

Catholic Education Conference, March 2010

-report from *Cathy B.*

I had the privilege to be one of the representatives of the Provincial Council at the 2010 Catholic Conference. Our Keynote speaker was David Wells from England. David's key theme is that holiness is found in the home. He encouraged us to "recognize the hand of God in everything, even in the sameness of day-to-day living. His overall message is that home is a holy place." He told us that the church has much more 'Ordinary Time' than we have feasts and spectacular events such as Easter, and Christmas. "The Church situates our holiness in the ordinary. What it calls us to do is start to see it everywhere. This is the challenge of our families: Can you find God in the mundane? Can you see God in all things?" asked Wells. God recognizes that our domestic lives are holy too, and that home life is not only a place of privacy, but also a living expression of God's grace. It's easy to love people far away. It's not always easy to love people close to us. Bring love into your home for this is where the love for each other will start. That is a profoundly Catholic understanding," said Wells. David Wells provided three reasons why home is a holy place. Home is holy because God's love is present. Home is a holy place because God's presence graces all creation. Home is a holy place because family relationships mirror God-in-relationship."

I took 3 concurrent sessions. The first, Fr. Stefano Penna, spoke on "Journey to Jerusalem: An invitation to Catholic education. He challenged us as the faith community, as parents, as teachers to love our faith visibly and to try ever harder to challenge the seeming lack of faith in our world and to try to do our best to instill faith in our young people. Some of his key ideas:

- the great challenge for Catholic schools in Canada is being a public school that is Catholic
- There is a profound understanding of what is unique is that we can speak of God and speak and recognize God in each other. In grief I do not bring my counseling techniques, I bring Jesus Christ
- We accommodate those who do not believe in God as if there IS a God
- We have to be careful that we are not being righteous – we have been called to live and teach the gospel and we have to be humbled that we are not doing our best.
- Being the best is not about who we are but about who God is, because God is the centre.
- Catholics have a relational approach to God and to each other. What I bring isn't the whole story; there is something more. It is not our sin that is the story – it is how the Holy Spirit plants seeds within our story.
- Instead of saying our Catholic Schools are the best, we need to show how we are caught up in the story that is the best – the name of God is able to be lived; we radiate joy in being part of God. What is different and is best is that we live IN the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

- First and foremost, every Catholic educational institution is a place to encounter the living God
- Christianity is not just about love your neighbor. Catholic schools have to be called to something higher. We have to ‘get it’ to be and live as a Catholic.

Another session I attended was with Fr. Mike Dechant. He spoke on how Catholic Education inspires students to live as resurrection people. I think the most value from his talk is for us to live as Fr. Mike does, that his life and ours should inspire us by the way we personally live as Resurrection people. Some of his key ideas:

- Unless we see every moment as the unfolding of the Kingdom of God and that God is using me, here and now, we won’t see it when we die.
- We need to become gospel entrepreneurs – people who take the gospel and make it a reality
- He closed with this blessing: “Wherever you go; go with God. Whatever you do, make a difference.”

A session with Dr. Doris Kieser whose topic was “Between Times Morality; [the time of] Adolescence as Liminal Space perhaps had the most to say to us in our CWL role of recruiting and retaining young members. She reminded us that adolescents are “growing in their capacity to learn, to think, to make decisions but they really aren’t going to reach any kind of maturity in terms of their brain until they hit their 20s.” Adolescents do not yet have the mature brains to make wise decisions. They take risks because they want to have the experience and stimulation. We have our experiences and learnings from the past that help us to make decisions; obviously adolescents do not have this experience. Adolescents are working at creating their identity and this takes a lot of examining who they want to be and don’t want to be. They don’t want to do what we do because they see us as much older. They might want to be like us when they get older but not in their late teens and 20s. They want to make their own way, create their own style. Adolescents’s identity formation is coming to a strong conclusion of who they are in the world, and knowing what they are good at. If the stuff adolescents are good at is valued, then they tend to have higher self-esteem. By having their skills and interests affirmed by their peers and/or parents (by the Catholic women around them), they develop confidence. They grow into their skills through this support system of friends and family. I think this has huge implications for us as CWL. If we want to attract younger members we have to look and act current. We need to use some of the technology that they use. We need to pay attention to their interests. We are inviting them; we need them. They do not see that they need us, a Catholic women’s group, in this day and age.

The Provincial Council was quite visible at this conference. We were recognized in the program booklet, in verbal thanks given at the conference and at the organizer’s website. We were visible in our excellent display, which was set up inside the main gathering area. People did approach our table to talk to us and express that they are members or to ask us more about who the League is and what we are involved in. I believe that the Catholic Conference is an excellent venue for our visibility as the Catholic Women’s League.

Quotes and material from Chris Miller, Western Catholic reporter writer.