

The National Eucharistic Congress

Then and Now

BY HEATHER CRAIG

This summer, tens of thousands of Catholics gathered in Indianapolis for the Tenth National Eucharistic Congress. Eighty-three years ago, the crowds, the spirit, and the joy could all be found here in the Twin Cities, when we hosted the Ninth National Eucharistic Congress.

GETTING THERE

1941: Pilgrims arrived by special trains and buses from every state in the union. Papal Legate Dennis Cardinal Dougherty arrived with fanfare in a private train car on the Hiawatha Line.

2024: In the months leading up to the Congress, over 250,000 people took part in a Eucharistic pilgrimage, converging in Indianapolis.

THEME

1941: Our Eucharistic King, Glorified by Sacrifice

2024: Revival

ATTENDANCE

1941: Over 450,000 attendees over 4 days

2024: 60,000 in-person attendees, with more joining by livestream, over 5 days

LITURGIES AND OTHER EVENTS

1941: The largest liturgical events were held at the State Fairgrounds, transformed into a Eucharistic Center. But Masses were also held at the St. Paul and Minneapolis Auditoriums, the Cathedral, and at The Basilica. Separate Masses for men and women were held:

- A Midnight Mass Holy Hour at the fairgrounds for men, and Holy Hours for women at both the Minneapolis and St. Paul Auditoriums.
- The June 25 Pontifical High Mass at the fairgrounds featured a choir of 10,000 children — more than 800 of whom were overcome by the heat and treated at emergency stations primarily by Boy Scouts.

2024: Primary Masses and Holy Hours were held at the Lucas Oil Stadium, with adoration at St. John the Evangelist Church and Masses at several other Indianapolis churches. The stadium also hosted an expo, exhibits and an acoustic stage outside the stadium.

GATHERINGS

The **1941 Congress** featured sectional meetings open to both Catholics and non-Catholics. These meetings addressed a range of current topics: organized labor, family, youth, racism and the rise of dictatorships, just distribution of wealth, and the responsibility of men to God and country in time of war — though every topic was framed within the context of the Holy Eucharist. Additional sessions were held for liturgists, priests, and choristers as well.

The **2024 Congress** featured impact sessions focused on the Eucharist, prayer and evangelization, spiritual life, and renewal.

HIGH TECH

1941: Pope Pius XII delivered a live radio address direct from the Vatican before the Procession of the Blessed Sacrament. Local radio stations broadcast many liturgies here in the Twin Cities listening area. The Basilica Archives has a complete collection of 33 rpm records containing the liturgies and addresses of the Congress.

2024: Some events were livestreamed. Pilgrims could attend the Podcast Stage to watch popular Catholic podcasts recorded live. Presentations, liturgies, and keynotes are available digitally.

INTERNATIONAL CONGRESSES

1941: The 35th International Eucharistic Congress was to be held in Vichy, France, but was cancelled due to the war. International Congresses resumed in 1952.

2024: The 53rd International Eucharistic Congress was held in Quito, Ecuador, September 8 to 15, 2024. ✚

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Eucharistic Congress Parade, 1941. Eighty thousand pilgrims walked the two-mile path from the Church of St. Andrew to the Blessed Sacrament at the Throne of Adoration in St. Paul's Como Park. Pilgrims walked four hours through drizzling rain and downpours, undeterred, to kneel (many in the mud) to receive the final blessing from Dennis Cardinal Dougherty, Papal Legate. (Hennepin County Library)



Mass at The Basilica. The Basilica hosted the Mass of the Byzantine Rite in Old (Church) Slavonic. We also hosted the Holy Hour for Sisters. (Hennepin County Library)



Consecration of The Basilica, June 27, 1941. At the conclusion of the Congress, The Basilica was Consecrated by His Eminence Cardinal Dougherty, Archbishop of Philadelphia, and a number of other Bishops from across the country. (Basilica Archives)