

in a

# Word™

Volume 25, No. 9 November 2007

A Publication of The Society of the Divine Word, Southern Province



*Pages 2-3  
Final Reflections on Congress X*

*Page 4  
The Church loses a great priest*



# Congress X - The Movement Continues



The September and October 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 contemplative spirituality 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".

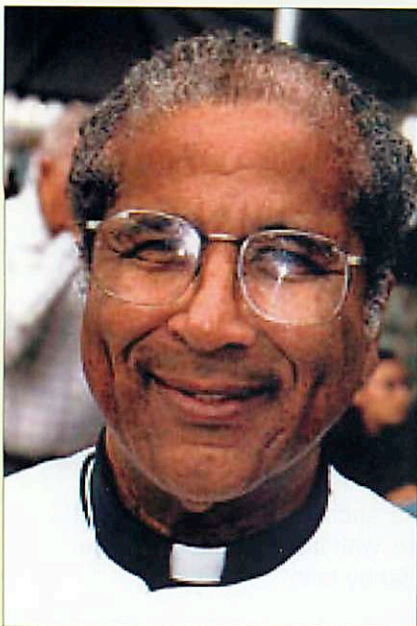
**The emergence of a dynamic laity, a broadening of expressing spirituality from outward expressions to a contemplative form, and the dreams of our young people are going to be recurring thoughts in the years to come.** If our Church is to go grow then Bishops, priests, and Catholics in general must 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.





## In a word or two



Fr. Fisher Robinson Jr., SVD, a Divine Word Missionary for almost 65 years died October 18, 2007, at Downey Medical Center in Downey, CA. of multiple natural causes. He had lived with his Divine Word Community at St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church in Los Angeles, since 1989.

Fr. Robinson was born on August 12, 1929, in Abbeville, Louisiana. He entered the Society of the Divine Word in Bay St. Louis,

Mississippi, in 1943, pronounced his First Vows in 1950, in Techy, Illinois, and was ordained a Priest on May 1, 1958, in Bay St. Louis. He would have celebrated his 50<sup>th</sup> Jubilee as a priest next May.

He was first assigned as Assistant Prefect of the Minor Seminary at Bay St. Louis, from 1959-61, then as Associate Pastor of Notre Dame Church in St. Martinville, LA, until 1963, when he was assigned to Divine Word Seminary in Riverside, CA as a teacher of math, science and Latin. In 1967 he became Principal of Verbum Dei High School in Los Angeles, where he served for 13 years, and continued to serve as a consultant and member of the Board of Directors. He was a recipient of the Verbum Dei Eagle Award for his contributions to the school. In 1980 he was appointed Pastor of St. Malachy Catholic Church in South Central Los Angeles.

In 1986, Fr. Robinson was appointed Episcopal Vicar of African American Catholics for the Archdiocese of Los Angeles by Cardinal Roger Mahony. He accepted the challenge and reached out to Catholics and the unchurched for the purpose of evangelizing and educating the laity about their baptismal calling. He held this position for 14 years.

A priest of priests, Fr. Robinson (Robbie, as he was affectionately called), dedicated himself to service in both his Community and the greater Archdiocese. He was a member of the Los Angeles Council of Priests, Archdiocesan Board of Consultors, Board of Ecumenical Center for Black Church Studies, was a founding member of the Black Lay Catholic Ministry and an active member of the 4<sup>th</sup> Degree Knights and Ladies of Peter Claver.

He was deeply respected and loved for being a sign of God's presence among us with his compassion, understanding, joy

and quiet wisdom. He drew the respect and affection of all who met him with his mentoring, spiritual direction, encouragement, friendship and presence. He was truly a Brother of the Word.

Cardinal Roger Mahony said of Father Fisher...

*"Your work and ministry has been a tremendous gift to us all. As a priest, you have accompanied many people on their journey of faith and strengthened their commitment to live the Gospel. As a leader in the Church you have mentored many others to recognize and develop their own gifts and have encouraged people to put these gifts at the service of the Church at large. As a faithful disciple of Jesus, you have helped bring the Good News to all people regardless of their ethnicity or culture."*

*(Cardinal Roger Mahony, Archbishop of Los Angeles, 2001)*

The 2008 Josephite African American History and Heritage Calendar for 2008 is available. The theme for this year's calendar is **LORD YOU ARE MY STRENGTH AND MY HOPE**. All images for the 2008 edition are taken from original paintings by the Benedictine Nuns of Turvey Abbey, part of their Jesus our life series of posters. The brilliant colors, rich design, religious sensitivity of the images reflect an outstanding creative, spiritual vision.

To order copies contact:

Josephite Pastoral Center  
1200 Varnum St., NE

Washington, DC 20017 Phone 202-526-9271

A video documentary on the 2007 National Black Catholic Congress meeting is available.

The 1 hour 20 minute video gives highlights of the Tenth Congress held in Buffalo, New York.

Included in the highlights are many scenes from the youth sessions, workshops, general sessions, and liturgies.

Cost is \$20.00 and \$5.00 for shipping and handling. To order contact:

Media Production Center  
Society of the Divine Word

199 Seminary Drive

Bay Saint Louis, MS 39520 phone 228-467-1097

e mail to [video@inaword.com](mailto:video@inaword.com)

*Front cover photo features Father Raymond Harris of Archdiocese of Baltimore; Ms. Valerie Washington, Executive Director of the Black Catholic Congress office; and Ms. Danielle Charles of St. Louis, Missouri. Father Harris and Ms. Charles assisted Ms. Washington by being facilitators for Congress X.*

**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.

**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; Paul Kahan, SVD.

All correspondence to Media Production Center, 199 Seminary Drive, Bay St. Louis, MS 39520, 228-467-1097, FAX 228-466-5640 Cell phone 504-908-6343. Electronic messages to our Internet address, [editor@inaword.com](mailto:editor@inaword.com). **IN A WORD** is not published during July and August.

Web page can be found at <http://www.inaword.com>