

Africa's Catholics must lead

Written by Judge Greg Mathis
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The Catholic Church, despite its controversies here at home, has long been a world leader in using faith as a tool for creating a better, more just world. On the continent of Africa, where the Church has a large presence, Catholic missionaries have worked to provide food and shelter to those in need. Now, Church leaders are calling on the continent's leaders to make a change in their policies and practices...or step down.

A group of African Bishops of the Catholic Church recently released a statement on corruption on the continent. Their goal was to bring an end to the self-serving policies that breed repression and tyranny in many African nations. While the Bishops didn't go so far as to single out any particular leaders, they did call on those in power who are of the Catholic faith to turn over a new leaf or resign from their posts.

There are approximately 158 million Catholics on the continent of Africa; that number is expected to grow to 230 million by the year 2025. African Bishops have taken the first step in using the Church's influence on the continent to bring relief and hope to the millions of Africans who live in extreme poverty. The Catholic Church's highest official, Pope Benedict XVI, himself has spoken out against poverty and disease in Africa and sees the church as a source of democracy and social justice.

Many social justice movements have been lead by communities of faith and their leaders. Gandhi, the highly revered spiritual leader, relied heavily on principles of faith when leading non-violent social protests in India and in Africa. In the U.S., the fight for equal rights for blacks was rooted in the church. Most recently, organizations like Balm in Gilead have rallied black churches to fight against rising HIV/AIDS infections amongst our people.

Even though it may not always seem like it, the majority of people in the world are people of faith, whatever their beliefs may be. It is this faith – and the leaders of those organizations – that can bring about real change, spurring leaders to alter their practices. The African Bishop's call for a new type of African leader should be taken up by Catholics worldwide – and other people of faith who believe in equal rights and justice. Movements like this often start small but can quickly grow and make a huge impact.

Judge Greg Mathis became the youngest judge in Michigan's history and was elected a Superior Court Judge for Michigan's 36th District. He has been called upon as a regular contributor to national television programs, including "Larry King Live," "Politically Incorrect," CNN's "Talk Back Live," "Showbiz Tonight" and "Extra" to discuss his opinions on complex issues of the day, such as national security, unique sentencing, affirmative action and celebrity scandals. He also offers his take on high-profile legal cases.