

The National Black Catholic Congress, Inc

Congress XI Pastoral Plan of Action Instrument

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Faith Engaged: Empower. Equip. Evangelize. This theme brought more than two thousand five hundred Catholics from all over the United States and beyond to Indianapolis, Indiana in July 2012, for Congress XI—the eleventh national assembly of African American Catholics. One outcome of that congress was this document, created to inspire and guide Black Catholics in ministry and action over the next five years.

This document began with original research to better understand the parish life and evangelization needs of Black Catholics. In 2011, the National Black Catholic Congress, in cooperation with the University of Notre Dame, commissioned an unprecedented National Black Catholic Survey. Hundreds of people in dioceses around the country reviewed the survey results during “Days of Reflection” in 2012. Their discussions and feedback suggested ten areas for action in order to better empower, equip, and evangelize African American Catholics. These ideas were summarized, discussed in three well-attended listening sessions at Congress XI, and then affirmed enthusiastically by the final general assembly of Congress XI on July 21, 2012.

With this plan, African American Catholics call upon each other, and the broader Church, to engage the faith in at least ten ways:

- I. Holiness of Life
- II. Life and Dignity of the Human Person
- III. Walking with the Saints
- IV. Engaged in Parish Life and Evangelization
- V. Faith Informed
- VI. Schools Too Valuable to Sell
- VII. Reaching Out to the Next Generations
- VIII. Vocations—Every Catholic’s Priority
- IX. Getting Married and Staying Married
- X. The Social Apostolate

For each of these calls to engagement, the Plan provides: one or more Scriptural texts; an examination of how Catholic tradition and the teaching of the Magisterium call us to action; analysis of the data and lived experiences that shape African Americans’ perspectives on the theme; and a list of ways to engage the call with concrete action.

An appendix provides the response from an assembly of some 250 youth at Congress XI. Led by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the youth of Congress XI commit to building the Church for the future, suggest youth-focused activities to engage young people in parish life, and ask for opportunities to grow in knowledge of Scripture.

References and additional resources conclude the document.

August 15, 2012

Dear Friends,

A month ago we were in Indianapolis celebrating an inspiring Congress XI. All of us who enjoyed that gathering have many debts of gratitude: to Valerie Washington, the NBCC Executive Director, Stephanie Byrd, who manages the NBCC office in Baltimore, and Father Stephen Thorne, Special Assistant to the NBCC, for several years' work organizing a superb congress; to the many cheerful volunteers from the Indianapolis welcoming committee; to the bishops, priests, deacons, and phenomenal choir who helped us celebrate the Mass each day; to Cardinal Daniel DiNardo, Bishop Edward Braxton, and Reverend Christopher Rhodes for their powerful homilies; to every speaker, presenter, consultant, workshop facilitator, and exhibitor who shared their knowledge and faith. Thank you.

Most of all, I appreciate every individual who chose to spend their vacation time and savings to be present in Indianapolis. We can take great hope from the 250+ youth who were there, and who declared that they are not just the *next* generation of the Church—they are the *now* generation.

From the first meeting of the National Black Catholic Congress in Washington DC in 1889 through our recent Congress XI, each congress has developed a written statement of beliefs, priorities, and commitments for action. In modern times, we call this a "pastoral plan for action"—an instrument to guide parishioners, pastoral leaders, and diocesan leaders during the five-year period between congresses.

The 2012 Pastoral Plan elaborates ten areas for action related to the Congress XI theme, "Faith Engaged!" At workshops and plenary sessions, more than two thousand five hundred people heard the challenge to "Empower. Equip. Evangelize." At the concluding general assembly of Congress XI, a packed ballroom of spirited Catholics came to their feet and affirmed, with great enthusiasm, this plan for engaging the faith and doing the multi-faceted work of evangelization.

The NBCC Board of Directors focused Congress XI on evangelization for many reasons. Blessed John Paul II and our Holy Father Benedict XVI have called for a new evangelization to confront a secularizing world. The dearth of priests and seminarians, essential to our Eucharistic faith, speaks to failures of evangelization. Too many of our beloved parishes and schools have closed, because dioceses cannot spare a priest, especially when the congregation is small, or stewardship, weak. Pastoral leaders see the people in the pews aging and hear the lament of parents whose grown children no longer attend Mass. So we asked: What is needed to reinvigorate parish life and to sustain the Church for the future?

Good answers begin with reliable data, but very little research exists about the African American Catholic minority. In collaboration with scholars from the University of Notre Dame, the NBCC commissioned a national survey in 2011 of Black Catholics' attitudes towards faith and parish life. We had strong support from the University of Notre Dame's Office of the President and Institute for Church Life, for which I am most grateful.

Some of the results were a pleasant surprise, as we found African Americans of all ages for whom the Catholic faith is a vital part of their lives. The survey findings became food for our collective thought, at thirty diocesan-level "Days of Reflection" where people gathered for presentations and discussion about the survey findings. Father Thorne ably led this process, facilitating many of the days of reflection, reviewing the diocesan reports to identify points of consensus that became key themes in this plan, working with Valerie Washington, myself, and a writing consultant to draft the working document, and then facilitating three listening sessions at Congress XI to hear constructive criticism and additional points for inclusion.

The finished document is a statement of our unique cultural and faith perspective. It should inform and inspire the broad Catholic and African American communities to which we belong, but it is first and foremost a document for Black Catholics. I hope you will not leave it on your shelf or at the bottom of your electronic "inbox." Study it. Pray about it. Discuss it in your parishes and schools. Commit to taking action. Review next year to see what you have accomplished and where you can do more. If you do so, I trust much good will follow.

May God continue to bless our community, that by fully engaging our faith, we will grow in our witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend John H. Ricard, S.S.J.
President of the Board of Trustees

PROLOGUE

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 which 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 five hundred strong, we gathered in Indianapolis from July 19-21, 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 came 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.

The NBCS results affirm the strengths in our community and provide some surprises and challenges as well. We are affirmed by the fact that the Christian faith is very important to African Americans overall (a constant finding in the academic literature), including Catholics (a finding of the 2011 NBCS). Religious identity, Mass attendance, and satisfaction with parish life are all very strong among Black Catholics. We are encouraged by the finding that young Black Catholics are committed to their faith and to parish life. These and similar findings affirm the strengths and positive examples that Black Catholics give to the universal Church.

People who live in dioceses¹ with vibrant African American parishes may be surprised by the NBCS finding that the vast majority of Black Catholics across the United States do not belong to parishes that are predominantly black. Those who *do* belong to black parishes are, however, more engaged in parish life, more regularly attend Mass, and report greater satisfaction with the Catholic Church's efforts to promote Black saints, bishops, vocations, and concerns.

Racial and cultural challenges remain a large part of their parish experience for Black Catholics. Yet by a large majority, most Black Catholics do not consider the Catholic Church "racist" and do not perceive racism and exclusion in their parish lives. These and many other findings from the survey help us place our particular experiences in the Church into a broader context.

In preparation for Congress XI, thirty dioceses around the country gathered parishioners together in early 2012 for a Day of Reflection. At these meetings, participants examined the findings from the NBCS and discussed how those findings could inform our pastoral plan of action to expand and deepen the faith engagement of Black Catholics. Each participating diocese reported back to the NBCC with their reflections and suggested priorities for implementing a plan of action on the Congress XI theme of "Faith Engaged: Empower. Equip. Evangelize." These commentaries provided the raw material for composing a draft plan of action.

During Congress XI, Father Stephen Thorne² facilitated three listening sessions to gather comments for improving the draft. Attendance was strong. Father Thorne took notes and invited participants to e-mail additional comments. The draft plan was enthusiastically affirmed by the final General Assembly of Congress XI on Saturday, July 21, 2012. After Congress XI, NBCC revised the draft in light of the congress attendees' suggestions to create this final document.

PASTORAL PLAN OF ACTION 2012

We are committed to the Gospel of Jesus Christ as expressed in divine revelation, the gift of salvation, and the social and moral teachings of the Catholic Church, and to the growth in faith and charity of African Americans. We recognize the need to bring purpose, order, and vitality to our work of evangelization in and to the African American community.

This Pastoral Plan of Action is an organizational tool, offering guidelines and resources for the faithful, so that we may engage and spread the Good News. It is also a focal point for reflection on ten core elements in our faith lives as Black Catholics. We recognize that each parish and diocese will adapt the plan to the particular needs of their local church.

I. HOLINESS OF LIFE

I am the LORD who brought you out of Egypt so that I could be your God. You must be holy, because I am holy. (Leviticus 11:45)³

We affirm our faith in Jesus Christ, true God and true man, and the Holy Catholic Church, his bride and mystical body. We strive for holiness of life and health of mind and body. We affirm the Holy Eucharist as the “source and summit” of our lives as Catholics (CCC 1324), empowering us to spread the Good News.

Our perspective, as African Americans:

Social scientists have repeatedly found that African Americans are more religiously engaged than other Americans. The recent National Black Catholic Survey confirms that Black Catholics have a “strong and resilient” faith. Weekly Mass attendance, reliance on the counsel of a priest, and engagement in parish life are common practices among Black Catholics.⁴ Overwhelmingly, and in every age group, Black Catholics declare religion an essential part of daily life. As the National Black Catholic Congress, we celebrate the faithfulness in our community and seek to sustain and nourish holiness in ourselves and future generations.

Our faith engaged:

- Empowered by the grace of God, we commit ourselves to conversion and holiness of life. Created in the image and likeness of God and called to live in perfect communion with Him, we commit ourselves to a life-long journey of faith, hope, and love, seeking to serve God by prayer, repentance, praise, and worship, and the active service of our brothers and sisters, especially those most in need.
- We renew our commitment to the sacramental life of the Church, especially the Mass, Eucharistic Adoration, and the sacrament of Penance.

II. LIFE AND DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON

I am now giving you the choice between life and death, between God's blessing and God's curse, and I call heaven and earth to witness the choice you make. Choose life. (Deuteronomy 30:19)

I have come in order that you might have life—life in all its fullness. (John 10:10)

As Catholics, we believe that “God’s creative action is present to every human life and is thus the source of its sacred value.”⁵ We are called to protect the sacredness and dignity of all human life from conception to natural death. We believe that human dignity does not depend on accomplishments or talents, nor is it rooted in race, age, gender, wealth, social status, or legal status. *Each and every human person has dignity* that deserves our respect, for that dignity comes from God.

Our perspective as African Americans:

Our history as Black Americans makes us keenly aware that what is legal may not be what is just. Our experience as Black Americans shows us that we must be vigilant and insistent, so that legal institutions do not impede the freedom and dignity of any human person.

Abortion rates are falling across America, including in the Black community. This tells us that attitudes can be reversed and that we must continue to speak prophetically, in the public square and to our children, friends, and associates, about the sacredness of all human life. Nevertheless, abortion remains a particular scourge in Black America. Since 1990, the African American community has lost more than 10 million children to abortion. Census figures show only 15% of American women of childbearing age are black, yet black women have more than one third of abortions in the United States and are 3.5 times more likely than whites to have an abortion.⁶

These facts tell us, as people of color and of faith, that we have much work to do: teaching our youth to reject the pervasive sexual permissiveness in our culture, promoting the institution of marriage, creating real options for women facing crisis pregnancies, and advocating for the economic opportunity and security that would help couples embrace parenthood with confidence.

To preserve our people, African Americans need to promote the culture of life and so we lament that more Black Catholics are not involved in pro-life advocacy. We urge the national pro-life movement to embrace fully an inclusive, diverse, and comprehensive approach to life issues, which would attract more African American Catholics to this just cause.

At the same time, we strongly reject efforts by organizations and funders that seek to expand “access” to abortion in minority communities. Our Black youth and young adults need access to role models and higher education. We need affordable health care, housing, and child care options, so that we can raise our children in economic security. We do not seek the “choice” to decrease the next generation of African American children.

Today, the death penalty and an abhorrent prison system disproportionately affect Black Americans. We affirm our opposition to the state-sponsored violence of capital punishment and commend the work of Catholic conferences nationwide in advocating for the abolition of the death penalty.

We commit ourselves to raise awareness of the many attacks against human dignity throughout the world, especially war, violence against women and children, and discrimination against persons with disabilities.

Called to love the lives God gave us, we deplore the conditions of modern life that lead too many of our brothers and sisters to a profound loss of hope and suicide.

We are convinced that every human being is loved by God and redeemable through Jesus Christ. Following the Lord's commandment (Matt 25: 44-45), we recognize our obligation to provide moral and spiritual support for prisoners and their families, and upon their release, to welcome them into our parishes and to support their efforts to reintegrate into society.

In addition to institutionalized violence against human life and dignity, we deplore the individual acts of violence that plague many urban neighborhoods. We especially deplore the senseless and widespread violence perpetrated by African Americans against their African American brothers and sisters and the devastating impact this has had on our communities. We are certain that God shares our heartache at young lives destroyed, parents and grandparents mourning, and innocent neighbors living in fear and despair because of youth violence.

Our faith engaged:

- Embracing a consistent ethic of life, we commit to work zealously to confront the "Culture of Death" by publicly witnessing to the value of human life as we actively seek to end legalized abortion and the death penalty, to redress the injustices of the penal system, and to join forces with persons of common interest and good will to combat the root causes of violent crime, gang-related activity and drug trafficking in the African American community.
- We commit ourselves to opposing euthanasia, assisted suicide and all legislation supporting these acts.
- We commit to raise awareness about and participate in the work of the National Black Catholic Apostolate for Life.
- We commit to increased involvement in the pro-life activities of Church organizations, at the national, diocesan, and parish levels, bringing an African American voice and perspective to those ministries.

III. WALKING WITH THE SAINTS

He said to me, "These are the people who have come safely through the terrible persecution. They have washed their robes and made them white with the blood of the Lamb. That is why they stand before God's throne and serve him day and night in his temple. (Revelations 7: 14-16)

In the Catholic tradition, we learn to live faithfully through the example of holy men and women before us—the saints who are both role models and intercessors.

Our perspective as African Americans:

We are blessed and grateful that today there are four black Catholic candidates for sainthood: two religious sisters, a lay person, and a priest, representing a diverse cross section of the faithful. For all American Catholics, they are models of holiness and service.

- Venerable⁷ **Mother Henriette Delille** (1812-1862), a free woman of color born in New Orleans, founded the Sisters of the Holy Family in 1842. The congregation ministered to slaves, at a time when educating slaves was illegal. Mother Delille was the first U.S.-born African American formally postulated for canonization.
- Servant of God⁸ **Mother Mary Lange** (c 1787-1882), co-founded the Oblate Sisters of Providence in Baltimore in 1829. Dedicated to the care and education of black children, the Oblate Sisters of Providence is the first successful religious community for women of African descent.
- Servant of God **Father Augustus Tolton** (1854-1897) was born into slavery in Missouri. Ordained in Rome in 1886, Tolton was the first recognized-Black American priest. Pastor of St. Monica in Chicago, Tolton became the spiritual leader of the 19th-century National Black Catholic Congress movement.
- Venerable **Pierre Toussaint** (1766-1853). Born into slavery in Haiti, Toussaint became a freeman, successful businessman, and philanthropist in New York City. He is the only lay person honored, alongside cardinal-archbishops, with burial in the crypt of St. Patrick Cathedral.

We are *proud* of these forebearers, but we also *need* them. We need their intercession, as men and women who know what it means “to shoulder the responsibilities of being both Black and Catholic.”⁹ We need their example.

The causes for canonization, in turn, need us. The Holy See deems someone worthy of canonization when it is clear that the people of God value their example and their intercession. Since we want American Catholics to know and honor saintly Black Catholic men and women, we need to work to advance the causes of canonization.

Our faith engaged:

- We commit ourselves to promote knowledge and veneration of Black saints and African American candidates for sainthood. We urge homilists and Catholic school teachers to introduce these holy men and women to their congregations and classes.
- We encourage Black Catholics, especially, to support the guilds created for the cause of canonization of each of these four exemplary African American Catholics.
- We urge the archdioceses of Baltimore, Chicago, New Orleans, and New York, to help promote pilgrimages for Mother Mary Lange, Father Augustus Tolton, Mother Henriette Delille, and Pierre Toussaint, respectively.

- We invite other dioceses and parishes around the country to organize pilgrimages and other prayerful events devoted to the candidates for canonization.
- We urge dioceses to add the Black saints to their religious curriculum for Catholic schools and religious education programs and to include their historical relevance in administrative training programs.

IV. ENGAGED IN PARISH LIFE AND EVANGELIZATION

All the believers continued together in close fellowship and shared their belongings with one another. They would sell their property and possessions, and distribute the money among all, according to what each one needed. Day after day they met as a group in the Temple, and they had their meals together in their homes, eating with glad and humble hearts, praising God, and enjoying the good will of all the people. And every day the Lord added to their group those who were being saved. (Acts 2:44-47)

Go, then, to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples: baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 28:19)

All Christians are called to spread the Good News through word and deed. Catholic Church documents powerfully challenge us to “go and make disciples” and to “evangelize the modern world.” Indeed, Pope Benedict XVI has called us to observe a Year of Faith from October 11, 2012 (the anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council) through Nov. 24, 2013.

We “go forth” from our home base, the parish. There, we learn and nourish our faith, build a community of believers, and we contribute our time, talents, and treasure so that community thrives. From there, we go forth, as a parish and individually, to evangelize the world. Knowing that ordinary life is filled with evangelization moments if our faith is engaged, we vow to live and speak faithfully--on the street, in the workplace and marketplace, and in our social activities.

Our perspective as African Americans:

From its century founding through the present, the National Black Catholic Congress has promoted evangelization. Indeed, the modern NBCC’s mission statement begins with the commitment “to establishing an agenda for the evangelization of African Americans.” At Congress XI, we celebrate the anniversary of *What We Have Seen and Heard: A Pastoral Letter on Evangelization from the Black Bishops of the United States*. We recall the words in that pastoral letter, which continue to summarize what parish life means to us:

Black Christianity is eminently a social reality. The sense of community is a major component of Black spirituality . . . [that] permeates our experience of liturgy and worship. Worship must be shared. Worship is

always a celebration of community. No one stands in prayer alone. One prays and acts within and for the community.

Because evangelization begins in parishes, we are distressed by the closures and mergers of urban parishes. We understand the fiscal responsibilities of diocesan leaders and we recognize the need for the local church to live within its means, nevertheless, we wish to express in the strongest possible terms our anguish over the vibrant parishes that have been lost. Parish closures mean lost opportunities, lost culture, and lost community.

We believe that the evangelization impact of these traditionally African American parishes cannot be overstated. Only one-fourth of Black Catholics belong to predominantly Black parishes, yet these are the Catholic African Americans who are most likely to attend weekly or daily Mass and who expressed the greatest satisfaction with the Church, on a variety of African American issues, in the *2011 National Black Catholic Survey*.

Furthermore, urban parishes are vital to the neighborhoods where they are situated. As the Second Vatican Council put it, “the People of God and the human race in whose midst it lives render service to each other” (*Gaudium et Spes* 11). That service is not rendered when the people of God have shuttered the church and scattered to the four winds.

The *2011 National Black Catholic Survey* showed that parish registration correlates with active engagement and stewardship in the parish. This suggests that strong parish registration efforts may help to sustain traditionally Black parishes.

Our faith engaged:

- We commit ourselves to discover anew the documents already written on evangelization:
 - *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975)
 - *‘What We Have Seen and Heard’* (1984)
 - *Go and Make Disciples: A National Plan and Strategy for Catholic Evangelization* (1992)
 - *Disciples Called to Witness: The New Evangelization* (2012)
- We commit ourselves to invite those who have left the Church to prayerfully consider coming "home." We encourage adaptation of successful Catholic evangelization programs to the specific needs of African Americans. We especially encourage parishes to develop comprehensive RCIA programs for people seeking to join the Catholic Church, and we commit ourselves to support those efforts by extending personal invitations to attend our parish RCIA.

- Faith is engaged through parish life, so we urge every parish to promote registration by all Mass-goers and we urge all practicing Catholics to register in a parish.
- Full participation in a parish requires much more than registration. We urge each parishioner to prayerfully commit to full stewardship, including a generous financial commitment to sustain the parishes that sustain our faith.
- When diocesan leaders face budget and personnel constraints, we know from experience that *prior* dialogue and input from the affected parish communities are most helpful. Trust and good will are maintained when communication is open and forthcoming. *Long before* any closure decisions are made, diocesan leaders should establish and maintain dialogue with parishes that might be affected.
- We applaud the innovative approaches that some dioceses have taken to support parishes ministering to the African American community, and we ask diocesan leaders who are considering parish closures or mergers to consider creative solutions, to address financial and administrative obligations while sustaining the affected faith community.
- Finally, when closure of a traditionally African American church is unavoidable, we strongly urge the local church to plan for the pastoral after-care of those who have lost their parish. After the closure, the Church must work with a spirit of true communion, enabling the faithful who were accustomed to a traditionally African American parish to find a new parish home *that they can make their own*.

V. FAITH INFORMED

Call together all the men, women, and children, and the foreigners who live in your towns, so that everyone may hear it and learn to honor the LORD your God and to obey his teachings faithfully. (Deuteronomy 31: 12)

We cannot engage our faith without understanding it. The catechism, Our Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, recently wrote, is “fascinating because it speaks to us of our very destiny and that is why it concerns each one of us very closely.” It is challenging—and life-changing—and so, the Pope continued:

Because of this I ask you: study the catechism with passion and perseverance! Sacrifice your time for it! Study it in the silence of your room, read it together, if you are friends, form groups and study networks, exchange ideas on the Internet. In any case remain in dialogue on your faith! ¹⁰

Our perspective as African Americans:

The need to educate ourselves in the faith was a frequent theme in diocesan reports on their Days of Reflection in preparation for Congress XI. This is important to us as individuals trying to understand “our very destiny,” but also because as a religious minority among African Americans, we sometimes find ourselves challenged by friends and relatives who have misconceptions about the Catholic tradition.

“Cradle Catholic” is a strong identity for many of us, yet our children find their identity challenged by friends from other Christian traditions. It is important to tell the story of our Catholic heritage and the presence of Catholics of African descent in America, which dates to the earliest sixteenth century Spanish settlers in St. Augustine, Florida.

Our faith engaged:

- We commit ourselves to deepen our knowledge and understanding, through Bible study, adult faith formation classes, catechesis, retreats, faith sharing and other means to spiritual growth.
- We urge dioceses across the nation to honor Black Catholic History month each November, sharing the centuries-long faith journey of our people in America.

VI. SCHOOLS TOO VALUABLE TO SELL

*Truth, wisdom, learning, and good sense—
these are worth paying for, but too valuable for you to sell. (Proverbs 23:23)*

Catholic Schools continue to be critical means of evangelization. Whether parish, regional, independent, or some new variation, the critical characteristic is a Catholic environment, where the values of hope, charity, prayer, service, sacrifice, and respect for the dignity of every human person are taught and reinforced.

Our perspective as African Americans:

From the first National Black Catholic Congress in 1889, to ‘*What We Have Seen and Heard*,’ which the Black Bishops of the United States issued in 1984, to the Pastoral Plans of Action from Congresses IX and X, the NBCC movement has reiterated concern for the vitality of Catholic schools.

After Congress IX, the NBCC appointed a Special Commission on Catholic Education. The commission emphasized that Catholic schools have long been “beacons of hope and opportunity” for families and young people in the Black community and that sustaining these schools *is achievable*, with commitment, creativity, and leadership. Successful innovations include: work-study, such as Christo Rey programs and the Independent School Model in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia; innovations in diocesan support, such as the Jubilee Schools established by Bishop Terry Steib in Memphis; and targeted foundations such as Chicago’s Big Shoulders Fund and the Foundation for the Nativity & Miguel Schools. These creative approaches, and the commission’s ten recommendations for sustaining the schools, are described at length in its 2007 report, *Sustaining Catholic Education in and for the Black Community*, which is available through www.nbcccongress.org.

Following the special commission's recommendation, in 2010 the NBCC Board of Trustees created the NBCC Catholic Education Foundation LLC. The foundation has expert educators available for consultation with struggling schools. The Foundation is currently raising funds for an endowment from which it will make grants to elementary schools to support financial stability, training, scholarships, or implementation of new models. This foundation is the Black Catholic community's *own* means to build up the elementary schools that minister in Black communities and educate Black children.

Our faith engaged:

- We call upon the many leading professionals, athletes, artists, and other public figures, who are products of Catholic schools, to give back to the schools that gave them a strong academic, moral, and athletic foundation.
- We call for ongoing professional development, continuing education opportunities and Catholic faith formation for teachers, administrators, staff, and school board members.
- We urge Catholic schools to invite their students' parents to learn about the Catholic faith through RCIA.
- We call upon book companies and publishers to include Black Catholic saints and other people of color in their publications.
- We urge all Catholic schools to integrate into their curricula the history of African Americans and the history of people of African descent in the Catholic Church.
- We commit to spreading word of the work of the NBCC Catholic Education Foundation to our fellow-parishioners and diocesan leaders.
- We show our support for Catholic education in and for the Black community by becoming financial supporters ("partners") of the NBCC Catholic Education Foundation, so that it may flourish.
- We celebrate the special place of Xavier University of Louisiana, the only historically-Black Catholic university in the United States, and we honor its remarkable president, Dr. Norman Francis. We urge Catholic high school guidance counselors to acquaint their college-bound seniors with this outstanding institution.

VII. REACHING OUT TO THE NEXT GENERATIONS

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 homepage, 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 Appendix 1.)
- 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.

VIII. VOCATIONS - EVERY CATHOLIC'S PRIORITY

So he said to his disciples, "The harvest is large, but there are few workers to gather it in. Pray to the owner of the harvest that he will send out workers to gather in his harvest." (Matthew 9:37-38)

Keeping our beloved parishes and schools open requires keeping them staffed. Every Catholic who loves the Church must pray for, believe in, and encourage vocations to the priesthood and religious life. This is not just the job of vocation directors.

Fortunately, the work of evangelization and vocations go hand in hand. Vocations grow when we nurture faith, catechism, prayer, and service in children and youth.

In the United States, the number of priests has fallen 33% in the past thirty five years, while the Catholic population has increased 34%. The result of ordinations and population moving in opposite directions is that more than 3,200 U.S. parishes no longer have a resident priest.¹¹

There is simply no substitute in the Catholic tradition for the priest who consecrates the Eucharist and reconciles the sinner to Christ through the confessional. Because every Catholic relies on priests, *every Catholic* needs to make vocations a priority.

The permanent diaconate and consecrated life as brothers, sisters, or lay associates contribute immeasurably to the universal church and the common good. Too many Catholics have misconceptions and biases about what a vocation to religious life is like. The same logic that encourages networking, internships, and mentoring for youth who are exploring a secular profession applies for youth who might consider religious life. Young people need to interact with clergy and religious, to see firsthand what they do and how they find fulfillment and challenge in their work.

Our perspective as African Americans:

The ordination class of 2012 in the United States has just one U.S.-born African American.¹² Indigenous priests, that is, priests who have a common background with the people to whom they minister, are vital to the long-term work of evangelization. We need to support priests and seminarians in their vocations and find ways to become more effective at inviting and supporting African Americans to the priesthood.

The National Black Catholic Congress has long called for more representation of African Americans in the leadership of the Church. Of course, Black bishops begin as Black priests. If we would like to see our community reflected in the faces of the bishops' conference in the future, we need to develop vocations to the priesthood, today.

The National Black Catholic Congress, in collaboration with the Institute for Parish Life at the University of Notre Dame, brought some 30 African American priests together in 2010 to reflect on their own vocations and devise strategies for supporting vocations. This effort, however, takes more time and resources than these already-time-burdened pastors have. Greater collaboration between priests, vocations directors, lay organizations, and African American schools and parishes is needed to create a more effective outreach in our community.

We strongly affirm the vital witness of African American religious in our faith community. We commit ourselves to working with African American Catholic religious sisters and brothers to foster vocations to their respective communities and to support them in their apostolic endeavors.

Our faith engaged:

- Because we cherish the Celebration of the Eucharist, we take seriously our personal responsibility to pray for and promote vocations to the priesthood.
- We encourage parish organizations and individuals to support seminarians through Burse Clubs and seminary development campaigns.
- We commit ourselves to encourage and support our friends and relatives who might be called to be Sisters, Brothers, Deacons or Priests.
- We call on vocation directors in dioceses and religious communities to reach out to African American youth, particularly through predominantly black parishes and schools, national Black Catholic leadership organizations, Xavier University of

Louisiana, and the Newman Centers at historically Black colleges and universities.

- We commit ourselves to promote awareness of the Institute for Black Catholic Studies at Xavier University of New Orleans, where professionals and volunteers can develop the knowledge and understanding to minister most effectively in the Black Catholic community.
- With deep respect and gratitude for the sisters, brothers, and priests who nurtured our faith and character, we commit to being generous in the annual collection for the Retirement Fund for Religious, typically held in December.
- We strongly urge every Black Catholic to consider a generous donation to the congregations of men and women religious who have served the African American community for generations. These include the Oblate Sisters of Providence, Sisters of the Holy Family, the Franciscan Handmaids of the Most Pure Heart of Mary, the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, the Josephite Fathers and Brothers, Holy Ghost Fathers, the Society of the Divine Word, and many other congregations who have served our community.

IX. GETTING MARRIED AND STAYING MARRIED

“So God created human beings, making them to be like himself. He created them male and female. . .” Genesis 1:27

We affirm the sanctity of marriage, a sacramental bond between a man and woman. We embrace each and every human being without exception and we are committed to assisting each person to live out his or her life in accordance with the universal call to holiness, rooted in the natural law and the virtue of Christian chastity as that virtue shapes each and every state of life.

Our perspective as African Americans:

We stand with the Church in her advocacy of traditional marriage. As African Americans, however, our urgent concern is that men and women are not committing themselves in Holy Matrimony. Historically, close family ties have been the foundation of African American life, so we lament that today in the United States, more than 45% of black men and women have never married,¹³ more than 70% of African American babies are born out of wedlock,¹⁴ more than half of black children live in a single-parent household, and only 28% live with their biological *and* married parents.¹⁵ These staggering numbers are a clarion call to our entire community.

While the 2011 National Black Catholic Survey shows that among African Americans, Catholics are slightly more likely to marry, nevertheless, about a third of Black Catholic adults are not (and never have) married. We believe that children need the security and guidance of parents committed to each other through marriage. Evidence shows that vocations to the priesthood and religious life often bloom in

families where two Catholic parents model lives of selfless commitment. Moreover (and without in any way diminishing the contributions of every parishioner, young or old, single or married, childless or parenting), our experience suggests that two-parent families with children are among the most engaged members of many vibrant parishes.

We also affirm the many programs already existing that support marriage in the African American Catholic community, such as "Marriage On A Lampstand" by the Lyke to Lyke Consultants or the African American Pre-Cana, sponsored by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. Many of these programs resulted from the Pastoral Plan from Congress VII in 1992.

Our faith engaged:

- Given these convictions, we commit to encouraging our children to reject the sexually permissive culture that pervades music and media.
- We call on diocesan family life offices to reach out to predominantly Black parishes to promote participation in pre-marriage preparation programs. It is vital that programs recruit African American couples as presenters.
- We encourage parishes to offer programs that support couples getting married (receiving the sacrament of Holy Matrimony) and staying married (living the vocation).
- We see adoption as a life-affirming decision and we call upon all married couples to prayerfully consider their capacity to be a loving and secure family for an African American infant or waiting child.
- We urge African American couples to honor their anniversaries by participating in the annual Mass with Renewal of Vows that dioceses typically celebrate in February.

X. THE SOCIAL APOSTOLATE

The righteous will then answer him, 'When, Lord, did we ever see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you a drink? When did we ever see you a stranger and welcome you in our homes, or naked and clothe you? When did we ever see you sick or in prison, and visit you?' The King will reply, 'I tell you, whenever you did this for one of the least important of these followers of mine, you did it for me!' (Matthew 25: 37-40)

We affirm that the social teaching of the Church is fundamental to Catholicism. That teaching calls us to act in the modern world to defend human life and dignity, to act in solidarity with those who are poor or vulnerable, and in all other ways to promote the common good and defend the universal destination of goods. That teaching also affirms the grave immorality of racism and any "attitudes of prejudice and bias against any individual for any reason."¹⁶

Our perspective as African Americans:

High unemployment and a broken health care system undermine the common good in America today—and are felt acutely in too many African American homes. Jobless rates among African Americans are consistently and substantially higher than the national average.¹⁷ Youth need opportunities to learn job skills and develop their resumes, yet nearly 38% of black teens are unemployed.¹⁸ Rates of infant mortality, heart disease and stroke, HIV-AIDS, hypertension, and asthma are all disproportionately high in our community. We are less likely than white Americans to have health insurance and more likely to live in unhealthy housing.¹⁹

That these disparities are longstanding does not mean they are inevitable, but only that they are even more indefensible. We believe that as a society, we must see our brothers and sisters who are unemployed or uninsured and attend to their needs, as we would do for Christ.

We reject the insidiousness of racism in all its forms, as it affects our own people and others as well. African Americans know how racial profiling offends human dignity. We understand the heroic efforts of mothers and fathers seeking to move out of poverty and provide a better life for their children. We know how incarceration for minor offenses destroys families and communities. So we reject efforts to use nationalism or xenophobia to pit poor people of different nationalities against each other in the labor market and we stand in solidarity with immigrants seeking a path to full citizenship in American society.

Our faith engaged:

To promote moral and universal health care, job creation, fair housing, educational opportunities and economic opportunity for all people, we will support the advocacy efforts of our states' bishops' conferences and the USCCB. This includes using conference documents to learn the issues, and organizing our fellow parishioners to respond to "action alerts" and other invitations to faithful citizenship.

We welcome immigrants into our parishes, schools, and communities. We support the DREAM Act, Comprehensive Immigration Reform, and the work of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Justice for Immigrants campaign.

We promote and support prison ministries for men and women along with programs for reform and rehabilitation. We encourage all African American parishes to develop effective prison outreach/visitation ministries.

We support our brothers and sisters with disabilities and promote programs that highlight the gifts and talents of our differently-abled members.

CONCLUSION

Finally, in gratitude and celebration of the landmark Pastoral Letter on Evangelization from our Black Bishops, "What We Have Seen And Heard", we conclude the Pastoral Plan with the same words they used:

Last of all, we turn to Mary, the Mother of God and the Mother of the African American community. She is the Poor Woman and the Bearer of the Word, the first to believe and the first to proclaim the Word. We entrust to her powerful intercession this work of evangelization within the Black community. May our Heavenly Father perfect us, his Church, in faith and love, that we might always and everywhere faithfully witness to the power of the Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom be all honor and glory in the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen

APPENDIX

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.

NOTES

¹ For ease of reading, this document uses the term “dioceses” to encompass both archdioceses and ordinary dioceses.

² Reverend Stephen D. Thorne, pastor of St. Martin de Porres Catholic Church in Philadelphia and former director of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia Office for Black Catholics, served as a Special Assistant to the NBCC in preparations for Congress XI.

³ Scripture quotations in this document come from *Good News Translation, Catholic Edition*, available online at: www.just1word.com/bible/versions/good-news-translation-catholic-edition_gntce

⁴ Davis, Darren W. and Pope-Davis, Donald P. *2011 National Black Catholic Survey* (manuscript, 2011). See Figures 2, 12, and 13, respectively.

⁵ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. 2006. *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*. Washington, DC: USCCB, p. 389.

⁶ “Table 101. Abortions—Number and Rate by Race: 1990 to 2007.” U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2012*. The figure of ten million abortions since 1990 is calculated from the table, conservatively estimating the data for 2008-11 based on the lowest annual levels.

⁷ The title of “Venerable” is given at the second phase of the canonization process, after Vatican officials have examined the *positio* (written testimony of witnesses) and the Holy Father has affirmed that the *positio* provides evidence of the person’s “heroic virtue.”

⁸ The title “Servant of God” is given to someone in the first phase of the canonization process, that is, someone with a reputation for holiness and for signs and favors, whose cause for canonization has been sponsored by a bishop and opened by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints in Rome.

⁹ The phrase comes from *“What We Have Seen and Heard”: A Pastoral Letter on Evangelization From the Black Bishops of the United States*. St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1984, p. 17.

¹⁰ ZENIT, “Pope’s Preface to New Catechism for Youth” (Feb. 6, 2011). www.zenit.org/article-31672?l=english

¹¹ Calculated from data for 1975 and 2011, from CARA, ‘Frequently Requested Church Statistics’ downloaded at cara.georgetown.edu on July 6, 2012.

¹² CARA, “The Class of 2012: Survey of Ordinands to the Priesthood” available on-line at www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/vocations/ordination-class/index.cfm

¹³ “Table 1. Marital History for People 15 Years Old and Over, by Age and Sex: 2009.” U.S. Census Bureau, Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP).

¹⁴ See Table 7 in U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Health, United States, 2011*. Available through: www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/hus/hus11.pdf#007.

¹⁵ Table C-9 of U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2011 Annual Social and Economic Supplement (Internet Release Date: November 2011).

¹⁶ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* (Washington DC: USCCB, 2008), p. 326.

¹⁷ See trends from 1972-2010 at: Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Spotlight on Statistics: African American History Month.” United States Department of Labor website (February 2010). Downloaded 6/26/12 from http://www.bls.gov/spotlight/2010/african_american_history/

¹⁸ Based on average of monthly unemployment rates, January through May 2012, from U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. “Table A-2. Employment status of the civilian population by race, sex, and age.” <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.t02.htm>.

¹⁹ Center for Disease Control and Prevention. *Health Disparities and Inequalities Report—United States, 2011*.

²⁰ We gratefully acknowledge the skillful and inspiring facilitation of the NBCC Congress XI Youth Program by these parishioners from dioceses across the country:

Coordinator of the Congress XI Youth Program: Joyce Thomas Lombard (Beaumont)

Co-Coordinator: Anita Bardo and Stephanie Whitley (Indianapolis)

Presenters: Kyleigh Chevis (Beaumont); Uchechi Azike (Baltimore); Ladaya James (Baton Rouge); Joshua Bartholomew (New Orleans); Monica McGuthrie (San Bernardino)

Program Support: Creighton Guillory (Lake Charles); Deven Smith (Indianapolis); Funmilayo Smallwood (New Orleans), Donald Staff (Beaumont).

RESOURCES

DOCUMENTS CITED (ARRANGED BY DATE)

Pope Paul VI. *Guadium et Spes. (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World)*. December 7, 1965. Available at: [.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html)

Pope Paul VI. *Evangelii Nuntiandi (Apostolic Exhortation On Evangelization in the Modern World)*. December 8, 1975. Available at: [.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi_en.html)

'What We Have Seen and Heard': *A Pastoral Letter on Evangelization From the Black Bishops of the United States*. St. Anthony Messenger Press: 1984. An abridged version is on-line at: [.nbccongress.org/resources](http://www.nbccongress.org/resources)

National Catholic Conference of Bishops. *Go and Make Disciples: A National Plan and Strategy for Catholic Evangelization*. Washington DC: NCCB, 1992. Available at: [://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach](http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach)

USCCB Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis. *Disciples Called to Witness: The New Evangelization*. Washington DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2012. Available at: <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach>

CAUSES OF CANONIZATION

- Venerable Mother Henriette Delille: [.sistersoftheholymfamily.com/CanonizationProcess.html](http://www.sistersoftheholymfamily.com/CanonizationProcess.html)
- Servant of God Mother Mary Lange: [.motherlange.org](http://www.motherlange.org)
- Servant of God Father Augustus Tolton: [.toltoncanonization.org](http://www.toltoncanonization.org)
- Venerable Pierre Toussaint: [.obmny.org/VenerablePT.htm](http://www.obmny.org/VenerablePT.htm)

PROGRAMS TO SUPPORT MARRIAGE

Archdiocese of Philadelphia, African American Marriage Preparation Program.
Information at: 215-747-3250

ForYourMarriage.org (an initiative of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops)

Lyke to Lyke Consultants. www.lyketolyke.org