

in a

Word™

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Congratulations to all newly confirmed in the Spirit!!

Photo by Father James Pawlicki, SVD

DO YOU BELIEVE IN UTOPIA?

by Father Jerome LeDoux, SVD

"We, the governing body of Monte Verita, wish to nominate you, Father Jerome LeDoux, as Ambassador of Utopia from St. Augustine Church in New Orleans, Louisiana. We want to make this presentation on April 19, 2009 in New Orleans."

Upon reading this, did you get the same ??? reaction as I did? Undoubtedly. In fact, when the time came for the presentation, my mind was poles apart from the big moment. Lenus and Berylyn Jack, organizers of the weekend celebration for the Buffalo Soldiers and Black Mardi Gras Indians, called Our Lady Star of the Sea Rectory. The high-voltage pastor there, Father Tony Ricard, embraced the celebration with heart and home. Thus, I as celebrant served to a nearly full house in his spacious church.

Backed by veteran parochial soldier Father Vic Cohea and the dynamic Gospel choir directed by Archdiocesan Mass Choir director Richard Cheri, we had a rousing, happy celebration.

Monte Verita is a benevolent ruling body governing Utopia, a fancied country which is home to the highest ideals, ideas, tendencies and aspirations possible to us human beings. Further, it is a country in which all of these things are possible and at times do happen.

Ever looking for new ambassadors of Utopia from around the world, Claudio Rossetti, the Director of Monte Verita, sounds the opinions of his friends local and abroad. Those soundings somehow brought him to Father Jerome LeDoux, SVD.

At the end of our joyous Gospel/Jazz Mass celebration on April 19, Claudio Rossetti and the Swiss contingent came to the pulpit to make the presentation.

My mind raced from one end of the philosophical spectrum to the other, wondering, for one thing, whether folks would consider me an impractical nut, a space cadet for venturing into the fanciful world of Utopia. Is Utopia, as defined and lived by devotees of Monte Verita, a mere world of dreams, imaginings and futile gropings? Or is there not only room for but need for Utopia in our fast-unfolding world?

Acts 4:32-35 and 5:1-11 relate the only genuine instance of Utopia in the history of the world embodied in the earliest community of Christian believers. Living with everything in common, so that no one had a surplus and no one a need, theirs was the only instance of true Communism that ever was. But the avarice of Ananias and Sapphira destroyed it.

Since the purest example of Utopia rose fast and crashed in flames among the earliest Christians, how or why should we dare even explore the possibilities of

Utopia in these very harsh times? Compared to the vices of yore, these latter times have all the traces of secular cultures flaunting much deeper and more prevalent avarice, greed and selfishness.

Can there possibly be a reasonable return for our forays into what was tried and failed amid the strong faith and best intentions of people bound together in God's Spirit? What will it profit us to tarry in the country of Utopia whose high ideals, ideas, tendencies and aspirations do not nearly match those of the harsh realities of any other country on earth?

All these thoughts jammed into my mind as Claudio Rossetti read the manifesto of my ambassadorial assignment to the country of Utopia. Interestingly, the congregation began to applaud with muted cheers when they heard the word ambassador. But did they really know what was going on? Did they understand the implications of the word Utopia?

I must confess I was having the same doubts about my own understanding of just what was being wrought in that presentation by the Swiss director of Utopia. Just imagine me with an astonishing new title: Ambassador of Utopia. Come on, suppress that laugh!

My curiosity deepened further when I read from the letter of Claudio Rossetti: "Monte Verita has long been the ideal place for meeting and exchanging ideas, attracting a formidable array of writers and intellectuals, artists and political and economic exponents."

After that barrage, I wondered what I might have in common with revolutionary writers although a commonality in literature and science would be understandable. Evidently, part of what makes Utopia go is the very fact of diversity in its ambassadors' cultures, philosophy, theology, economics and array of ideas.

With a new twist toward practical reality, Monte Verita has been working closely with the Swiss federal institutes of technology, the Swiss Universities and the academic research institutes since 1990. Their centre hosts over forty conferences of high scientific and humanistic caliber each year. UNESCO recognition has enhanced all that.

Open to the general public, Monte Verita reaches beyond scholars and important personalities to make itself a lighthouse illuminating society, our culture and other areas of our lives with utopias, some of which have since turned into concrete projects.

Oscar Wilde writes: "A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which humanity is always landing."

Asked by Claudio Rossetti whether I thought everything is possible, I responded: "I can do all things through him who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:13) "For human beings this is impossible, but for God all things are possible." (Matthew 19:26)

A partnership between the African American Catholic Center for Evangelization and Loyola Marymount University's Center for Religion and Spirituality is forming parish leaders for specialized ministry with African American Catholics. The certificate program is primarily geared towards lay people "who are looking for a way to deepen their understanding of ministry to the African American community," said Robert Hurteau, director of LMU's Center for Religion and Spirituality.

For some time, African American parish leaders and clergy talked about the need to develop formalized training in African American ministry in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, including members of the African American Advisory Council to Our Lady of the Angels Region Auxiliary Bishop Edward Clark. "We had the task of designing a training program for those priests and religious who want to work and provide ministry in African American communities," said LeRoy Titus, who chairs the council. "Then we realized the need to educate not just priests and deacons but also cradle Catholics." As conversations continued, the African American Center for Evangelization (AACCFE) and LMU made a decision to collaborate as the key organizations to design and market the certificate program.

Lectures focus on the history of African American spirituality, the formation of lay ministers, planning a liturgical service, preaching to an African American community and evangelization. The goal is to form parish leaders who can effectively respond to the concerns and ministry needs of today's African American Catholics.

One of the key strengths of the certificate program is bringing renowned scholars and church leaders from around the country to speak on the experience of Black Catholics nationwide.

The program also addresses the changing demo-



The first class of the African American Ministry program in Los Angeles

Forming Parish Leaders for Ministry with African American Catholics



Anderson Shaw, director of AACCFE with wife Audrey and Father John Hartman, SSJ

graphics of traditionally Black Catholic churches which have seen an influx of Latino Catholics into their parishes.

"There are seven or eight traditionally African American churches in South Los Angeles that are quite Hispanic now," said Hurteau. For Black Catholics, he added, key questions are, "How do we keep our own sense of ourselves? And how do we work with others?"

Anderson Shaw, director of AACCFE, also is thinking about evangelization strategies towards young adult African Americans.

"We have a lot of young African Americans moving into outlying regions who are disconnected or are not making connections with the church because it is not the church in the urban areas where they grew up," said Shaw. Those parishes could consider evangelization strategies that include using Martin Luther King remembrances and Black History Month as opportunities to introduce people to spirituality of the African American community.

"They may be surprised there are more than two families who will show up," said Shaw, "and it will make their community even more diverse and powerful."

This article was edited from a longer description of the program as found in the October 17, 2008 issue of the TIDINGS, the Catholic paper for the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. Author was Ellie Hidalgo.

Web site for African American Catholic Center for Evangelization is www.aaccfe.com

in a word or two

Front cover features young people preparing for Confirmation at St. Maria Goretti Church in New Orleans, Louisiana.

The Archbishop Lyke Conference will be held June 18 to 21, 2009 in New Orleans, Louisiana. The theme of the Conference will be *"In Christ All is New"*. The conference features music and liturgical dance workshops. The Lyke Conference is a spiritually uplifting experience that is a must for those ministering our parishes. For more information go to: www.LykeConference.com

W.Clifford Petty, has just released his second recording of sacred music titled **TOUCH JESUS**. Building from his first collection, *"In Spirit and Truth,"* Petty delivers a rich collection of praise and worship music that is both reflective and spirit lifting. His gentle ballads and profound lyrics cross cultural and denominational lines and appeals to people of all races and Christian religious traditions, especially those who appreciate the soulful and majestic energy of gospel music. Petty's rich velvety voice embodies warmth and grandeur as he expresses his passion and love for the Lord. Petty is choir director at Resurrection Catholic Church in Montgomery, Alabama. More information about Clifford Petty is found at www.reverbNation.com/wcliffordpetty

African American Catholics were very much present at the 2009 Religious Education Conference held in February of this year in Anaheim, California.

Sponsored by the archdiocesan Office of Religious Education, **the four-day 2009 Religious Education Congress drew close to 40,000 attendees who participated in close to**

300 workshops (some in Spanish, Vietnamese and Korean), more than a dozen liturgies and a variety of special musical and spiritual events. The event is no doubt one off the largest religious education gatherings for Catholics in the United States.

The liturgies and workshops were extremely well done.



Workshop presenters came from throughout the USA and overseas as well. With so much diversity in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles there was something for everyone.



People from many cultures attended the African American Catholic liturgy. Feeling the Spirit close to 3000 people were touched by the moving liturgy replete with song, dance and the stirring preaching of Father J-Glenn Murray.

A workshop conducted by Richard Cheri of New Orleans drew a huge crowd. It was interesting to see and hear people of various nationalities sing songs that were distinctly African American in style.



Father Tony Ricard was extremely popular with the delegates. He is pictured here with Anabel Monterosa (on left) and Haydee Islas both from Santa Monica, California.



Divine Word Missionaries is an international missionary community of over 6,000 brothers and priests. In 1905 the SVDs began working among African Americans in the Southern United States. Today, Divine Word Missionaries work in over 35 parishes in Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas and Arkansas.

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