



CREATING A VOCATION CULTURE

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In April 2002, the Third Continental Congress on Vocations to the Ordained Ministry and Consecrated Life in North America was held in Montreal. It was a meeting of a broad spectrum of Catholics of all ages and states of life; its purpose was to create a plan that would increase the number of priests and religious. Throughout discussions, however, the importance of all vocations – the priesthood, religious life, married life and single life – was emphasized. It was obvious that healthy vocations in all states of life were central to creating an environment where more vocations to consecrated and ordained life would take place.

The action guide that came out of the Congress, *Conversion Discernment Mission – Fostering a Vocation Culture in North America*, states that discussions were based around a “...central theological reality: that every Christian vocation is indeed a ‘gift of God, given for God’s people,’ a call to holiness, discipleship and service, oriented to the building up of the body of Christ in the world.”

After much discussion and reflection before and during the Congress, questions arose as to how to create an atmosphere within our churches where everyone accepted God’s plan for vocation in their own lives and in those around them. Just imagine if the question was not, “Do you think you have a vocation?” (implying vocation to the priesthood or to the religious life), but rather, “To which vocation do you think you are called?” And the follow-up question would then be, “How can we help each other to discern and to live our vocations?” What a different sense of church would be experienced!

In order to effect this dynamic, a change in attitude of Catholics in general is necessary – an attitude that embraces the fact that all baptized Catholics are called to a vocation, and that this call is rooted in the universal baptismal call. Also necessary is an acceptance that all vocations, whether lay, consecrated or ordained, are equal but different, and all are necessary to promote and build up the other vocations. The plan, then, needs to be one of building a “Vocation Culture” – of creating a space where vocation is the norm and not the exception.

The Congress then tackled the question of how to establish and create a “Vocation Culture” throughout the church in North America. They discussed the societal trends and how they affect people’s attitudes toward vocations; they discussed the obstacles that prevent people from hearing their call and responding. They discussed the importance of teaching Catholic biblical and theological tradition about the understanding of “vocation” in a way that is easily understood. They noted that biblically and historically, vocation means to be called, which is to be sent, to be “set apart” for a particular mission.

The Congress emphasized five central pastoral priorities – to pray, to evangelize, to experience, to mentor, to invite – and stressed the importance of all people of the church being involved in the creation of a “Vocation Culture.” If this is to happen, each person and each organization within the church must ask some serious questions to determine where and how they can be more responsible for the promotion of all vocations.

Some discussion questions are:

- How does the CWL take leadership in promoting the universal call to holiness among its members and those it serves?
- How does the CWL proclaim the gospel with conviction and passion?
- Do members seek opportunities to promote actively an intense life of faith and a profound spiritual renewal?
- What more can members do to help create a “Vocation Culture”?

Although much of the discussion and many of the questions and concerns addressed the need for ordained and consecrated vocations, the importance of all vocations was stressed repeatedly. Indeed, the action guide that resulted from the Congress is a teaching in itself about God’s universal call to all baptized Catholics. For more information, or for more questions for you and your council to ponder, read *Conversion Discernment Mission – Fostering a Vocation Culture in North America*. It may be available from your diocesan vocations office or through CCCB Publications at www.cccb.ca or (800) 769-1147.

The emphasis of all vocations is exemplified, once again, in the action guide. “The promotion of vocations to ordained ministry and consecrated life cannot be understood in isolation from the universal baptismal call to holiness and service. Vocations to ordained ministry and consecrated life – and to single and married life, to lay ministry and Christian witness in a secular society – will flourish in a Church where each member can identify and concretely live out the Father’s call to life and holiness, the Son’s call to discipleship and communion, and the Spirit’s call to witness and mission.

“For vocation ministry to be effective, there needs to be a fostering of personal involvement in a precise life choice. If we all are ‘called on a mission to love and serve the Lord’ and His people, we do not all do so in the same way. Some of us are called to do so in marriage and family life, others in the single

life. Some enter ordained ministry and religious life, while others serve in recognized lay ecclesial ministries.

“This universalization of the notion of vocation in no way trivializes it. It acknowledges that a vocation is not something chosen one day, and given up the next. To live one’s true vocation presupposes both the ability to discover God’s call, and the willingness to respond to it at the deepest level of one’s being. It requires a capacity to discern the most appropriate response to the call, a response that takes into account not only one’s own personal talents, limitations, and practical life-situation, but no less, the needs of the Church and the world. It must become a life-project in which the desire for holiness and union with God, and the willingness to hear God’s call in the hungers of the world, are encountered and embraced continuously.” †

CWL: A LEAGUE OF GREAT, LOVING CATHOLIC WOMEN

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Katherine Hughes was one of the key founders of The Catholic Women’s League of Canada.

The two legs on which a typical Canadian parish stands are the Knights of Columbus and The Catholic Women’s League of Canada. Both of these institutions were established during the papacy of the great Pope Leo XIII. I would like to give credit to the largest organization of Catholic women, the League.

In 1912, Katherine Hughes of Edmonton, a woman full of courage and conviction, initiated a grassroots movement in Canada, based on the guidelines of other Catholic women’s organizations in England. Eight years later, in 1920, The Catholic Women’s League of Canada was founded.

Over 100 councils were organized within the first year by dedicated women who travelled across the country by train to visit small towns and large cities in each diocese. “For God and Canada” was their chosen motto.

Local church authorities and the Roman hierarchy soon noticed and applauded the work these women were doing to advance the guidelines and social principles espoused by the Vatican, especially those pertaining to the dignity of women.

Various popes have commended the League for its good works. Popes Pius XII, John XXIII, Paul VI and John Paul II all

recognized that these women have had great input into the social fabric of the church and society in Canada.

In a country where lawmakers and political opinion have promoted a culture of death with the legalization of abortion on demand and the clamour for assisted suicide, the League continues to be alert and actively promote the culture of life. But much more important than their social agenda is their dynamism.

By the example of her Christian life, each member commits herself to the holiness so essential in illuminating and improving the moral and social life in Canada. Only by being the light of the world and the salt of the earth can each one be the support needed so badly in every parish in this country.

Certainly a parish could become a city of God with the generosity, eagerness, and commitment to defend Catholic values that these women possess. They feel concern and anguish for this changing world, which is creating a godless society as it rages against natural and divine law. †

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