

in a

Word™

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Catholic youth remind us that they are not the *NEXT* generation, but the *NOW* generation, ready to be more fully engaged in the life of their Church.

REACHING OUT TO THE NEXT GENERATIONS

(Part Seven of National Black Catholic Pastoral Plan)



Young people, enjoy your youth. Be happy while you are still young. Do what you want to do, and follow your heart's desire. But remember that God is going to judge you for whatever you do. (Ecclesiastes 11: 9)

We commit ourselves to the spiritual needs of our youth and young adults. Their participation in the life of the Church is vitally important to us. We especially commit ourselves to

addressing the critical issues that challenge our youth in the areas of human sexuality, educational opportunities, social and professional development, and conflict resolution. The Church is adopting new ways to minister to youth and to young adults, especially through social media and modern technology. Evangelization has always required adopting new languages and tools. So today, we must communicate with parishioners, particularly those under-40, by learning and embracing their preferred technologies.

At the same time, the medium should not drive the message. As Catholics, we have a sacramental understanding of reality—of Real, not virtual, Presence. For human persons to be Christ to one another, they must engage the whole human person. Social networks are not personal relationships. Text messages do not substitute for person-to-person conversation. New technologies offer new possibilities for evangelization and yet they cannot replace the fully-engaged, unabbreviated presence required for Eucharist, confession, or corporal works of mercy. We recall that “the Word became flesh” (John 1:1) – i.e., incarnated, not virtual.

Our perspective as African Americans

The Pastoral Plan of Congress IX called for greater attention to the spiritual needs of Youth and Young Adults, so the NBCC responded at Congress X and again this year at Congress XI, with presentations and social events just for youth and for young adults. **The youth reflected on this plan and offered their own response, reminding us that they are not the next generation, but the now generation, ready to be more fully engaged in the life of their Church.**

Catechists and youth ministers need resources that communicate the Gospel and challenge youth to reflect upon its meaning for their own lives and life choices. The NBCC bimonthly newsletter, which appears on the NBCC homep-

age, includes a fresh reflection on faith by a young adult or youth. Previously published articles are archived under the “Youth and Young Adults” tab at the NBCC website. An electronic “forum” at NBCC’s website enables youth and young adults across the country to post comments and start discussions.

The National Black Catholic Congress, in collaboration with St. Mary’s Press, is producing a Bible with commentaries, prayers, explanatory material, and original artwork designed to speak to the cultural and faith traditions of Black Catholic youth. This unprecedented project, *The African American Catholic Youth Bible*, is scheduled for publication in early spring 2014.

Beyond outreach to those who are already involved in the Church, we are deeply concerned for those young people who seem to lack hope, faith, or charity. Too many young men seek meaning and community not in a parish or studies, but in the streets. Gun violence by and against our African American young men is an affront to the dignity of the human person.

Our faith engaged

We applaud and support the beautiful statement of faith and plan of action for youth, which was created by the youth participants at Congress XI. (See next page)

- We commit ourselves to a “holy use” of modern technology as a means of evangelization. We encourage younger parishioners to contribute their creativity and knowledge of “new media” to develop effective means to share the Good News with the millennial generation. As well, we urge pastors and parish staff to welcome younger parishioners to take leadership roles in their parishes, including helping the parish to incorporate new media and technologies in its programs.

- We know that Jesus said “blessed are the peacemakers.” As young Catholics, we commit that we will not engage our minds, our money, or our time with music, media, or activities that glorify violence. We will strive to be peacemakers in our daily life and to be witnesses to the Gospel, which brings hope and life to those who embrace it.

- We continue to call upon parish, diocesan, and national leaders in the Church to promote leadership development among youth and young adults, and to monitor their progress in expanding leadership participation by younger Catholics.

- We commit to establishing a dialogue with the USCCB and NCEA regarding the importance of Catholic schools serving the African-American community.

THE PASTORAL PLAN OF THE YOUTH OF CONGRESS XI

Over 225 youth at Congress XI heard presentations on the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and participated in our own workshops and events.²⁰ We then gathered at the Youth Pastoral Plan Session to discuss the draft *Congress XI Pastoral Plan of Action Instrument for 2012-2017*. We focused on three sections of the plan: IV. Engaged in Parish Life and Evangelization; V. Faith Informed; and VII. Reaching out to the Next Generations.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER

We chose to speak about how we, the youth, the future of the church, want to retain our faith and help youth to grow as a community. Talent shows, outreach programs that concentrate on the mind, body and soul, and more youth activities will keep youth involved in parish life.

THE SON

We chose to speak about the need to have projects of evangelization to spread the Word of God to our youth in the community, by creating youth masses and youth ministries. This is so that we, the youth, can find greater interest in our parishes and remain involved with God our Father. ***We are the now generation, not the next generation.*** Brothers and sisters, without the growth of the youth community there will be a decline in our black Catholic community. As the youth, we need to remain strong and strive to bring more people into our church community.

AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

We chose to speak about how we, the youth, want to grow spiritually in our parishes by finding a commitment to Jesus through the Word of the Lord, in Bible study. This is so we can develop and satisfy our *hunger for the Holy Spirit* in our communities and parishes. By conducting Bible classes, we have the opportunity to learn, grow, and live on the Word of the Lord, bringing us closer to the Holy Spirit and growing in our faith



in a word or two

For those who have not heard the news.... Xavier University Preparatory School (Xavier Prep), a high school for primarily African-American Catholic girls in Uptown New Orleans, will close at the end of the 2012-13 academic year. The Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament made that announcement from the order's headquarters in Pennsylvania. The statement said the 98-year-old school "does not have a financially sustainable future." "After much prayer and deliberation, it is with very heavy hearts that the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament have come to this decision," the announcement said.



"The board of directors, the school administration and the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament worked tirelessly to meet the financial challenges facing the Prep, but after reviewing the financial projections for the 2013-14 school year, the Sisters concluded that the Prep does not have a financially sustainable future." The statement said, "No other decision was possible."

The school further said that it remains "committed to the students and families of Xavier Prep and will work with the Archdiocese of New Orleans to help all students transition to new schools, if need be."

According to the school's website, more than 95 percent of its graduates in recent years went on to college or other post-secondary education and one third of the graduates were awarded academic scholarships.

The school, which was founded by St. Katharine Drexel, has no direct connection to Xavier University. It was originally co-ed but became all-female in 1970. Although its graduates include many prominent Orleanians, including the wives of the city's first two black mayors, many of its students came from families of limited means.



When Hurricane Katrina heavily damaged St. Mary's Academy and St. Augustine in 2005, Xavier Prep welcomed students from those African American schools for the 2006 school year. The school was called MAX. Above photo shows students from each school. Interestingly, in October of 2012 the three schools gathered for a special Mass remembering that historic time. Who would have known that as the three schools gathered in 2012 that Xavier Prep would soon announce closure.



A Mass against violence was held on February 24, 2013 at St. Katharine Drexel Catholic Church in New Orleans, Louisiana.

The Imani Team of the CYO/Young Adult Ministry of the Archdiocese of New Orleans, which has organized an annual spiritual event for youth for the past six years, chose a Mass instead of a revival. The youth organizers said they were tired of seeing their peers die on the street and nobody saying anything about it. The young people hope the Mass will open up a dialogue and send a message to their peers.

The IAACEC (Interregional African American Catholic Evangelization Conference) "Living Our Faith" will take place May 4, 2013 in Columbus, Ohio.

The conference is designed to equip and empower all who attend, especially our youth and young adults and those who work with them. To accomplish this task, the conference is offering the best resources and experiences in faith that our heritage can afford.

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The 2013 Archbishop Lyke Conference will be held June 19-23, 2013. This liturgical conference is a Roman Catholic Conference with a focus to enhance worship through enculturation and education in an environment that is richly African American and authentically Catholic.

For more information go to www.LykeConference.com IN A WORD will have more on the Conference in next month's issue.

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.

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