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Dancers perform at the 2025 Religious Education Congress' opening ceremony Feb. 21 in Los Angeles. (OSV News/Courtesy of Archdiocese of Los Angeles/Joe Garcia)



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The Los Angeles Religious Education Congress welcomed Catholics from across the U.S. and Canada, as well as Australia, Africa and Latin America for worship, prayer, learning and sharing in February. The event is a vivid display of the peek into heaven offered us in Revelation 7:9, "a great multitude, that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages."

This year's theme was "Called to Compassion," and the opening ceremony highlighted compassion in action. Speakers from Corpus Christi Parish in Pacific Palisades spoke of the heartbreak of losing both their community and their church to the January wildfires, but also of the outpouring of support from the region and the nation.

Sr. Rosalia Meza of the Verbum Dei Missionary Fraternity noted in her welcome address the words of Pope Francis, who defines compassion as "the language of God." Recalling the witnesses of Archbishop Oscar Romero, Sr. Thea Bowman, the four martyrs of El Salvador and Cesar Chavez, Meza showed how each of them recognized and engaged in the suffering of others.

The rest of the congress included eight series of concurrent workshops, six culturally diverse liturgies, morning and evening liturgy, a sacred space, exhibit hall, film showcase, reconciliation opportunities and a [Taize service](#). The size and scope of the congress is beyond the grasp of one single attendee, yet with persistence you can experience it as a retreat, liturgy, gathering, prayer space and educational class.



Msgr. Liam Kidney, pastor of Corpus Christi Church in Pacific Palisades, California, shares his testimony at the 2025 Religious Education Congress' opening ceremony Feb. 21. Amid the embers of the Palisades Fire that destroyed the church, firefighters rescued the tabernacle. (OSV News/Courtesy of Archdiocese of Los Angeles/Isabel Cacho)

Oblate Fr. Ron Rolheiser presented a session on "Spirituality of Compassion: Jesus' Ultimate Challenge." He reminded us that the Sermon on the Mount offered humanity our greatest moral code, noting Jesus' challenge to "love one another as I have loved you." He remarked that in John's Gospel, the Eucharist is replaced by the washing of feet. This, he indicated, was to show we can live the Eucharist every day in selfless service to others. Rolheiser closed with a comment he heard once from James Forbes, a Black New York pastor: "No one gets into heaven without a letter of reference from the poor."

Sr. Marie Kolbe Zamora of the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity offered a workshop entitled "Living Jesus' Compassion in the Church and in the World." She

suggested we not tie ourselves in knots trying to be compassionate. Instead, we must "let go of ourselves" and accept the love that Jesus has for us. In this way compassion is but a manifestation of Jesus' love for us, and the whole world.

In a later session Zamora presented "Jubilee Journey: The Today and Tomorrow of the Francis Papacy." She reviewed the encyclicals and writings of Pope Francis to highlight the references to compassion, mercy and accompaniment. Zamora said the pope taught us that faith "is an encounter with God's mercy." Zamora reinforced the call to mercy with the pope's physical gestures, such as him kissing the feet of prisoners and embracing those disfigured with disease.

C. Vanessa White of Catholic Theological Union led a spirited session on "Journeying in Love and Discipleship: A Spirituality of Racial Justice." White reminded us that work for racial justice must be founded in determined spiritual practice. Spiritual practice, she said, addresses fundamental needs through concrete acts, and "makes space for God's presence and engages us in God's activity in the world." She exhorted us to include sacred space, ritual and meaning in our daily practice.

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Indeed, the event itself had a sacred space, open every day to host quiet prayer time before the Blessed Sacrament or a meditative walk through a labyrinth. Each time I entered I was refreshed.

The quiet of the sacred space contrasted with the buzz and energy of the exhibit hall. The hall houses over 200 booths for Catholic ministries, schools, book sellers, music distributors, gift and rosary distributors, religious orders and more.

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The Saturday night Taize service was a prayerful time of song and silence. For me the most powerful moment was the prayer around the cross. As we each approached, touched and prayed before the cross - I envisioned my shortcomings and burdens, alongside those of all present, being embraced and released into the cross.

The Liturgy of Catholics of African Descent was presided by Paulist Fr. Stephen Bell, and included dance and drums from the LMU African Music Ensemble, Gospel music and the call and response of the black Catholic worship experience. Whenever I attended any event in the arena, I always made a point to sit next to the musicians. The conductor, band, singers and composers created a meaningful worship experience for all present.

Perhaps the most inspiring part of the congress is the opportunity for meaningful conversations with Catholics from across the country and world. Their dedication, vocation and prayerfulness are a source of inspiration and hope. The Los Angeles Religious Education Congress was a timely infusion of Catholic prayer, social teaching and spirituality; for me, food for the soul, inspiration to the heart and energy to go forth and live the compassion of the Gospel.