The 2014 ACCCRUS national convention took place in Houston Texas, from July 30, 2014 – August 2, 2014. The event, hosted by the Houston chapter of ACCCRUS, was attended by approximately 210 priests and religious women working in different ministries in various parts of the United States.

The theme of the 2014 Convention was “Building Effective and Fruitful Ministry as People Called to serve”. The three-day event was packed with spiritual, intellectual, social and interactive activities aimed at helping the participants achieve the goals of becoming more effective ministers of the Gospel and experiencing joy, fulfillment and peace in their personal lives.

The opening ceremony included the gathering ritual (prayers and songs) and a welcome address by the host chapter president, Fr. Edmund Nnadozie. The attendees of the convention ended the first day by participating in a Holy Hour of Eucharistic Adoration.

The second day took off with the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours. This was followed by the Address of Welcome from the National President, Fr. Henry Atem and another address by Sr. Joanna Okereke, HHCJ, with the Secretariat for the Pastoral Care of Migrants, Refugees and Travelers (PCMRT) at the Bishops’ Conference. Bishop Joseph Perry, ACCCRUS’ Episcopal moderator addressed the assembly and so did a representative of the Archbishop of Galveston-Houston.

The highlight of the day was the keynote address “Nurturing the Inner Life of Clergy and Religious” by Dr. Robert Wicks. In a nutshell, Dr. Wicks threw some light on every minister’s ability to be conscious of their strengths and weaknesses, and to recognize the need to maintain balance for a healthy and holy ministry. In order to be faithful to his/her calling, the minister must have the ability to nurture good and healthy friendships and continuously strive to be faithful to their commitment.

The second presentation was by Dr. Cheryl Cash on “Maintaining Balance and effective Time Management in the Ministry”. Dr. Cash talked about the complexity of the demands placed on the minister by the challenges and expectations from the employers, the general public and the Parishioners/people ministered to. The peculiarities of the culture in the USA make the challenges even more pressing. It is not a culture where things get done when they get done. It is a time conscious culture. This makes scheduling/timing very crucial in everyday life. Despite this, the minister must plan very well and still make out time for rest, personal/spiritual exercise. Priests and religious need to be proactive in taking care of themselves and their schedules need to reflect these needs.
During the Q & A, the concerns raised could be summarized thus:

- Not being affirmed or fully accepted by the employers despite the great effort being made in ministry
- The issues of being scorned or insulted for having foreign accents
- In civil law, one is innocent until proven guilty. But in the Church, one is treated as guilty even before the hearing. This is in regard to the sex abuse cases in the USA.
- The issues of Bishops reporting or handing over the priests to civil authorities even when he is not yet proven guilty.
- The challenge of ministering to American children with African parents and helping the children discover their cultural roots.
- What the Church is doing to address the socio-systemic changes in the USA that seem to be enticing and drawing the youth away from participating in religious activities like the sacraments or make them feel religious activities are boring.
- Why the West seems to be very keen on propagating only sad and bad news about Africa. What is their fear about Africa?

Dr. Wicks, Bishop Perry and Dr. Cash tried to address the above concerns/questions. They said the most important thing is faithfulness to God’s work. Do not be governed by the negativity (feeling of not being valued or affirmed). Give what you have and rest your peace in God. Do not let your joy depend on what people think or say.

It is a pity that our culture today permits everything but forgives nothing. A culture that condemns you as quickly as it celebrates you.

There is need for the priests and religious to support each other. There is an even greater need for ministers to be conscious of who they are, their obligation to proclaim the Word in season and out of season. The priests and religious must never refrain from ministering to the youth/young people despite the issues about sex scandal. The laity still trust and rely on their priests though a few priests have hurt that trust.

The issues of racism/discrimination have been there for a long time. It is one not only the Church, but the society at large is dealing with. The African Americans have suffered discrimination and non-acceptance from the other Americans, even within the Church.

**During the breakout sessions, the four groups discussed answers to two questions:**

1. How could our faith and spirituality serve as useful tools in helping to free us or assist in resolving secondary sources of stress?
2. What are the sources of secondary stress and how do we deal with them?

The groups agreed that prayer, silence, relaxation and abandonment to the will of God are very important in ministry. Understanding our capability and limit, dialogue, sharing with trust and confidence, putting everything in perspective and context, supportive and good friendship, these are tools that will help in resolving secondary stress.

The sources of secondary stress are the inability to say ‘no’ at times; not accepting our limitations; not taking time for self-care; at times forgetting it is God’s work not ours; not planning and scheduling well; not adhering to our schedules; not leaving some room for unplanned eventualities. The groups agreed that these stressors could be handled effectively by proper planning, creating time for self-
care, good collaboration and delegation at work, developing the ability to prioritize and placing things in their right context (differentiate office work from home task), have a peaceful and trusting environment around you, make out time for spiritual exercises, have the freedom and ability to say “NO” at times, politely!

The second day of the convention was wrapped up by the meetings of the men group (the priests/deacon) and the women group (religious women). These groups get this opportunity to come together to discuss issues bordering on their personal welfare and how the association could help them in their ministry and personal well-being.

At the business meeting on the third day, the various chapters of ACCCRUS gave the report of activities from their chapter. Some of the chapters reported improvements and growth in their association while some had nothing to report. There was general consensus for the chapters to see what they could do to promote ACCCRUS and encourage participation by African priests and religious in their area. It was also decided that the executive body look into things that could be done to promote membership and encourage attendance of members to the national convention.

**RESOLUTIONS TAKEN:**

1. Members of ACCCRUS working in various ministries in the different dioceses across the US must endeavor to identify with and participate in the activities of the local chapter of ACCCRUS where ever they are.
2. Priests and the religious men/women should be conscientious and courageous ministers, faithful to their calling as true ambassadors of the Gospel of Christ. Despite the many challenges and difficulties encountered directly or indirectly in the ministry, priests and religious are to be true witnesses of Christ, relying on God’s grace for their joy and peace in ministry.
3. Members of ACCCRUS should be men and women of integrity, making good use of their time through proper planning, diligent time management, collaboration and delegation in ministry. They are to pay attention to their personal and spiritual needs, by creating time for self-care, prayers and practicing abandonment to the will of God.
4. Members are to develop the ability to say “NO” when the need arises. They are to have a good understanding of their capability and be willing to accept their limitations. This will reduce the level of secondary stress and help in making them effective and fruitful ministers of the Gospel.

The 2015 ACCCRUS Convention will be holding in Boston and the 2016 Convention will be in Washington DC.

Signed:

Fr Henry Atem

Fr. Henry Atem
National President
Sr. Joanna

Okereke

Sr. Joanna Okereke, HHCJ
Program Coordinator

Date: February 25, 2015

Sr. Ogechi Offurum

Sr. Ogechi Offurum, HHCJ
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