

NATIONAL BLACK CATHOLIC CONGRESS

REPORT FROM THE CONGRESS XII DAY OF REFLECTION

Arch/Diocese: Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester, New York

Date of Day of Reflection: August 27, 2016

Number of Participants: 34

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“THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME: ACT JUSTLY, LOVE GOODNESS, WALK HUMBLY WITH GOD”

1) How can we use social media to effectively promote the causes of Servant of God, Mother Mary Lange, Venerable Henriette Delille, Venerable Pierre Toussaint, and Servant of God, Father Augustus Tolton?

We believe that all Catholics in every parish across the U.S. should have the opportunity to learn more about the lives of these four holy men and women. Their wonderful qualities serve as an example to every generation regardless of race or gender. They have paved the way for us and we must follow in their steps: to walk humbly, love tenderly and act justly. Faith impels us to action.

In an effort to promote the causes of these four candidates for sainthood, a social media initiative can communicate a number of important ideas. First, it should educate people on the process of canonization. You might even incorporate stories of experiences from other parts of the world where they have effectively promoted the causes of Saints in their own countries. You can promote prayer through the intercession of these candidates, provide testimonies of people from their religious communities, and encourage the corporal and spiritual works of mercy as seen in their lives.

We recommend developing a variety of resources for parishes such as professional videos that can be used in religious education, RCIA or other faith formation activities. You can provide names of Black Saints for confirmation candidates. Also, make available and encourage all Catholics to pray their official canonization prayers. Prayers of petition and homily helps provided on an ongoing basis can be useful to clergy as they prepare for the Sunday Liturgy each week.

National Black Catholic History Month always provides a great opportunity to initiate these conversations. Create an event that celebrates the lives of Black Saints or make them the subject of a recurring program such as a Revival. Letter writing campaigns are an excellent way to raise public awareness about an issue. Perhaps an email campaign could be effective. An “adopt a candidate” campaign might encourage individual parishes to create their own activities to promote one particular cause. The Presbyteral

Council can also serve to spread the word about these four candidates for sainthood, as we all can through our own social networks.

2) While honoring the achievement and wisdom of the elders in our parish communities, can we suggest ways to allow opportunities for youth and young adult members to lead our universal church into an era where their skills are valued, embraced and welcomed? This will involve inter-generational love and handholding with the Lord. Young paired with the more seasoned, doing a dance with the Lord so that all of us stand ready to build up our church for the future.

Opportunities for youth and young adult members of our Church should first connect them with Jesus. Our hope is that they fall in love with Jesus developing a deep and lasting relationship with God. We also want them to value and love themselves. Faith formation opportunities, such as Bible studies and "Theology on Tap", are ways that we can foster this.

Powerful worship experiences will connect young people with the Church but they should also be invited into liturgical roles. Let us celebrate their gifts as ushers, lectors, musicians and singers. In doing so, we must encourage them to take ownership and be willing to let go of some control.

Intergenerational relationships must be based on mutual trust and an understanding of the actual needs of the young person. Leadership development, mentoring, and community service opportunities are wonderful ways to build up our youth in the Church and foster these relationships. The simple ministry of presence also goes a long way.

3) African Americans have survived many years of tribulations and trials, oppression and rejection, hatred and violence. The community has navigated a faithful existence on American shores through faith, education, family togetherness and constant prayer. Taking into account the poverty, marginalization, lack of health care, incarcerations, violence, legal injustices and other recent social events, how can our parish communities rise above inequities to embrace the joyful lives that God intended for them? How do we grab onto the promises of the Lord so that we can act justly, love goodness, and walk humbly with God?

The first step parish communities can take is to recognize that the inequities that exist in society are an effect of racial injustice. The Church needs to take action to overcome these inequities and create safe spaces for open dialogue. People should feel comfortable to express their concerns when they see or experience an injustice.

These are not only urban issues. These are issues that affect all of society and we must educate all of our faith communities on their broad impact. The public images of African Americans have much to do with how people understand and relate to the Black community. The 2011 National Black Catholic Study found that the U.S.'s estimated three million Black Catholics are highly educated and deeply engaged in the Church; yet, racial inclusiveness in the Church is still a concern. We encourage parishes to invite Black Catholics into leadership roles in their faith communities. We also urge the media to

portray the full richness of the Black community and stop its paternalistic narrative. This includes the Catholic media.

We are called to act justly. As Pope Francis continually reminds us, we need to be a Church that goes out to the margins of society. We need to reach out to those outside our Church doors. We need to visit different parishes in our Diocese and make our presence as Black Catholics known. We need to work with our Diocesan structures and social service organizations to address the issues that affect our community. We need to participate in interfaith and ecumenical opportunities such as the National Day of Prayer. We must also practice faithful citizenship and get out the vote.

We are called to love goodness. Faith allows us to trust in the promises of the Lord. Therefore, we must pray unceasingly both personally and as the Body of Christ. The Prayer of the Faithful during our Eucharistic celebrations is just one opportunity for the entire People of God to pray for these concerns. The Holy Scriptures, which contains within it every human experience, can also be used to teach and comfort. But, if we are to put into practice the teachings of the Lord, we must hold out a mirror to ourselves. Before our communities will "rise", we must rise in our families. We must strengthen relationships within our communities and support one another. We must celebrate "goodness" even in the poorest neighborhoods. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis states: "This is why I want a Church which is poor and for the poor. They have much to teach us. Not only do they share in the *sensus fidei*, but in their difficulties they know the suffering Christ. We need to let ourselves be evangelized by them..." (No. 198).

We are called to walk humbly. Humility is a virtue that helps us recognize the sacredness and dignity of all human life as a precious gift from God. It allows us to be selfless and show more charity towards others. It allows us see those who are different as brothers and sisters in Christ. It allows us to stand in solidarity with the poor, the marginalized, and the suffering.