NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://www.ncronline.org)

Reflections on the congress

Zoe Ryan | Jul. 31, 2012 NCR Today

NCR interviewed a few people who attended the National Black Catholic Congress (held July 19-21 in Indianapolis), asking questions including why they went to the congress, what they take away from the congress, and where they find hope in the church. Here are some responses:

***

C. Vanessa White's first congress in 1992 was "an experience that I will never forget."

White, assistant professor of spirituality and director of the Augustus Tolton Pastoral Ministry Program at Catholic Theological Union, has attended four congresses. At her first, she was part of a Chicago delegation with Cardinal Joseph Bernardin and Sheila Adams, then director of the Office for Black Catholics.

She returned to future congresses because of the themes, "but also because it is an opportunity to dialogue and meet Black Catholics from across the nation." This past congress she was a presenter on the topic "Where Did All The Time Go?: Spiritual Practices For Busy Christians."

"In the busyness of our current life, it is a challenge to take the time to be attentive to our spiritual as well as emotional and physical health. The workshop gave practical suggestions rooted in our Catholic and Black religious tradition for taking care of self, so that one could better care for others and move into closer union with God. I see this is of vital importance because we have many who are burnt out, stressed out and spiritually 'washed out,'" she said.

As to what she takes away from the congress: "It is affirming to see so many Black Catholics who are passionate and committed to their faith. I left the Congress energized to do the work that God is calling me to do."

And where does she find hope in the church? "I found hope in the hundreds of young Black Catholics who were in attendance."

White is also convener of the Black Catholic Theological Symposium (Association of Black Catholic Theologians and Scholars) as well as on the faculty of Xavier University's Institute for Black Catholic Studies and Loyola Marymount University's African American Ministries Program.

***

This year's congress was the second for Barbara Cottrell, a registered nurse, hospital chaplain, and an associate in Chicago of the Sisters of Providence of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods.

"It has been inspiring for me to come together with Black Catholics from all over these United States to joyful worship and to learn how sacramental life and our Catholic Mission and Values are essential to the flourishing of faith and community," she said.

The theme of the congress was "Faith Engaged: Empower. Equip. Evangelize." It was executed just as it was described, Cottrell said, as "a time to renew and revitalize our commitment to address the challenges of the present Faithful Catholics engaged in this process of Sankofa. Remembering where we have been so that we can continue to move more confidently in the present and future."

This year's keynote speaker, Immaculée Ilibagiza, described surviving the 1994 Rwandan genocide by hiding in a 3- by 4-foot bathroom with seven other women. She recounts her experience and her faith in the acclaimed book "Left to Tell." Her powerful story, Cottrell said, was one of hope, love and reconciliation.

The listening sessions to form the pastoral plan and the youth writing their own pastoral plan were highlights, and it was "gratifying to see bishops, clergy and religious among us as we continue to pray for vocations," she said.

"As a Black Catholic lay woman I find hope in the Providence of God, as expressed through my Catholic faith. Through Grace, I am truly experiencing 'Faith Engaged.'"

***

As someone who works with young adults, Timone Davis noticed the great number of young adults and youth at the congress.

Davis is the coordinator of ReCiL: Reclaiming Christ in Life, a ministry at the Young Adult Ministry Office for the Chicago archdiocese. She also was the coordinator for the young adult track at the congress as well as a presenter.

She finds hope in many things in the church, but one of them is in the young people, she said. They are enthusiastic; they do not take their faith for granted; they are asking questions and seeking answers. "They want to know and want to grow," she said.

The young people at the congress are learning and also networking with people across the country. It is a place to get a sense of "I'm not alone in this journey of faith," she said.

"I think that aspect really helps, when we find we're not the only ones" on the journey, said Davis, who has a doctorate from Catholic Theological Union.

What people will find also is people that look like me, you know, nuns and priests who are black, which is "helping someone obtain affirmation." Faith is an ongoing process, she said, and the congress gives "renewed strength."

It's not 'all about me' -- it's all about us, she points out. And people don't journey separately.

"We journey together."

[For *NCR*'s story on the congress, click here [1].]

Source URL (retrieved on *2016-05-28 19:14*): http://www.ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/reflections-congress

Links:
[1] http://ncronline.org/news/people/black-catholic-congress-develops-five-year-plan