

Reflections on Congress X Taken from IN A WORD November 2007 issue

The September and October 2007 issues of *IN A WORD* have examined features of the National Black Catholic X gathering in July of 2007. This month we conclude our three part series by reflecting on significant aspects that occurred during those days and what the future portends.

To be sure those who attended the Congress event truly benefited from the gathering. For a large number this was their first meeting of so many African American Catholics in one place and at one time. It was an opportunity to hear and share.

For the people who had attended all the Congress meetings since 1987 the event was like a two edged sword. One it pointed to signs of growth and maturity in the African American Catholic Church. Yet on the other hand it was also a painful reminder of how much more work needs to be addressed to sensitize the Church to the value and gifts of African Americans.

One could point to many things that made the Congress unique. Surely there were those who had a list of negatives and those who spoke nothing but praises. We do not wish to compare shopping lists. For we believe that when one gets right down to it three things stand out prominently in this Buffalo Congress gathering. We ask our readers to consider their importance.

The first is the prominent role of the laity. Liturgies were conducted in wonderful fashion with the Bishops giving excellent homilies. However, the workshops showed the power and abilities of the laity.

The majority of the workshops were conducted by lay men and women. Workshops on *Spirituality, Parish Life, Youth and Young Adults, Racism, Catholic Education, Africa, HIV/AIDS,* and *Social Justice AIDS,* were ably run by talented people from all over the United States. As mentioned in the video documentary about the Congress days it seems that the recent Congress is gradually inching back to the time of Daniel Rudd where the Congress events were led by laity.

The Buffalo meeting had fewer African American Priests and religious than ever before. Yes, the presence of African American clergy and religious was there. Yet, we repeat that it was not with the numbers of the past. This gradual decline has been going on since the New Orleans Congress in 1992. Why this is so is open to many interpretations.

Thus it stands to reason that with lay men and women dominating the workshops and discussions it seems to be just a matter of time when future Congress assemblies are led primarily by lay men and women who are African American and Catholic.

Spirituality is the second item that rose prominently at the July gathering. Deep faith and spiritual life has been found at all previous Congresses. However, this time a strong interior spiritual was manifested.

There were the moments of the Spirit moving in song and dance but for the first time a deep yearning for a quiet resting with God was allowed to come forth. Throughout the Congress days there were expressions of prayer and meditation. For example a workshop on meditation was attended by a large number of participants.

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament was the ultimate sign of this deep spiritual hunger for God. **For the first time ever at such a Congress event the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament was held. This was an historic first.** In silence prayer came from deep within the hearts of young and old. The public testimonies as to the power of the Eucharist were powerful witnesses to this strong yearning for God.

Thirdly, youth and young adults were for the first time prominently present. As mentioned in the last issue of *IN A WORD* the youth experience of Congress X was powerful.

It should be noted that the youth were not just teens but included a large number of young adults. **The presence of so many twenty to thirty somethings was a sign of the Spirit moving in the young future leaders of our communities.**

The young adults WANT to make a difference in their Church. They WANT responsibility. They hunger for God. That yearning for God was evident time and again in their prayer and meditation and reverent attitude to the sacred. What a wonderful future we have ahead with these young people. Truly “we have come far by faith”.

The emergence of a dynamic laity, a broadening of expressing spirituality from outward expressions to a contemplative form, and the dreams of our young people are going to be recurring thoughts in the years to come. If our Church is to go grow then Bishops, priests, and Catholics in general must allow the laity to come alive, speak to the spirituality both interiorly and exteriorly and reach out to the young adults who so fervently want to make a difference.

The Congress X event was more than just those days in July of 2007. As Bishop Ricard said back in 1987 “The Congress is not just an event but is a movement”. There is no doubt that African American Catholics are moving forward and the Congress movement is definitely alive.