

Catholic Men Challenged to Take Action to Address Needs of Church and World

By Christopher Harding

St. Paul, whose year of remembrance we are still celebrating, frequently used no-holds-barred challenges and imagery derived from athletics to appeal to the men of his time. Speakers borrowed the Apostle's techniques to reach the 2,250 contemporary males in attendance at the 5th Annual Boston Catholic Men's Conference (BCMC), held on Saturday April 18 at Boston College's Conte Forum.

The basketball/hockey arena lent itself well to the opening keynote of the day, "Seven Lessons from Sports for Catholic Men of Faith," delivered by BC's Jerry York, the second all time winningest coach in college hockey history. He distilled memorable life-lessons from presentations made by high profile sports figures to his squad in the locker-room.

The next speaker Curtis Martin had similar guy-friendly credentials: among his many ministries is co-hosting EWTN's "Crossing the Goal," a sports-talk-format spirituality series aimed at men. But Martin's primary focus these days is growing FOCUS (Fellowship of Catholic University Students), a national campus ministry he founded.

As he does with college men, Martin challenged BCMC attendees to respond to their inborn instinct to fix problems by "figuring out what specific thing God wants me to do by looking at what ticks me off or breaks my heart - and then redirecting that energy." He called the men to imagine telling a story in heaven about their work for God on earth and encouraged them to pick bold issues now to direct all their talents. "This is a great time for Catholics because we have huge challenges. We can be part of the generation that changed the course of world events."

Before the lunch break it was time to honor three exemplary men for building up the Church. Than "Layman of the Year" went to Stephen Guillotte of St. Anthony's Parish in New Bedford for among other contributions, his work with the Knights of Columbus, and advocacy for the unborn, elderly and homeless.

Guillotte explained that his organizational efforts were aided by "the support of a great pastor and many great men just waiting to be asked." Deacon of the Year honors went to Deacon Leo Donoghue, believed to be the longest serving director of a Permanent Diaconate Office in the country before his recent retirement. Moving tributes were read about the boundless time spent with men in recovery by "Priest of the Year," Fr. Rodney Copp, pastor of St. Charles in Waltham and police chaplain.

After lunch, film star Jim Caviezel addressed the men. Caviezel shared how his life, faith and career have been transformed by his roles in the Count of Monte Cristo and The Passion of the Christ.

He described how he physically suffered during the filming of The Passion and how that paled in comparison to the suffering that Jesus himself experienced. He then challenged the men to be willing to suffer like Christ and the many martyrs for our faith by standing up for what is right and fighting to build the Civilization of Love that God wants the world to be.

Undaunted by having to follow three tremendous speakers, Dr. James B. Stenson, parenting expert and former headmaster at prestigious boys schools, concluded the speaking portion of the program by sharing a wealth of practical wisdom in his presentation on "Successful Fathers in the Eyes of God."



Coach Jerry York addresses the men.
Photo: George Martell.



Curtis Martin tells a joke.
Photo: George Martell.



More than 2,200 men attended.
Photo: George Martell.



Jim Caviezel shares a light moment.
Photo: George Martell.

He reviewed best practices in fostering the spiritual and psychological maturation of children from teaching sons about firm handshakes and his daughters about modest dress. Stenson emphasized four key points for men. Fathers are called help children adjust to the world outside the home; to protect his family from physical and financial dangers; to encourage and model respect for his wife so that his children imitate him; and to strengthen the character and conscience of children so later in life they can protect themselves. "Treat your children and grandchildren the way God treats us-- with love and with high standards of right and wrong."

Augmenting and strengthening the speaking program were the opportunity to participate in sacraments and devotions. Hundreds of priests heard confessions throughout the day. Daylong Adoration in a small chapel gave way to a procession in the arena with Exposition and Adoration with worship led by recording artist and worship leader Martin Doman.

Cardinal Sean O'Malley celebrated the culminating Mass, in his homily tying together themes of the day with the Divine Mercy Sunday reading about "doubting Thomas." Slideshows and videotapes of many of the keynote addresses are available at www.CatholicBoston.com.



More than 125 priests attended the Conference.
Photo: George Martell.

Catholic Women Encouraged to Trust in the Lord

By Christopher Harding

"Hear me and understand well, that nothing should frighten or grieve you. Do not fear that sickness, nor any other sickness or anguish. Am I not here, who am your Mother? Are you not happily within my fold? What else do you wish?" Our Lady of Guadalupe's reassurances were echoed last Sunday in the communal sharing and support that characterized the 4th Annual Boston Catholic Women's Conference (BCWC), held at Boston College.

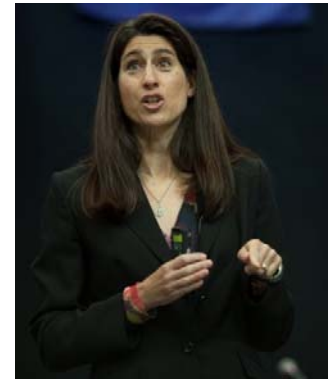
Thousands of women from throughout the Archdiocese of Boston and surrounding dioceses – a few with their children in tow - gathered to worship, to hearten one another, to scrutinize the touring digital replica of the miraculous image of Our Lady of Guadalupe (the only apparition of the Virgin Mary as a pregnant mother) and to honor, among others, one of America's hardest-working and most astute champions of the unborn.

The theme for this Divine Mercy Sunday gathering was "Trust in the Lord with All Your Heart," a sentiment endorsed by many of the speakers as the proper response to life's trials and disappointments.



More than 2,350 women attended.
Photo: George Martell.

Sr. Nancy Keller, SC, a national figure in the Catholic Charismatic movement, emphasized that "trust is the daily act of hoping." She advised attendees to "let the Holy Spirit overcome the obstacles to hope in us." She learned from the losses in her own life though that "healing is not a substitute for redemptive suffering" and encouraged women to "find your place in the Passion."



Kerri Caviezel speaks to the women.
Photo: George Martell.

Kerri Caveziel confided that trust is the theme of her marriage to film star Jim Caveziel. When asked to give up her career as a teacher and basketball coach, she struggled before realizing, "Who you are is not what you do, but who I Am in your life." Part of God's unexpected plan for her has so far involved her addressing youth in more than 50 countries on the Sanctity of Life and adopting two abandoned Chinese children with brain tumors. She shared lessons she had learned from the lives of St. Bridget of Sweden, St. Monica, Blessed Margaret of Castello (patroness of unwanted children), and the Blessed Mother.

During the midday awards presentations, Cardinal Seán O'Malley personally presented the inaugural "Culture of Life" award to Nellie Gray, the founder of the March for Life, whom he fondly introduced by noting, "Some refer to her as the Martin Luther King of the Pro-Life Movement, but to me she's the Joan of Arc for the Culture of Life." Gray thanked the Cardinal for his consistent support of and personal presence at the March and warmly invited all to join him and her for the 37th March on January 22, 2010.

Fr. Daniel Hennessey, who heads the Archdiocese of Boston's vocations office, beamed as he presented the "Laywoman of the Year" award to colleague and friend, Loretta Gallagher, whom he called a "spiritual mother to so many priests and seminarians in the archdiocese." Gallagher is co-president of the local chapter of Serra International, a ministry to encourage and support vocations. She also coordinates and promotes the daily pray for a local priest calendar.

Sr. Marian Batho, CSJ, was honored as "Religious Woman of the Year," in recognition for her "inclusive leadership" work as liaison between the archdiocese and over 120 communities of men and women religious and for her efforts to lead many important initiatives for Cardinal Seán.

Opening the afternoon session, Scripture scholar Dr. Mary Healy interwove personal stories with New Testament passages. She hailed "the peace that comes from trust, and the trust that comes from knowing the Lord." She encouraged women to become familiar with Scripture passages and highlighted a new series of books on the Bible for Catholics.



Sr. Nancy Keller addresses the women.
Photo: George Martell.

Johnnette Benkovic, tireless host and producer of EWTN's "The Abundant Life" and founder of the "Women of Grace" apostolate, topped off the speaking portion of the program. Her dynamic and varied presentation ranged from describing her reversion to the Faith after lapsing in college to leading BCWC participants through many moving sections of Scripture.



Johnnette Benkovic explains an element of her reversion.
Photo: George Martell.



Cardinal Seán O'Malley is welcomed by the women assembled.

Photo: George Martell.

Throughout the day, Alicia Herson led the women in worship and praise music, including during Adoration and the concluding Mass celebrated by Cardinal O'Malley.

Slideshows and videotapes of many of the keynote addresses are available at www.CatholicBoston.com.