Procession of Cultures Kicks Off Quinquennial Congress

PITTSBURGH, PA, July 3, 2007 - An exuberant evening procession of cultures kicked off the Secular Franciscan Order’s 17th Quinquennial Congress July 3 at the Radisson Hotel Pittsburgh Green Tree. The colorful display of dress from Bulgaria, India, Ireland, Italy, Korea, Latin America, Native America, the Philippines, Romania, Spain and other cultures served as the procession to the opening mass, celebrated by Steubenville, Ohio Bishop Daniel Conlon.

Noting the Congress theme, “Many Cultures – through Francis in Christ,” National Minister Patrick Mendés welcomed the 430 participants, and recognized a few special guests; among them:
- Canadian Doug Clorey, OFS, the international councilor for English speaking countries;
- past national ministers Richard Morton, SFO, William Wicks, SFO, and Carol Gentile;
- representative from the Anglican Third Order Society of St. Francis, Rev. Joan Verrett, TSSE.

In his homily, Bishop Conlon referred to the Gospel reading about the apostle Thomas doubting Christ’s resurrection, saying he had to see the Lord for himself and touch his cross-born wounds. When he was in the seminary, the bishop said, St. Thomas was called the patron saint of doubt. The thought behind that was that “we should not have blind faith…We should test, discuss, probe…”

Keynote Speaker:
Know Your Own Cultural Iceberg

Episcopal priest Eric Law painted his message of multi-cultural diversity with Franciscan brushstrokes at the first keynote session.

He began by having the 400-plus attendees chant the words, “Lord, make me an instrument of your peace,” while he sang the other verses to the peace hymn known as the Prayer of St. Francis.

Then he had the audience join him in reading aloud Article 13 of the Secular Franciscan Rule, which exhorts Secular Franciscans to accept all people, with a gentle and courteous...