

Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<https://www.ncronline.org>)

September 5, 2012 at 11:49am

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## Pope asks African Catholics to defend values of faith, culture

by Cindy Wooden by Catholic News Service

**VATICAN CITY** -- Pope Benedict XVI encouraged lay Catholics in Africa to defend Christian and traditional African values, share their faith in Jesus and transform African society.

"The most valid traditional values of African culture are threatened today by secularization," unleashing confusion and tension, which are seen in new waves of "tribalism, violence, corruption in public life, the humiliation and exploitation of women and children, and the growth of poverty and hunger," the pope said.

In a written message to the 300 delegates to the Pan-African Congress of Lay Catholics, meeting in Yaounde, Cameroon, Sept. 4-9, Pope Benedict said lay Catholics have a responsibility to deepen their faith and allow the positive values of African culture and Christian teaching to inform their work in society.

"If we look at the heart of the African people, we discover a great richness of spiritual resources that are precious for our age," including the love for life and for the family, a spirit of joy and sharing, and enthusiasm for faith.

The gift of Christian faith and the obligation to share it with others form a "virtuous cycle" in which individuals are changed and bring change to society, he wrote.

"In the work of transforming society, which is so urgent for Africa today, the lay faithful have an irreplaceable role," the pope said.

Africa needs "ambassadors of the Good News," who are "in love with Christ and his church, full of joy

and gratitude for the baptism they have received, courageous peacemakers and announcers of authentic hope," he said.

The congress for lay Catholics was organized by the Pontifical Council for the Laity as a follow-up to the special Synod of Bishops for Africa, held in 2009, and in preparation for the 2012-13 Year of Faith and the upcoming world Synod of Bishops on new evangelization.

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