

## **CATHOLIC PRIESTS FROM ACROSS THE GLOBE TO MEET IN TAMPA**

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### **Body**

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More than 200 **Catholic priests** from the United States, England, Wales and Africa are expected to convene in **Tampa** on Sunday for a five-day **meeting** that will focus on challenges facing **priests** in the American church.

The **priests** will take part in the 39th annual convention of the National Federation of **Priests'** Councils, a group that represents about 20,000 **priests** nationwide. The **meeting** marks the first time the group has met in **Tampa** since it formed in the late 1960s to give a voice to **priests'** concerns around the country. The organization last met in the bay area at its 1975 convention in St. Petersburg.

This year's convention, which will be held at the Hyatt Regency hotel in downtown **Tampa**, will center on the theme: "Many Gifts, One Body: Intentional & International," a nod to the large numbers of foreign-born **priests** helping to fill the clergy shortage in **Catholic** churches in the United States.

"We want to acknowledge the contribution those **priests** have made by being a part of the American scene," said the Rev. Richard Vega, president of the Council, which is based in Chicago. "At the same time, we want to look at some of those challenges that are confronting us when it comes to the multicultural, multi-ethnic church in the United States."

The **meeting** consists of a series of workshops with topics that include immigration reform, Christian/Muslim dialogue, risk management strategies and the implementation of the Dallas Charter, which was created to guide church leaders in recognizing and preventing clergy sexual abuse.

Mostly, convention organizers said, the **meeting** offers clergy a chance to bond with other **priests** and discuss their concerns.

"**Priests** are usually so preoccupied with their own parishes and their own diocese," said the Rev. Gary Dowsey, the **Tampa** convention coordinator and associate pastor of St. Jerome **Catholic** Church in Largo. "We have a lot to learn from **priests** from one side of the county to the other, and it just builds up the brotherhood of the clergy as well."

The convention came to **Tampa** at the invitation of the Rev. Desmond Daly, pastor of Christ the King **Catholic** Church in **Tampa**.

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On Tuesday evening, Bishop Robert N. Lynch, head of the nearly 400,000-member Roman **Catholic** Diocese of St. Petersburg, will hold a public Mass at Sacred Heart **Catholic** Church in **Tampa**. It is the group's only public event. Other convention events are closed to the public in hopes of promoting open and honest dialogue among **priests**.

"It's really a time for strengthening bonds, recognizing you're not alone in the struggle," Vega said of the **meeting**. "It's a mutual sharing, a mutual collaboration and mutual visioning of the future."

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