

CONVOCATION

Continued from page A1

St. Francis Seminary in Milwaukee, noted that black and white Catholics belong to the same church, but have had different cultural experiences in America.

For example, many white Americans don't think of their racial identity all that often, he said, whereas for many African-Americans, it's an ever-present issue. A struggle for freedom in and acceptance by the larger society is a common experience for blacks, he noted, and informs black Catholics' desire for a church that celebrates their heritage and supports their struggle. Celebrating that heritage means that the wider church needs to encourage African-American Catholics to participate in church life, from its liturgy to its leadership, he noted.

At the same time, black Catholics also must respond to the challenge of diversifying the church by becoming "culturally competent," Father Massingale said. African-American Catholics need to become well-versed in black Catholic history and build cooperation among black Catholic leaders.

In a follow-up interview, Father Massingale made a number of practical suggestions for parishes to become more accepting of cultural diversity. Every parish should learn hymns that come from different ethnic groups, he noted, and incorporate into liturgies different aspects of all of the church's cultures. He added that parishes that are becoming multiethnic — for example, a parish moving from a mainly Polish congregation to a Puerto Rican congregation — should hold open dialogues about how such a transition is going and how it can be seen as a gain, not a loss.

"The goal is not to make the transition painless; it's to make it graceful," he said.

When asked how people of different colors can discuss racial issues



Eric Sucar/Catholic Courier

Daughter of Divine Love Sister MaryPaul Asoegwu (right), coordinator of ethnic ministries for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, speaks with Brenda Easley Webb, director of the Diocese of Buffalo's Office of Black Ministry, during the second day of the Black Catholic Convocation. The gathering took place at Pittsford's St. Bernard's School of Theology and Ministry Oct. 16.

without devolving into quarreling over racism, Father Massingale urged Catholics to be honest, but polite.

"Be up front about it," he said. "Say, 'This may not come out right' or 'I feel uncomfortable — don't take offense.' The one thing we have in common in our society is that we're not very skilled at talking about race in a multicultural setting. We're still trying to learn the skills, so there still may be some awkwardness."

Another topic of the convocation centered on defining who is an African-American. Is it someone whose African ancestors came over to America on a slave ship? A black Haitian who has immigrated to America? Someone whose family immigrated from Kenya 30 years ago? Or someone whose family just

fled war-torn Sudan? These questions were among many addressed during an Oct. 16 presentation by Daughter of Divine Love Sister MaryPaul Asoegwu, coordinator of ethnic ministries for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and a native of Nigeria.

Africa has produced three popes, many saints and millions of Catholics, the woman religious noted. Yet, despite the fact that black Americans, black Caribbean natives and African immigrants share common roots in a continent that has decisively influenced the church, all three groups have vastly different experiences of America. Catholics seeking to work with any or all such communities need to realize that they have different histories and needs, she noted.

Sister Asoegwu said the U.S.

church is continually taking steps to address the needs of black Catholics from Africa and the Caribbean. For example, she said, Washington, D.C., will host the first national convention of Caribbean Catholics from Aug. 26-28, 2005.

One of the discussion participants, Nevin Byrd, a 16-year-old parishioner of St. Martin de Porres Church in Buffalo, said part of her reason for traveling to Rochester was to learn how to better relate to the small group of Sudanese who attend her predominantly African-American parish. She spoke words that could be taken as a recurring message of the convocation itself.

"Everybody has good intentions," she said. "But without trying to understand (another person's) culture and where they came from, it's not inclusive."

Experience a Catholic Mass in Rochester's Most Beautiful Church



Come join us in the rich tradition of an English liturgy. Worship amid 1890's stained glass windows, priceless religious relics, listen to hymns played on our recently refurbished 1903 pipe organ with brass accompaniment. Ample parking behind the Parish Hall via Clifford Ave.

EVERY SUNDAY, 7 PM

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Feast of Christ the King - November 21
Eastman School Choir - November 7 & 21, December 5 & 12, January 9
Christ Church Handbell Choir - TBA
Music of Palestrina, V. Williams, Batten, Handel, Manz, DiLasso & Ord.

ST. MICHAEL'S CHURCH

Corner of Clinton Ave. N. and Clifford Ave., Rochester, NY 14605 • 585-325-4040

SENIORS: ARE YOU READY TO DOWNSIZE?

Call a Senior Housing Specialist
With 19 Years of Proven Results.

Douglas Sadowski

Associate Broker

Office: (585) 756-7405

Email: DougSadowski@remax.net

Contributions to selected Catholic charities with Every Sale
RE/MAX First • 95 Allens Creek Road • Rochester, NY 14618

