

Racial, ethnic groups build bridges in harmony

By Michelle Martin
STAFF WRITER

Native Americans danced with African Americans, Filipino children played instruments and Polish children sang, and people from the North Shore and the South Side sat together and enjoyed it all.

The Oct. 1 Racial Justice Unity Rally offered Catholics from across the Chicago area a chance to celebrate the racial and ethnic diversity in the Archdiocese of Chicago with a variety of art forms, from drawings done by Catholic school children to a variety of styles of music and dance.

The rally, with the theme "Building Bridges and Uniting People," included an opening prayer by Cardinal George, a presentation by comedian and human rights activist Dick Gregory and a closing prayer by Auxiliary Bishop Joseph N. Perry.

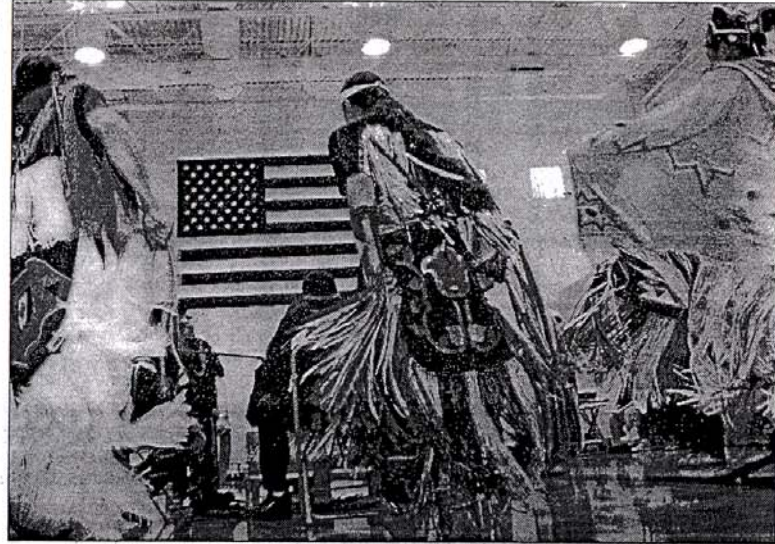
"The sin, the crime, the tragedy, the horror of racism is not a good thing to rally around," Cardinal George said. "But it is a good thing to challenge us to take notice."

The cardinal addressed racism in his 2001 pastoral letter, "Dwell in My Love," and supported a program bringing together people from different parishes and different racial groups to address their experiences of racism.

Those workshops, coordinated by the archdiocese's Office for Racial Justice, led to the Catholics United for Racial Justice Committee, which organized the rally.

Deacon Dexter Watson of Holy Angels and St. Malachy parishes said he thought the event was good, but wished more people came to fill the bleachers in the gym at Trinity High School in River Forest.

"I thought this place would be packed," Watson said. "We want to get the word out



that more of this has to be accomplished. We need to deal with this."

Cardinal George called racism the "original sin" of American society, and acknowledged that it will take more than workshops and rallies to overcome it.

"It has a long history, and it needs a long-range plan—a battle plan, if you will, to address it," he said.

It will take all the resources available, including the grace of God, to change people's hearts.

The need was made heartbreakingly clear in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, when most of the people left stranded were poor and African American, he said. The rally was dedicated to hurricane survivors, and a collection was taken in for their relief

Gregory, the comedian who rose to fame during the civil rights era, said what happened in New Orleans in the days after Katrina showed the rest of the world what America is really like.

At the same time, Gregory said, the United States has come a long way.

"Forty years ago, every time I went to Mississippi, I knew I'd be killed," he said. "Thank God, I went anyway. Forty years later, the head of the Mississippi state troopers is a black man. The head of the Mississippi department of social services is a black woman."

But he called Americans to task for failure to recognize ongoing racism, from the current concern over "black-on-black" crime ("People kill where they live. Why aren't



Native American dancers (left) perform at the second annual Racial Justice Unity Rally Oct. 1 at Trinity High School River Forest. The event, sponsored by the archdiocesan Office for Racial Justice and Catholics United for Racial Justice, included a variety of performances from different ethnic groups, including children who performed classical Filipino music (above)

Catholic New World photos/David V. Kamba

we talking about white-on-white crime?") to the lack of awareness on the part of many that people in every city are living like the people in New Orleans who were unable to leave.

Mary Cronin, an event volunteer from Queen of All Saints Parish in Sauganash, said that the message of the day is one that should be heard by everyone.

"It's important to see that you have to stand together as a family," Cronin said. "If you don't stand together as a family, then everything breaks apart. And we have a lot of things breaking apart."