

in a  
**Word**<sup>TM</sup>

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**National Black Catholic Congress XI  
July 19-21, 2012**

Photo by: Father James Pawlicki, SVD

# The Eleventh National Black Catholic Congress

The Eleventh National Black Catholic Congress took place from July 19-21, 2012. Theme of the Congress was *FAITH ENGAGED: EMPOWER EQUIP, EVANGELIZE*.

At the gathering held in Indianapolis, Indiana the Congress remembered and celebrated 25 years of *WHAT WE HAVE SEEN AND HEARD*.

The Congress gathering got off to a spirited start with a welcome by Bishop John Ricard, SSJ. There were spirited liturgies all three days.

General session speakers were Father Reginald Whitt, OP, and Immaculée Ilibagiza. Along with many workshop presenters the participants were rewarded with much



information throughout the conference.

The talk by Immaculée Ilibagiza must be given special notice. Her presentation was very powerful and touched an audience that had people standing or sitting on the floor.

Immaculée is a living example of faith put into action. Her life was trans-

formed dramatically during the 1994 Rwandan genocide where she and seven other women spent 91 days huddled silently together in the cramped bathroom of a local pastor's house.

Immaculée entered the bathroom a vibrant, 115-pound university student with a loving family - she emerged weighing just 65 pounds to find most of her family had been brutally murdered.

Immaculée credits her salvage mostly to prayer and to a set of rosary beads given to her by her devout Catholic father prior to going into hiding. Anger and resentment about her situation were literally eating her alive and destroying her faith, but rather than succumbing to the rage that she felt, Immaculée instead turned to prayer.

The event is held every five years in different locations across the country to work together to create a pastoral plan (guide) for the Black Catholic community for the next half-decade. The finalized plan will be released for implementation later this year.



This Pastoral Plan of Action is an organizational tool, offering guidelines and resources for dioceses around the United States. Last year's unprecedented National Black Catholic Survey, conducted by Notre Dame University on African-American Catholics, helped shape the Pastoral Plan.



The approved pastoral plan, which will be mailed to all diocesan bishops, targets ten core elements in the faith lives of Black Catholics. Dioceses and parishes will be invited to use the plan as action steps for their local church.

**The Prologue to the Pastoral Plan document of Congress XI provides the background for the Pastoral Plan and the Congress movement.**

*"The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts. For theirs is a community composed of men. United in Christ, they are led by the Holy Spirit in their journey to the*



*Kingdom of their Father and they have welcomed the news of salvation that is meant for every man. That is why this community realizes that it is truly linked with mankind and its history by the deepest of bonds.*

With these opening words of *Gaudium et Spes* more than a half century ago, the Second Vatican Council declared that we, the Church, are wholly engaged in our faith when we, as *followers of Jesus Christ*, are Wholly engaged in the modern world.

This commitment to engage our faith fully and to engage with the world *because of our faith* motivates the eleventh modern meeting of the National Black Catholic Congress. More than two thousand strong, we will gather in Indianapolis from July 1921, 2012 to celebrate the Catholic faith in the African American community and to equip and empower ourselves for the work of evangelization. We understand evangelization to be the spreading of the Good News of Jesus Christ not only through our words and prayers, but through our actions in the world.

We come to Congress XI equipped with valuable information about our community. Studies of religious attitudes are rarely designed to capture the attitudes of religious and ethnic minorities, so in 2011, the NBCC commissioned the first National Black Catholic Survey (NBCS). Dr. Darren W. Davis and Dr Donald B. Pope-Davis, social scientists from the University of Notre Dame, designed the study, which was conducted with support from the Institute for Church Life and the Office of the President, both at the University of Notre Dame.“

**(taken from Congress XI Pastoral Plan prologue)**



The proposed Pastoral Plan is quite detailed but we can provide the following 10 priorities that the NBCC outlined in the pastoral plan of action. These are:

1. Holiness of Life.
2. Life and Dignity of the Human Person:
3. Walking with the Saints:
4. Engaged in Parish Life and Evangelization:
5. Faith Informed:
6. Schools Too Valuable to Sell:
7. Reaching Out to the Next Generations:
8. Vocations
9. Getting Married and Staying Married:
10. The Social Apostolate:

In A WORD has been reporting on the Congress event since it was revived in 1987.

As in the past we will focus attention throughout the year on the Congress XI event. Each month a section of the Pastoral Plan will be examined.



## in a word or two



After a lengthy illness Rev. Gerald Lewis, SVD passed away in Panama City, Panama on July 27, 2012.

Father Lewis, affectionately known as “Father Gerry”, was born in the city of Colon, Panama on April 26, 1924 to Edmund Lewis and Josephine Tullock. He was the sixth of nine children. After completing his primary and secondary education in Colon at St. Joseph he arrived in New Orleans, Louisiana on September 6, 1940.

In 1943 he entered the novitiate of the Society of the Divine Word where he took first vows in 1945. On September 8, 1950 he pronounced his perpetual vows in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi at St. Augustine Seminary.

On June 24, 1952 he was ordained to the priesthood by Bishop Gerow. During his 60 years as a Divine Word Missionary Father Gerry served in many capacities to schools and parishes in Bay Saint Louis, Ms; St. Martinville, Louisiana; Vicksburg, Mississippi; Chicago, Illinois; St. Louis, Missouri; Los Angeles, California; Panama Canal Zone; Lafayette, Louisiana; Broussard, Louisiana and New Iberia, Louisiana. Before his retirement he served as chaplain for the Diocese of Galveston-Houston at UTMB (The University of Texas Medical Branch) in Galveston, Texas.

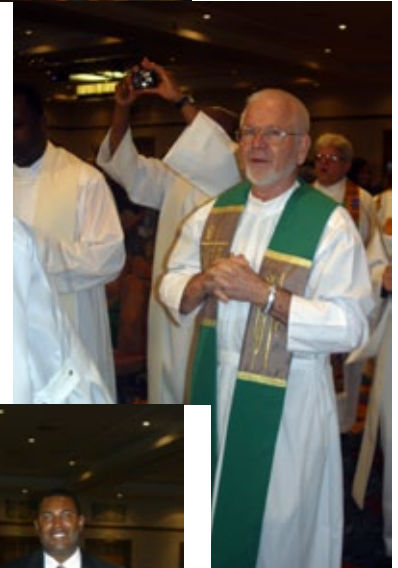
Father Lewis was at the center of a bitter fight to end segregation in the Archdiocese of New Orleans. When he was told by the parish at Jesuit Bend where he had been sent to say Mass that he was not welcome and was barred from entering the building. Frustrated with the overt racism Archbishop Rummel shut down the Church. The picture of Father Lewis was placed on the front cover of JET magazine in December, 1955, an issue that pointed out the efforts of Louisiana Catholics to end segregation.

Front cover photo: Ansel Augustine and Keah Moffet at National Black Catholic Congress XI.



*Religious Sisters were very visible at the Congress gathering. The Sisters were often publicly recognized for their service to the Church and community.*

*Monsignor John Cisewski of New Orleans was one of many priests and Bishops present at the Congress event.*



*Knights and Ladies of Peter Claver were very active in Indianapolis*

**Divine Word Missionaries** is an international missionary community of over 7,000 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.

**IN A WORD** is a publication of The Society of the Divine Word's Media Production Center. Rev. James Pawlicki, S.V.D., Director and Editor; Cathy Green-Miner, office manager; Father Brendan Murphy, SVD consultant.

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