

When WUCWO AND CWL Meet

Over 700 Catholic Women's League members and guests met in Halifax, Nova Scotia, one of Canada's older historic cities, August 14-17, 2016 for the 96th Annual Convention, *One Heart, One Voice, One Mission: Palliative and Hospice Care*, a fitting title for a convention in the Jubilee Year of Mercy. As an added bonus this year the CWL Convention was held in conjunction with the North American Regional Conference of the World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations (WUCWO), which shared in the beautiful opening Eucharistic liturgy and events. Four glorious days of faith, fun and fulfillment were shared by all.

Sunday afternoon saw the opening of the WUCWO North American Regional Conference, a WUCWO Meet and Greet. Velma Harasen, Vice-President of the North American Region and Board member from Canada chaired the session starting with a beautiful dialogue prayer. She brought past and present together by calling attention to a beautiful, current WUCWO banner and an earlier banner made by a CWL member for the General Assembly of WUCWO in Antigonish in 1983. She also introduced us to a small white well for donations to an international project to provide well water in Senegal and a water distribution system to a school in Argentina. Themes of prayer, service and mercy ran through the greetings from National CWL President Barb Dowding, UCWLC President Marion Baraszcyk, and Sheila Hopkins, National Council of Catholic Women of the United States. Maribeth Stewart Vice President General of WUCWO and board member from the United States spoke about her work at the U.N. on behalf of WUCWO, a voice heard throughout the world. She spoke of concerns (e.g. protection of the family; misuse of language to disguise true intent); goals (education about human trafficking; education of girls) and practical efforts (support for small business; medical treatment especially maternity).

Maria Giovanni Ruggieri, WUCWO President-General, made three points: 1. WUCWO is a challenge to the indifference of the world to those on the peripheries of the world; 2. WUCWO's goal is to give voice to the voiceless; 3. WUCWO founded by women offers the gift of listening to the grassroots and offering their contributions to the universal Church and society.

Sunday evening, under the soaring ceiling and gorgeous stained glass windows of historic St. May's Basilica, we gathered as "sisters who become one in the Eucharist" (Opening Liturgy booklet). Presider Archbishop Anthony Mancini (Halifax-Dartmouth) noted that CWL (and WUCWO) work is a call to fidelity to the Word in a world of many voices. We are called, like Mary our model in faith, to witness, to hear the Word and to respond.

Monday morning began with a moving prayer service centred on Mercy led by Maribeth Stewart. Readings from Isaiah, 55:6-9 and Matthew, 25:34-40, show a merciful God who calls us to works of mercy. The reflection exhorted us to "Let us go then and show our merciful hearts to the world and in so doing, spread the loving Gospel message of Christ." The theme of mercy continued with speaker Sister John Mary Sisters of Life who spoke on *Women of Mercy United in One Heart, One Voice, One Mission*. With candour and humour, Sister shared her story and her work with pregnant women and those who have suffered the wound of abortion. She noted that to be a person of mercy one must have "dispositions of the heart" captured in three words: Receive, Delight, Persevere. After her presentation

the audience was asked to share personal stories of life-changing events. At the WUCWO luncheon, Rita Janes gave an inspiring talk on *Laudato Si*, which she described as an invitation to change our hearts. This ended the North American Conference of WUCWO, but some delegates stayed for the CWL convention, which continued until Wednesday evening.

Tuesday's inspirational speaker was Father James Mallon from Halifax on the topic *I Am a Mission on this Earth*. Using the parable of The Lost Sheep, Father challenged us to examine our work in the light of our mission to bring the Good News to the world. In the afternoon, Neysa Finnie, board member of the Catholic Women's Leadership Foundation, spoke of the need for the Foundation and its history, told her personal story (she is an example of the young Catholic woman that the Foundation hopes to attract to the program) and gave an overview of where the foundation is going financially.

On Wednesday we had the privilege of listening to Sister Nuala Kenney who said that she was "happy to be here but sad to talk about her topic, *Medically Assisted Death: Challenges for Christians Today*." She observed that the key reasons for euthanasia are psychological not physical and urged us to respond to the suffering and do the acts of mercy that support a good death, which would include prophetic resistance to inappropriate use of technology; resistance to the medicalization of suffering; promotion and improvement of palliative care; and witness to mercy and compassion.

Conference/Convention 2016 was a faith driven, fun filled, opportunity for personal and League fulfillment shared with our North American Region WUCWO sisters. May we prayerfully carry back what we have learned to our local WUCWO and CWL work in the coming year.

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Convention Guest Journalist