

Congress expands horizons with greater broadcast outreach



Dan Houze (producer, left) and Brett Grossman (audio, center) monitor the Closing Liturgy during last year's Religious Education Congress, while Fr. David Loftus (right) provides commentary for those watching the live webcast, which reached more than 4,000 viewers.



At Congress 2010, host Alex Venegas (right) interviewed composer Jesse Manibusan for a live webcast interview, sharing stories about RECongress and how the theme of "Incredible Abundance" has related to Jesse's own personal journey.

BY PAULA DOYLE
Staff Writer

This year's Religious Education Congress at the Anaheim Convention Center March 17-20 seeks to evangelize participants locally and globally with a slate of workshops, concerts and liturgies as well as a live webcast from the arena all four days.

Opening March 17 with "Youth Day on 'Godbook' — Everyone Invited," in a nod to the social networking phenomenon of Facebook, the internationally-acclaimed four-day event will host more than 40,000 people and an increased global audience due to expanded webcast, television and radio coverage.

The Congress theme, "Hold Firm ... Trust!" reminds faithful near and far, living in these tumultuous times, to lean on a God who accompanies and steadies his people on the journey, says Religious Sister of Charity Edith Prendergast, director of the archdiocesan Office of Religious Education.

"Congress has been a light to people. We have received wonderful testimonies," said Sister Prendergast. In spite of the difficult economy reflected in increased requests for registration fee assistance, pre-registration is on track to reach last year's attendance figures, according to Sister Prendergast.

She likened Congress, with its 305 workshops over the four days (including 54 in Spanish and eight in Vietnamese), to a powerful evangelizing tool energizing participants for ministry.

"We are looking at mission rather than just being in maintenance mode," explained Sister Prendergast. "We especially are called to be good mentors and models of forgiveness and to build a world of inclusivity."

The Opening Rite and Welcome March 18 will mirror Congress' inclusive spirit in song, bilingual (English/Spanish) Scripture read-

ing and prayer. Archbishop José Gomez will preside at the praise and worship ceremony, which will feature a reflection by Sister Prendergast. Friday's evening concert in the arena will continue the celebration of the archdiocese's diverse, multi-cultural population with a "Festival of Cultures: A Celebration of Sights, Song, Music & Dance."

Saturday morning's keynote address will be delivered by Jack Jezreel, speaking on the topic, "Gathered and Sent: Saints, Prophets and Martyrs on a Mission." Jezreel, who spent six years in a Catholic Worker community before turning his attention to transformative education, is the founder and executive director of Kentucky-based JustFaith Ministries. Jezreel will explore the future of American Catholicism which, he says, holds promising prospects if Catholics are willing to renew the evangelizing possibilities of parish purpose and structure.

Dr. Greer Gordon, a frequent Congress speaker, will give Sunday's English keynote address, "The Cross as Transformation." Dr. Dora Tobar Mensbrugghe, another popular returning speaker, will give Sunday's Spanish keynote speech, "How to Talk About God to Today's Women and Men."

Activities for young adults will abound on Saturday evening, beginning with a young adult Mass in the arena with Msgr. Kevin Kostelnik, presider, and music by Jacob & Matthew followed later by activities that include a dance and also a social with live jazz, co-sponsored by Boston College's School of Ministry.

In keeping with Congress' expanded use of technology this year, the first ever "Sky-ape" presenter, Ansel Augustine, coordinator for black youth and young adult ministry for the Archdiocese of New Orleans, will participate in a panel discussion in a Saturday afternoon workshop, "My Life is Calling Me: Young Adults Speak."

Staff at the new Broadcast Booth next to the Office of Religious Education Booth in

Exhibit Hall A will conduct interviews with several Congress speakers for a live webcast on www.recongress.org. Among interviewees scheduled are Archbishop José Gomez, Father Robert Barron, Father Richard Leonard, Pedro Rubalcava, ValLimar Jansen, Victor Valenzuela and Char Wenc.

At the Tech Center Booth across the aisle from the ORE Booth, Archbishop Gomez will conduct an online chat with students from St. Thomas the Apostle School in Los Angeles on March 18, 10-11 a.m., continuing the tradition established by Cardinal Roger Mahony.

Besides the live webcast, Guadalupe Radio (87.7 FM) and Sirius/XM Radio's "Busted Halo" Catholic program (bustedhalo.com) will be broadcasting from the Congress, while El Sembrador Spanish television will rebroadcast the final liturgy and will also record all Spanish workshops in Hall B for a television special to be broadcast later in the year.

"We're very excited to partner with El Sembrador this year in their rebroadcast of the final liturgy and later airing of the Spanish workshops, which can potentially reach 8 million plus viewers throughout Southern California and Mexico on their new digital station 56.2," said Dan Houze, producer of the live webcast, which will run from opening Youth Day events to the closing liturgy with Archbishop Gomez.

Film buffs can relax on Friday night at "Film Showcase 2011," produced in partnership with Loyola Marymount University, screening narrative feature films, shorts, documentaries, experimental and animated films whose thematic elements are grounded in Catholic social teaching, justice, ministry, spirituality and theology.

"Soy Inmigrante" (I am Immigrant) will be an event for the Spanish-speaking community presented Saturday night in Hall B, 7:45 p.m., with music, film documentaries on immigration and the participation of guest speakers who minister to immigrants. A partial list of participants includes Father Richard Estrada, CMF; Hermana Glenda Hernández, Rosa Martha Zarate and Sandra Vargas from the bishops' California Catholic Conference.

A bilingual English/Vietnamese workshop on Saturday morning titled "The Vietnamese Community: A Culture of Beauty" is another innovative multi-cultural Congress presen-

tation pairing Oakland-based liturgical music consultant, Franciscan Brother Rufino Zaragoza, with Paul Nguyen, director of music at Corpus Christi Church in the Diocese of Orange. The workshop will explore how Vietnamese Catholic traditions, including a strong devotional life and a unique chant tradition, can enrich mainstream parish life.

Another presenter pairing of popular returning Congress speakers is a Saturday afternoon workshop, "Contemplative Prayer Experience: Castle of the Soul," with Los Angeles-based Tony Alonso, director of liturgical music at Loyola Marymount University, and Father Liam Lawton, director of music for the diocese of Kildare and Leighlin in Ireland. The prayer experience workshop will explore the writings of ancient and contemporary mystics in discovering God's presence in a busy world.

A short list of some of Congress' internationally-acclaimed speakers and their workshop topics includes: Father Richard Rohr, "Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life" (2-24); Dr. James Davidson, "The View from the Pew: Parishioners Perceive their Parishes" (8-05); Hermana Glenda Hernández, "Es Mi Grupo un Grupo Sano?" (3-55); Father Ron Rolheiser, "An Anatomy and Theology of Trust: From Paranoia to Metanoia" (1-19); and Nancy Sylvester, IHM, "Living in a Time of Chaos: The Call to Contemplative Spirituality" (7-23).

Exhibit Hall A will showcase over 260 exhibitors, including companies, educational institutions and archdiocesan ministries. The first 200 people visiting the Office of Religious Education's booth will receive a free thumb drive. Booth visitors will also have a chance to win an i-Pad or i-Pod Nano.

People who have not registered for Congress by March 11 may register on-site for a \$70 registration fee. Participants can register on-site March 17 at 6:30 p.m. and every morning from March 18-20 beginning at 8 a.m. For more information, log on to www.recongress.org. ❖



Tony Alonso, LMU director of liturgical music (pictured with Eleazar Cortez), will lead "Contemplative Prayer Experience: Castle of the Soul," with Father Liam Lawton.