and on the church for programs to strengthen African-American family life and to incorporate black culture.

Dobson applauded the congress' focus on family life. A community is



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Jacquelyn Dobson, diocesan director of the Office of Black Ministries, was among the 2,700 participants at the National Black Catholic Congress in New Orleans July 9-12.

only as strong as the families who live there, she said, and many U.S. families — white, black and Hispanic — are experiencing "real trouble."

Dobson noted that the congress issued a 250-page book, named after the African-American spiritual "A Balm in Gilead," that included a wealth of information on how Catholic churches can strengthen and enrich black Catholic life. The book outlines several programs designed to give moral "rites of passage" to young people and a greater sense of healthy self-awareness and community life to black Catholics.

In addition to presentations on the African-American family, Dobson said

one of the gathering's sessions inspired her to consider calling on more diocesan African-American couples to participate as leaders in marriage-preparation programs.

Entitled "The Sacrament of Marriage vs. The Kingdom of Thingdom," the session was presented by Andrew and Terri Lyke, coordinators of the Chicago archdiocese's Marriage Ministry for the African American community.

"I was inspired to see a healthy, nurturing, happy black couple," she said, adding that black couples need to see role models such as the Lykes to help them strengthen their own marriages.

In fact, one of the pastoral state-

ments adopted by the congress urged the adaption of existing marriage-preparation and marriage-enrichment programs and/or the establishment of programs where there are none that "are culturally relevant to African-American people."

Not only was the example of black Catholic couples at the congress affirming, but the presence of a number of black clergy also moved Dobson.

"For me, it has called me to do even more through our office to expose our diocesan folk to black clergy and religious," she said. The black clergy's presence can inspire other African-Americans — especially young men — to imitate such role models, she said.

In addition to the statement on marriage-enrichment and marriage-preparation, other pastoral statements called for church strategies to:

- Help black families who lack basic necessities; support single-parent families; develop family-ministry programs with African-American cultural values; organize parish prison-ministry programs; and give material, emotional and spiritual support to pregnant women who think abortion is their only option.

- Start training for lay ministers in African-American parishes; help lay ministers in their relationship with parish councils and committees; provide scholarships to those who want to pursue lay ministry as a profession; and teach the laity how to be involved in development of public policy.

Contains reporting by Julie Asher of Catholic News Service and Staff Writer Rob Cullivan.

Bishop Clark appoints priests to administer confirmation

By Lee Strong
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Bishop Matthew H. Clark recently appointed three diocesan priests to administer the sacrament of confirmation in the Diocese of Rochester.

Father John M. Mulligan, vicar general and moderator of the Pastoral Center, Father Kevin E. McKenna, diocesan chancellor, and Father William F. Laird, judicial vicar of the diocesan tribunal, will join Bishops Clark and Dennis W. Hickey in administering the sacrament this fall.

In a letter dated June 30, 1992, Bishop Clark pointed out that he, Bishop Hickey and the retired Bishop Joseph L. Hogan have been administering the sacrament for many years, but that Bishop Hogan decided he would no longer preside at confirmation celebrations.

After Bishop Hogan's decision, Bishop Clark invited the three priests "to share this privilege and responsibility with Bishop Hickey and me."

The change is covered under canon law, which states that a bishop may issue a "special grant" to priests other

than bishops to administer confirmation, Father Mulligan noted.

The vicar general explained that he was chosen along with Fathers McKenna and Laird because, "the offices that we hold are all connected with the Office of Bishop," and "canon law links celebration of confirmation closely with the Office of Bishop."

Father Mulligan noted that the appointments were effective for one year.

"We regard this as an interim effort," the moderator observed. "After a year, we are going to evaluate how it is going."

Among the other options discussed was having pastors administer the sacrament of confirmation, Father Mulligan said. He said that option was being rejected at this time.

"To merely designate the pastor (to confirm) makes it too broad, moves it too far away from the Office of the Bishop," he said.

A random survey of diocesan pastors shows support for the decision, with a few reservations.

Father Conrad J. Sundholm noted that some priests during discussions suggested the idea that pastors or regional coordinators confirm youths.

The pastor of Auburn's Holy Family and Aloysius parishes added that "this is probably a better approach because these are people right out of the Pastoral Center."

In addition, Father Sundholm saw a possible positive result of the decision.

"It will help to concentrate on the fact that it is the Holy Spirit coming, and not focus so much on the bishop coming," the pastor said.

As for pastors confirming candidates, Father Sundholm commented, "I think people ought to see somebody else. In a small town, you never see anybody else."

Although he views the decision as necessary, Father William M. Barrett hopes that the current solution is an interim one.

"I think this is probably a wise, but temporary decision to get away from the bishop (confirming) to another level," said the pastor of Dryden's Holy Cross Church. "I think maybe four or five years down the road the regional coordinators will (confirm)."

He added, however, that he hoped the bishop will continue to administer the sacrament.

"The parish feels itself very far away

from the diocese," Father Barrett said. Thus, he said, the tradition of the bishop coming to the parish for confirmations was good because, "if for no other reason, it brought him around once in a while."

Likewise, Father Richard O'Connell, pastor of St. Joseph's Parish in Rush, observed, "I think it's nice for the bishop to come."

Nevertheless, Father O'Connell did not object to the change.

"That may be a problem for some people, but not for me," the priest said.

The Rush priest believes that the entire sacrament — as it is currently administered — needs to be reconsidered.

"I would like to see the U.S. bishops do what the Eastern churches do — do it as part of baptism," he said, touching on an issue theologians are currently debating.

The decision to designate additional priests to confirm was essentially a practical one, Father Sundholm observed.

"You have to be realistic," the Auburn priest said. "There's no way the bishop can try to come to do them all."

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