

Report on the 2016 NCCW Convention

By Jane Carter, Supporting NCCW Member

The NCCW 2016 Convention was “Excellent!” There was an overwhelming spirit of warmth and welcome by the women of Indianapolis, an unending supply of information and inspiration from our speakers and a continuous outpouring of generosity and compassion by attendees. What a perfect picture of *Catholic Women: Instruments of Mercy!*

“Over the Toes and Under the Clothes” was a great success as fifteen 55-gallon bags packed with 1,423 packages of new socks (“over the toes”) and undies (“under the clothes”), cash donations and layettes were given to the Holy Family Shelter in Indianapolis.

Fr. Stembler, Chair of the Spiritual Advisors, reminded us that “We are all a part of the Common Voice of NCCW, including those who served before.” Fr. Stembler finished his term at this convention, and we all join him in being “thankful to God that our paths were allowed to cross!”

The Leadership Luncheon speaker, Immediate Past Lt. Governor of Indiana Dr. Sue Ellspermann, shared with humor and real life anecdotes what it means to be a Catholic woman in the public arena, a Catholic woman in her parish and a Catholic mom at home, “living our faith in the decisions we make every day.” Dr. Ellspermann reminded us that “(Catholic women) are not only allowed, but called to lead and called to renew the Church, using our unique gifts in unique service.”

Attendees came away from the First Timers’ Orientations with a wonderful understanding of how to get the most from convention and enthusiastically looking for the “Great Leader” poster at the LTD table to take photos to “tweet” and “post” to friends and family; publicity in the 21st century!

++++

The opening general session included reports from other Catholic Women’s organizations. We heard membership numbers from Catholic Daughters of the Americas (65,000+) and the Knights of Peter Claver Ladies Auxiliary (10,000+). Why are NCCW’s membership numbers are so different? Simple! In all other organizations every single INDIVIDUAL woman is a dues paying member. **NCCW annual dues are now \$50**, less than \$5/month! Help our NCCW membership numbers better reflect the strength of our organization. **Encourage every Catholic woman you know to join today!**

Sister Donna Markham, OP, PhD, the first woman CEO of Catholic Charities USA, was our first keynote speaker. She called NCCW members women of faith, following the example of Mary, striving to carry Christ into the world, a “collection of collective goodness” in the midst of our violent world. Sister Donna shared, through real life stories from her years in ministry, how we are called to do more than just “help.” We are called to offer “compassion, inclusion and accompaniment” to those who are troubled and troublesome. We are called to welcome the marginalized and outcast, to be “organizers of love” and to care for the forgotten or alienated. We are called to set aside our own needs and risk being unpopular to restore the dignity to another person. In line with one of our 2016 Resolutions, she stated emphatically: “Catholic Charities has been resettling refugees for 105 years and we are not going to stop now!” Sister Donna challenged all Catholic women to “harness the power of good in mercy and justice,” and to remember that “God’s mercy is the beating heart of the Gospel.”

And then—drumroll—the beautiful new NCCW logo was unveiled. The video clip posted on the NCCW website is not to be missed!

The Commission Workshops were presented in succession to the entire assembly this year, highlighting new Vocation Promotion and Mercy programs, PowerPoint presentations about NCCW history and structure, Human Trafficking, Respite Care and personal testimony about the need to actively welcome and assist Immigrants. Check the NCCW website to order resources and find more information.

Indianapolis Archbishop Tobin was the celebrant of the opening liturgy, celebrated on the birthday of Our Blessed Mother. He spoke of Mary who treasured Divine Mercy in her heart, whose Magnificat extends from generation to generation, and who, at the foot of the cross, witnessed the perfect mercy: Jesus.

Late Night Catechism with “Sister” had us sitting up straight, standing tall and using our Confirmation names. Who knew that Ann without an “e” at the end was naked? Ball caps and cell phones were confiscated, Msgr Lozinski had to explain his tardiness, marks were entered on the permanent record of more than one student and the entire “student” audience laughed until our sides hurt. Definitely one of the very best NCCW FUN-raisers and a perfect ending to the first full day of convention!

++++

The convention breakfast session was bountiful and the morning speakers were inspiring, energetic and engaging. Maria Morera Johnson began by reminding us that we need to tell our own faith story, an emphasized the need look into the eyes of those we serve, quoting John Paul II and Benedict. She told her story, how the saints have “chosen her” and shaped her faith life, “popping up” whenever she needed a boost or a push. We listened to every word as Maria told the story of Sister Blandina Segale, Servant of God, working in the American wild west and St. Philip Neri’s sense of humor (giving the penance of carrying his cat around the town square). She shared how St. Rose of Lima worked in her life and the life changing trip to see her Uncle, Bishop Emilio, in Cuba. Weaving the theme of mercy throughout, summarized with one quote from John XXIII, “I have looked in your eyes with my eyes, I have put my heart next to your heart,” Maria ended with the beautiful words of Paul VI in his address to women at the close of Vatican II, “But the hour is coming, in fact has come, when the vocation of woman is being achieved in its fullness, the hour in which woman acquires in the world an influence, an effect and a power never hitherto achieved. That is why, at this moment when the human race is undergoing so deep a transformation, women impregnated with the spirit of the Gospel can do so much to aid mankind in not falling.”

Judy Hehr shared her very personal faith journey of how God turned her “mess into a message” with an energy and passion that kept us on the edge of our seats. Carrying around a ball and chain to represent the years her life was a “mess,” Judy darted back and forth as she spoke, engaging the audience from one end of the room to the other. She told us how all her success in the secular world left her empty, and how having “rules and religion” did not mean she had a personal relationship with her Savoir, and proclaimed that mercy is getting what you don’t deserve. Coming from a family where “instead of forgive and forget, we hated and remembered,” she had a desperate need to be “seen, known and loved.” Judy spoke of the joy she experienced when, after a lifetime of mistaken priorities and bad decisions, she heard Jesus say to her “It’s not what you are—it’s what you did,” and she finally realized that we are “forgiven, freed and loved from birth.”

Celebrating the Liturgy for the Deceased Members of NCCW, Bishop Parkes, our Episcopal liaison from the diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee spoke about the meaning of mercy being forgiveness and the life of St. Peter Claver, a Jesuit priest who served the slave population in the new world as an example of an instrument of mercy. St. Peter Claver wrote, “This is how we spoke to them (the slaves), not with words, but with our hands and hearts.”

The new chair of the Spiritual Advisors was announced and we welcomed Fr. Richard Dawson from the diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee to this important role. And, yes, it’ true, for the first time in our 96-year history, the NCCW President, the Episcopal liaison and the chair of the Spiritual Advisors are all from the same diocese!

The afternoon business meeting included reports from the executive officers—the last one from retiring Treasurer, Mary Matheus—passing four new resolutions, reports from the NCCW Representative to the United Nations, Friends of NCCW for WUCWO, NCCW programs on Domestic Violence, A Million Mercies and the new Purse Club. The Associates of NCCW presented President Hopkins with a check for \$8,500 to support a variety of programs.

There was a mad scramble to dress and prepare for the group photos and province dinners as day two ended with old friends and new, gathered at the elevators, tired, but smiling.

++++

The last day of convention kicked off with Katariina Rosenblatt, a human trafficking survivor. Her story is not unusual. Katariina was only 13 years old and living in a Miami hotel, sitting by the pool while her mom was at work when she was targeted by an older teenager. Having grown up in an abusive home, Katariina was vulnerable and had low self-esteem. At 13, she had no job, could not drive license and easily became dependent upon her 19 year old “friend.” We learned that it only takes about a month of grooming and girls—and boys—between 11 and 14 are prime targets. The good news is that Katariina survived, got out, and began working with law enforcement and speaking in schools to help end this modern day slavery—and her young adult daughter is now helping in this ministry!

The NCCW Leadership Training Development Team (LTD) presented an informative skit highlighting the “gifts” of the LTD program, featuring the wide variety of topics available to trainers when customizing a program. They also announced a new technology component and introduced the two newest team members—Amy Kennedy and Jeanie Ilian. In service to NCCW members for a decade, the LTD team is waiting to be invited to YOUR council!

Every year one special member of our organization will be recognized for her deep faith, commitment to council and service to the Church and her community. The recipient of the 2016 NCCW Our Lady of Good Counsel Award was Joan McGrath. Much to her surprise, her three adult children were able to come and be with her on this special day and there were many tears and hugs on stage!

The installation of the new province directors is always a poignant moment at our convention. It is a joy to welcome new leaders to our national board of directors and it is hard to say good-bye to those whom we have come to know and love. It is good to have a moment to pray with them, pledge our support of their efforts and watch the flashes of cameras and phones as everyone tries to get a shot of “their” PD!

And the last order of business, as always, was the invitation to the NEXT convention! Those Texas gals always do things in a big way, and their invitation was no exception. There were hats and whoops and handouts...and definitely a welcoming call to "See Y'all in Dallas in 2017!"

Our closing liturgy was celebrated by Archbishop Kurtz, Chairman of the USCCB and Archbishop of Louisville. It was humbling to hear his thanks to us, his appreciation of the work of all our members throughout the parishes and dioceses across the country, and the gift we are to the priests and the Church. Archbishop Kurtz spoke of the special ways we show mercy and the many excellent programs and service we provide and challenged us to continue the good and holy work. It was a perfect message to leave in our hearts.

The 2016 Convention ended with the Banquet—good food, good friends, good time—the very best way to end our last day!