

Black clergy, religious hail national meeting

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

BUFFALO — Transforming the church to better serve its black members — and similarly, organizations of black Catholic priests, seminarians and religious to better serve themselves — concerned more than 130 participants of a conference held here from July 24-29.

Sponsored by Central City Apostolate of the Diocese of Buffalo, the conference took place at the Hyatt-Regency Hotel in downtown Buffalo.

The joint conference was attended by members of the National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus, the National Black Sisters' Conference and the National Black Catholic Seminarians' Association. More than 1,300 priests, deacons, brothers and sisters belong to the three organizations, according to their leaders.

The Offices of Black Ministry in the dioceses of Rochester and Syracuse assisted in planning the joint conferences calling black Catholics to empowerment and wholeness in their ministries.

Following a Mass on Thursday night, July 28, at St. Joseph's Cathedral, 50 Franklin St., conference participants gathered at a reception at The Catholic Center, and spoke of the work accomplished during the weeklong gathering.

Father Edward B. Branch, vice president of the Black Catholic Clergy Caucus, noted that his members discussed creating a communications network to lessen the isolation black clergy perceive in the church.

"Most of us are scattered all over the place," he said. "When we know each other, it's to the benefit of the whole church."

The caucus wants to establish a regular newsletter enabling members to keep in touch with one another, he said, adding that the caucus also will develop a list of experts who can be contacted by members and of resource materials that black clergy can use to enhance their ministries.

The caucus also explored further developing the Institute of Black Catholic Studies at Xavier University in New Orleans, La., and establishing continuing-education programs for its members, Father Branch explained.

Like the priests they aspire to be, seminarians attending the conference also focused on helping each other develop their vocations, according to R. Tony Ri-



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

Deacon Bradley Seabrook (left) celebrates the Eucharist July 28 alongside Buffalo's Bishop Edward D. Head during the closing liturgy of the Black Catholic Conference at St. Joseph's Cathedral.



(From left) Ann Marie Szpakowska, Lucille Danek, Alicia Anderson, and Linda Lewis performed in a choir featuring singers from the Buffalo diocese.

card, outgoing president of the National Black Catholic Seminarians Association.

To better serve the African-American and non-African-American men who want to serve as priests within black communities, seminarians must develop programs that emphasize black spirituality, he said.

"In the black community, spirituality is based on the family," Ricard commented. "As a young man in the church, I don't begin a homily without asking the elders of the church permission to speak."

Black Catholics, from toddlers to senior citizens, must be involved in every aspect of the liturgy, Ricard emphasized, adding that the church's emphasis on the saints parallels the black community's reverence for its ancestors.

"We have African saints," he said. "You should call upon these saints when you do the martyrology."

Much like their brethren in the clergy and the seminaries, black women religious experience isolation in the church and must support one another, remarked Sister Marie dePorres Taylor, a member of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary and president of the National Black Sisters' Conference.

"Many don't feel supported in their own orders," Sister Taylor claimed of her membership. "They are dealing with people who do not understand different cultures. Most of the (religious) communities are Eurocentric."

Sister Taylor pointed out, for example, that some black sisters would like prayer services in their convents

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Father Fernand J. Cheri, OFM, sings along with the choir during the closing Black Catholic Conference liturgy.

Draft of Synod pastoral plan ready for review, revision

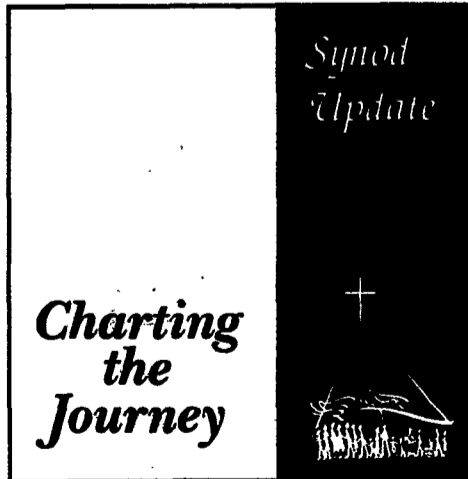
By Lee Strong
Senior staff writer

GATES — The Synod Implementation Commission Aug. 3 was scheduled to review the first draft of the diocesan pastoral plan for implementing the five recommendations that came out of the diocesan Synod last October.

The plan will also be evaluated by such consultative bodies as the Priests' Council, the Stewardship Council and the Diocesan Pastoral Council in the coming months, and by parish teams during 11 regional meetings scheduled for Oct. 1.

According to Deacon Thomas Cass, Synod implementation director, the final plan — which will be based on the draft along with any revisions recommended during input from consultative bodies and regional meetings — will likely be released in early December.

Cass said the final plan will guide the diocese's mission in the years to come. The pastoral plan will include goals, objectives and specific actions



for implementing the five recommendations approved during the diocese's seventh General Synod last October: lifelong religious education; consistent life ethic; Catholic moral education; the role of women in the church; and small Christian communities.

The plan will be re-evaluated yearly and revised when needed, he added.

The draft was developed from responses by parish teams examining the five recommendations over the last few

months. The parish teams rated priorities and submitted their reports to the commission's Analysis Team.

Reporting that 115 parish teams responded for input into the plan, Deacon Cass said he was pleased with the response.

"That's a high response rate," he said.

In fact, parishes' input has already influenced the plan, Deacon Cass observed. For example, based on the recommendations from those sessions, lifelong religious education and Catholic moral teaching, along with components of consistent life ethic, will be linked together in one section of the pastoral plan.

The parish teams' analyses of the five recommendations included written comments on the recommendations and possible action steps, Deacon Cass noted. The combined religious/moral education portion of the plan alone produced 43 pages of comments, he reported.

The votes on action steps, as well as comments, will now be kept on file, Dea-

con Cass said. They will then be used in the coming years for reference as the pastoral plan is re-evaluated annually.

"We want to make sure as we update that we go back and reference our starting point," Deacon Cass said.

The proposed action steps include a variety of recommendations, including such initiatives as preparing pilot programs in parishes, developing discussion packets targeting social-justice issues, forming support groups and offering retreats for families, and providing training and education opportunities for local leaders.

"We're trying to be as specific as possible on the action steps," Deacon Cass said.

After the final draft's preparation and release, Deacon Cass said, a team of Pastoral Center employees, working in conjunction with the Synod Implementation Commission, will review the plan annually and make changes as necessary, Deacon Cass explained.

Thus, Deacon Cass acknowledged, additional action steps may arise in the future in response to specific needs.