

# A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION ON *MULIERIS DIGNITATEM*

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**W**hat an experience! As a participant at the International Convention on *Mulieris Dignitatem* (On the Dignity and Vocation of Women on the Occasion of the Marian Year) sponsored by the Pontifical Council for the Laity, I will try to share a few of the insights that came to me. While I went for the Archdiocese of Vancouver, I was also listed in my capacity as B.C. & Yukon Provincial President of The Catholic Women's League of Canada, so it is from this perspective that I offer these thoughts.

The days were very full, the speakers extremely qualified, and the discussion varied and interesting. While most Catholics are familiar with John Paul II's apostolic letter, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, it wasn't long before I realized how little of it I really understood. Certainly I had read the document and even quoted from it over the years but it took on a whole new meaning for me as I realized how little I understood its many dimensions.

The following four points are but a few that struck me personally and which I am sure will remain with me for a long time.

1. That John Paul II was a man of vision and, according to many, ahead of his time. While he always had a deep passion for the rights of the human person, he held women in the highest respect. When he wrote *Mulieris Dignitatem* he began with creation where he reminded the faithful that they didn't create themselves, but rather God did and "saw that it was good." The human person has absolute value and is loved for him or herself. One is fulfilled not from oneself but in the gift of self to others. John Paul II focused on the complementarity and reciprocity that must exist between a man and a woman to the extent that it becomes clear that they are made one for the other. So much of the convention was dedicated to this major point that it would take days to share the notes, thoughts, quotes and discussions that helped to bring clarity. Yet it was here for me the understanding began. Man and woman form the totality of humanity, not to be reduced to roles or preferences.
2. That the church is very aware of the quick and deep

changes of identity and in perception between the sexes in the twenty years since the document was written. This is indeed a worrying phenomenon and a symptom of a deeper crisis affecting the world where there is a general refusal of people to accept God. In fact, more and more people are pushing God out of society. Consciences are being sedated and the faithful are surrounded by an ethical relativism where there are no moral norms nor right or wrong, just opinions and feelings.

3. That the church supports women. It has and always will denounce abuses to women and to the dangers of what is seen as a new social paradigm regarding sex and gender. There are serious consequences in separating sex from gender. The disassociation between sex and gender is seen in the deconstruction of marriage and defies tradition and God. This new cultural revolution threatens the future of society. Women are called and encouraged to go against this new world ethical order by offering authentic feminine witness and action. The feminine dimension of faith belongs to all. However, women experience it through thought, heart and hands. Of the feminine genius, participants learned that women understand and see the big picture with eyes to see what others can't – using eyes of the heart. Women receive love to give love.
4. That women have a unique vocation to safeguard humanity and bring about peace. A church with a maternal focus will enable each person to acquire new freedoms proper to Christianity, appreciate the value of relationships and rediscover different experiences of culture. This conference instilled the desire to support, affirm and teach women where they live and work of the important issues and to convince other women that they hold the key to hope and have the necessary gifts to build peace. Participants learned that science won't save society, but love will, for love convinces more than reason; it convinces the soul.

I was encouraged and affirmed in my faith and my

vocation as a Catholic woman. There is so much to be thankful for as women have done many good things. But there is so much more to do. Participants heard stories from women around the world of abuse, violence, war, degradation and submission. The main thing I brought home from Rome was the understanding that if there is to be peace in the world it will be up to women and, perhaps in an even more significant way, Catholic women.



In support of the effort to promote and enhance the League's image, I pray that members will talk about and see themselves as women of faith, as true leaders and guardians of humanity. I hope the League crafts a new story that will include examples of Catholic women working toward the kind of world we all want to live in. How will young women understand their call if members do not teach them? Do schools teach this kind of understanding and leadership? Can the standing committees of organization and spiritual development expand to ensure members all know how to be beloved and confident daughters of God? Are there other opportunities to impart the infinite wisdom that comes from John Paul II? In building up The Catholic Women's League of Canada, I believe it is imperative to cultivate a climate that recognizes, promotes and values the "genius of women" in the way John Paul II meant it.

**Suggested actions:** Read *Mulieris Dignitatem* and the Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World, found on the Vatican website at [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va). Look into groups like Endow (Educating on the Nature & Dignity of Women) for small study group work at [www.endowonline.com](http://www.endowonline.com). Learn more about John Paul II's Theology of the Body. Work in small groups on such faith-sharing books as *Living as a Beloved Daughter of God: A Faith-sharing Guide for Catholic Women* and *Living as a Confident Daughter of God: A Faith-sharing Guide for Catholic Women*. †

## STROKE IDENTIFICATION TIPS



Sometimes symptoms of a stroke are difficult to identify. Unfortunately, lack of awareness spells disaster. The stroke victim may suffer severe brain damage when people nearby fail to recognize the symptoms of stroke.

Remember these three letters S.T.R., the first three letters in STROKE.

**S – Ask the individual to SMILE.**

**T – Ask the person to TALK and SPEAK A SIMPLE SENTENCE, coherently. (For example, It is sunny out today.)**

**R – Ask him or her to RAISE BOTH ARMS.**

Another sign of a stroke is this: Ask the person to stick out his or her tongue. If the tongue goes to one side or the other, that is also an indication of a stroke.

If he or she has trouble with any one of these tasks, call 999/911 immediately and describe the symptoms to the dispatcher.

Thanks to Military Ordinariate Past President Gabriele Kalincak for providing this information. †