

National Spiritual Advisor Most Rev. Stephen Jensen (Prince George)

Almost 70 years ago, a German theologian spoke at a conference on the state of the church and her future. At that time, the church seemed to be flourishing, but the theologian could recognize the growing trend of secularization in society and what he said probably shocked his audience.

He predicted that in the coming years, the church would lose much of her influence and power in Europe, maybe its material wealth, too. The future church would be numerically smaller but more intentional, as Bishop Lobsinger spoke about at mass yesterday, and countercultural, committed to the mission of announcing the gospel to a world that has lost faith.

The theologian who spoke such prophetic words long ago was Joseph Ratzinger, better known to us as Pope Benedict. What he foresaw is a pattern repeated over the centuries of the church's life. We can all recognize the effects of secularization and the loss of faith, and perhaps the disruption of normal life caused by the pandemic accelerated the trend for some people. But, as ever in history, God's grace is at work. We've heard in the reports at this annual meeting of members evidence of that. Let me mention a few signs of hope.

The lockdowns helped us remember the marginalized, those members of the League who are isolated and unable to be connected by technology. I heard the phrase "leave no one behind," a positive development that we might not be thinking of without this public health crisis.

The last two years have also forced us to adopt new technologies that connect members more easily and give us the potential to work more efficiently and effectively. The "software guide" that was mentioned in the reports reflects that, too.

Now that the pandemic has receded, the League is transitioning to focusing its work on the three pillars adopted through the strategic planning process. As members and councils become familiar with thinking in terms of faith, service and social justice, a new era is dawning for the League.

Much has changed since Joseph Ratzinger offered his prediction about the state of the future church, but God is the Lord of history and works to bring good out of every negative trend in human affairs. With confidence in His grace and the intercession of Our Lady of Good Counsel, we go forward in faith, hope and charity. †