

# HIGHLIGHTS OF THE 86<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL NATIONAL CONVENTION



**Susan Bernier, Guest Journalist**

Over 800 delegates gathered in 86<sup>th</sup> annual national convention in Halifax, Nova Scotia, at the World Trade and Convention Centre, August 13 to 16, 2006. The warmth of conversation between old friends and new was as invigorating as the sea air enjoyed by delegates as they cruised the world's second largest natural harbour aboard the Queen II. Sunday morning saw delegates enjoying an historic city tour with some heading as far out as Peggy's Cove. A trip to Halifax is a must see for history buffs!

The Sunday afternoon resolutions dialogue session, open to all delegates, was well attended once again, with members eager to review and discuss the resolutions under consideration before they came to the floor of the convention. The resolutions presented for consideration included the issues of religious freedom in the world, an increase in Old Age Security, renewable energy, the labelling and disposal of pest control products and GST exemption on funeral services.

Gathering Day speaker Kathleen O'Shea, author and social activist, spoke of her work as a nun, teaching in Santiago, Chile, during the Pinochet coup and how her journey brought her to work with women on death row. Unable to speak about the horrors of her experiences in Chile upon her return to the United States, she went back to university to pursue a degree in human relations. As part of her studies interviewing women in prison in Oklahoma, she was struck by the ordinary-ness of women on death row. As she met them, she was moved from research to becoming involved with them. She eventually decided that she couldn't do it on her own and established a newsletter *Women on the Row*, which would be sent to human rights organizations. Through the miracle of that newsletter, people began sending donations, including men on death row and other women on death row, in order to help each other.

Pamela Bryson-Weaver, past president of the Autism Society of New Brunswick and League member, spoke of the challenges families face in providing the therapy and supports required for those living with autism. When asked "How many of you know someone with autism?" delegates responded with a large show of hands. Pamela noted that it wasn't that many years ago that only a small number of hands would have been raised. She then took the time to

educate those present on the various forms of autism and what can be done to ensure that the child and his/her family are able to live life to its fullest.

Pamela then shared "Operation Rescue Johnny – Rescue Me" and spoke of the journey her family has been on and what she has been striving for to ensure that funding and resources are available for all, not just for those who can afford them.

The business of the convention was enlightening and stimulating as were the guest speakers interspersed throughout. Episcopal Vicar and General Secretary Father Jean Picher spoke about the 49<sup>th</sup> International Eucharistic Congress and a short-term voluntary fund was established. Executive Director Dr. Robert Walley spoke on MaterCare International, a cause near and dear to members' hearts, and it was agreed that the MaterCare International National Voluntary Fund should be extended for an additional two years.

With assistance from members who participated in the World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations (WUCWO) General Assembly, held in Arlington, Virginia, this past June, convention delegates participated in a workshop on WUCWO, opening their eyes and hearts to the plight of people around the world.

A presentation on Salt + Light Television was given by Producer Mary Rose Bacani and Marketing and French Language Programming Coordinator Jasmin Lemieux-Lefebvre about the video they are preparing for the League as well as the work they are doing in providing Catholic media on a national basis.

Entertainment at the closing banquet was kept under wraps, with delegates completely in awe as the Men of the Deeps shone their way on to the stage and into delegates' hearts that evening. Treated to a full concert repertoire, delegates were moved to tears by the performance and, in turn, brought tears to the Men's eyes as candles were raised and a blessing sung over them. What an amazing experience.

For delegates "from away," the highlight of the convention was the gift of warmth and hospitality they were treated to, making it hard to leave as they felt they had come "home" to Nova Scotia! †