

## **Secular Franciscan Quinquennial Congress**

### **Report to Encarnacion del Pozo, SFO General Minister**

**By Doug Clorey, SFO Presidency Councillor**

1. From July 3<sup>rd</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup>, 2007, over 400 members of the National Fraternity of the United States of America participated in their 17<sup>th</sup> Quinquennial Congress in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, one of the largest gatherings of the Franciscan family in the USA. The theme of the congress was “Many Cultures - Through Francis - In Christ”. The congress focussed on the multicultural aspects of the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States and aimed to raise the level of awareness of the cultural diversity within the Order. The congress included an educational component, workshops, group-sharing in congress fraternities, liturgical celebrations, and a festival of cultures.
2. The educational component of the congress was led by Fr. Eric H. F. Law, a consultant and trainer in multi-cultural ministry and in the building of inclusive communities which address the challenges of racism and cultural diversity. An Episcopal priest from the Diocese of Los Angeles, Fr. Eric shared his insights around working in a diverse changing world. He explained the iceberg analogy of culture and provided congress participants with tools to support effective dialogue in reflecting and sharing cultural icebergs. He presented a framework for supporting effective communications, including an explanation of the differences in communication styles and the use of respectful communication guidelines. During his presentations, he introduced participants to the “mutual invitation” technique that can be used to support inclusive dialogue within fraternities. He also presented a cycle of Gospel living and explained how power analysis can be used to mobilize the cycle of Gospel living, helping communities to move towards having the powerful listen and the powerless speak.
3. Five workshops were presented during the congress. Patti Normile, SFO presented a workshop on “Care Giving and the Elderly” while Ed Shirley, SFO presented one on “Spirituality in Today’s Secular World”. Ron Pihokker, SFO presented a workshop on “Secular Franciscans and the Catechetical Minister” while Javier Orozco, SFO presented one on “Francis, Divine Providence and Our Secular Life”. The Conference of National Spiritual Assistants also presented a workshop on “What is Spiritual Assistance”. All workshops provided an opportunity for members of the Franciscan family to explore and deepen their understanding of subjects pertinent to Secular Franciscan life.
4. Topics from the congress were discussed in small groups, sharing together as “congress fraternities”. These small groups met daily to pray, reflect on what had been heard and experienced, to share their understanding and thoughts, and to learn from each other. An essential part of the reflection was directed to the educational input provided by Fr. Eric, as well as a reflection on scripture (Acts 2: 1-13) and on the SFO Rule (articles 13 and 19). While congress fraternities met, the Conference of National Assistants conducted sessions for spiritual assistants.
5. The congress was also blessed with rich liturgical celebrations. Every morning, congress

participants met for morning prayer and, every afternoon, congress participants celebrated the Liturgy of the Eucharist. All liturgies were supported by a strong and skilled music ministry, versatile in many languages and which included the use of a theme song, "One God of Us All", composed by Clare McCluggage, SFO and Jan Parker, SFO. The opening Eucharist was presided by Bishop Daniel Conlon (Stubenville Ohio) and included a procession of cultures during which participants wore their native costumes and attire. Liturgies incorporated a variety of languages including Korean, Vietnamese and Spanish. Of particular interest was the celebration of the Eastern Churches Divine Liturgy presided by Archbishop Basil Schott (Pittsburgh, PA) and mass celebrated using the Syro- Malabar Rite presided by Fr. Peter Verrickkanakudy, OFM Cap from India. The closing liturgy encouraged all participants to be instruments of peace and concluded with the releasing of a white dove.

6. The Quinquennial Congress also featured a "Festival of Cultures" organized by the National Multicultural Committee and which spanned two evenings. The first evening of the festival highlighted the cultures of the Native Americans (Peublo, Navajo and Osage), India and Korea, while the second evening highlighted the cultures of the Philippines, Mexico, Italy and Vietnam. The Festival of Cultures included presentations from the various countries, including singing and dancing, and the sampling of local foods. A time of socializing and fraternal sharing followed each evening's presentation. On July 4<sup>th</sup>, participants also joined in celebrating Independence Day with a special meal.

7. Concurrent with the Quinquennial Congress was an assembly of Franciscan Youth from the USA. While the youth and young adults followed a separate program, both groups came together for the celebration of Eucharist in the afternoon and for the supper meal. About 30 youth were involved in the Franciscan Youth program. It was a great joy to witness the participation of all ages during this Quinquennial gathering.

8. Participants concluded the Quinquennial Congress by approving a statement reflecting their experience.

"In a spirit of Christian unity and love, over four hundred members of the Secular Franciscan Order gathered in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania from July 3 to 8, 2007. They celebrated their 17<sup>th</sup> Quinquennial Congress. Representatives came from all over the United States as well as from Caribbean islands, Canada, Australia, India and Latin America.

During their days together, they focussed on the multicultural nature of their Order. Several cultural groups were highlighted, including Eastern Rite Catholics, Filipinos, Italians, Koreans, Mexicans, Native-Americans, Syro-Malabar Catholics from India and Vietnam.

The Secular Franciscans modeled inclusion of all cultures and races during the Congress. The Secular Franciscan Order has committed itself to an intentional effort to transform racist attitudes and all forms of exclusion that separate and oppress the people of God. "

## Observations / Comments

9. The congress program certainly achieved its objective of raising the level of awareness of the cultural diversity within the Secular Franciscan Order of the USA. The key note speaker, Fr. Eric Law, was an excellent choice to support the congress theme of diversity and inclusiveness. He provided exceptional input for consideration of the congress participants and was well received by those in attendance. He is a skilled presenter who uses a variety of adult education techniques in presenting his material. Although there was some controversy around his selection as keynote speaker, congress participants very quickly understood the wisdom of the choice and, not only learned from him, but welcomed him into the experience of fraternity lived during the Congress.

10. It is important to underscore the significant effort of the organizers in helping participants gain an appreciation of the multi-cultural dimension of Secular Franciscan life through a variety of means. Audio-visual presentations were prepared and presented on India, Philippines and Vietnam to provide participants with a better understanding of these countries and their cultures. A number of nationalities provided a glimpse into their various cultures through song, dance and storytelling (Korea, India, Vietnam, Mexico, Philippines, Italy). Liturgical celebrations were also celebrated in various languages, rites and customs, all to assist participants in appreciating the gift of cultures within their Order. The Quinquennial Planning Committee is to be commended for their extensive work in creating an outstanding experience of multi-cultural fraternity during the Congress.

11. It is also important to underline the significant effort that went into planning the liturgical celebrations. The morning prayer and Eucharistic liturgies, in particular, were well prepared and celebrated. This is particularly noteworthy in light of the use of different languages and rites. Although congress events were held in a hotel, the space for the liturgies was well planned and conducive to worshipping together. The presiders and homilists were also well chosen and ministered in a fraternal and engaging manner. The music ministry was excellent, providing a variety of music ranging from the contemplative to the rousing and accompanied with a good balance of instruments. The closing liturgy, with its emphasis on peace, was particularly moving - outdoors with a backdrop of trees and birds singing, meaningful processions with incense and depictions of peace, as well as the freeing of a white dove symbolizing peace.

12. Although some attempts were made to integrate Franciscan youth and young adults during the Congress, it is regrettable that they did not have the opportunity of hearing the keynote addresses on cultural diversity and of being exposed to the framework for supporting effective communications, including the differences in communication styles and the presentations on respectful communication guidelines. These young people will be the leaders of tomorrow and could have benefited from hearing Fr. Eric's presentation on the cycle of Gospel living and the analysis of power in mobilizing this cycle. Perhaps further integration between the two groups could be explored for the next Quinquennial.

13. Although it is more common to have such a congress at a college campus, the choice of holding it at a hotel worked well. The venue was very comfortable for the participants and offered amenities that might not have been available at another venue (air conditioning, for

example). The choice of site also situated the Secular Franciscans in the secular world. In a sense, through this venue, the Franciscan family was able to give witness to its spirituality to others who were working or staying at the hotel; frequently, you could hear guests pointing out with a smile that the “Franciscans were in the hotel”. The amount of space available in a single facility and the flexibility that this space afforded also helped to support the organization of the congress. Although some meals were somewhat limited, they added to the simplicity of the event and supported the Franciscan aspect of the gathering.

14. From July 3<sup>rd</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup>, 2007, Secular Franciscans had an extraordinary opportunity to experience “fraternity” at the national level. Through keynote sessions, workshops, group-sharing in congress fraternities, liturgical celebrations, and a festival of cultures, participants were able to learn from each other and live the Franciscan way of life together. The National Fraternity of the USA is to be commended for organizing such an outstanding event. Well done!