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### **Catholic congress celebrates richness of African spirituality, culture**

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By [Catholic News S...](#)

By Richard Szczepanowski Catholic News Service

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BETHESDA, Md. (CNS) -- Catholics of African descent -- as well as all Catholics -- are called to understand their faith, have confidence in what they believe and be willing to share the faith with others, Cardinal Donald W. Wuerl of Washington told participants at the second African National Eucharistic Congress.

That's the response Pope Benedict XVI seeks from Catholics to his call for a new evangelization, the cardinal said.

The congress was an opportunity "to express our devotion to Christ in the Eucharist and also to bear public witness to our unity in the Eucharist with the whole church universal throughout the world," he said at an Aug. 5 Mass to close the gathering.

More than 1,000 Catholics representing more than 20 African nations attended the Aug. 3-5 congress, which met at the Bethesda North Marriott Hotel and Conference Center. The theme of the event was "The Eucharist as Our Nourishment: A Catalyst for Unity, Justice and Peace for African Catholics as New Migrants in the USA."

Participants came from as far away as California.

At the Mass some wore traditional African garb representing their countries of origin. The liturgy included African hymns in several languages accompanied by drummers and dancers.

In addition to Cardinal Wuerl, others who participated in the congress included Bishop Paul S. Loverde of Arlington, Va.; Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades of Fort Wayne-South Bend, Ind.; Auxiliary Bishop William Avenya of Makurdi, Nigeria; Washington Auxiliary Bishop Martin D. Holley; and Auxiliary Bishop Guy A. Sansaricq of Brooklyn, N.Y.

"We come together today in testimony of our unity and our faith, our commitment to ministry and our rootedness in the Holy Eucharist," Cardinal Wuerl said during the Mass. "With confidence, with assurance, we are called to proclaim what we understand and believe when the Church celebrates the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass."

He told congress participants that "in what we do and how we express our faith, we have to be able to re-propose our belief in Christ and His Gospel for a hearing among those who are convinced that they already know the faith and that it holds no interest for them."

"All of us who are part of God's family are one in faith, are nurtured in our new life by one Eucharist, and we are called in the New Evangelization to simply share the great gifts that we have received," Cardinal Wuerl said.

Cardinal Wuerl also told participants that while all Catholics are rightly proud of their heritage and ethnic background "because it anchors us in this world," they also pray for "peace and unity" of the Church during Mass.

Unity in the Holy Spirit, he said, "transcends every other bond that would define us in our great human diversity."

"Christ's redemptive love remains with us, transforming us," Cardinal Wuerl said. "We are made one both with Christ and, therefore, with one another."

Sister Joanna Okereke, program specialist for the U.S. bishops' Secretariat of Cultural Diversity and one of the organizers of the event, said the cardinal's message resonated with congress participants.

"We heard the message of the cardinal and were very much moved to participate in the new evangelization," said Sister Joanna, a Handmaid of the Holy Child Jesus.

"The goal of the congress was to get them (congress participants) spiritually nourished and energized, and I think that we accomplished that," she told the Catholic Standard, newspaper of the Washington Archdiocese.

The congress featured Masses, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, address, workshops, an essay competition and fellowship.

Nnamdi Okonkwo said he was surprised by how moved he was by participating in the congress.

"I did not expect to be this excited about sharing my faith with others," he said. "We have been called to help others see and appreciate the beauty of our Catholic faith."

For Obi Jakande, another participant, praying with others and adoring Jesus in the Most Blessed Sacrament were the most satisfying parts of the congress. "To be with others who want to take the time to talk to Jesus -- to thank him or to ask him for his help -- was very emotional for me," she said.

Sister Joanna said one aim of the congress was to raise awareness among all Catholics of the presence of African Catholics.

"We want to be more visible," Sister Joanna said. "The richness of African spirituality and culture is one of the things we can bring to the larger church."

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Szczepanowski is on the staff of the Catholic Standard in Washington.

Pasted from <<http://www.uscatholic.org/news/2012/08/catholic-congress-celebrates-richness-african-spirituality-culture>

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