

Spa for the soul inspires women to transform family and society

BY KATHERINE JASS LOPEZ
FOR TODAY'S CATHOLIC

Refreshing. Spiritual. Beautiful. Awesome. Wonderful. Powerful.

These are just a few words expressed by the women who attended the 10th annual Catholic Women's Conference, "Come to Me," sponsored by the Pilgrim Center of Hope, A Catholic Evangelization Ministry. The two-day event, held Oct. 7-8 at Antonian College Preparatory High School, offered time to be renewed in the faith through prayer and fellowship with other women.

Since 2001, women from across the archdiocese and south Texas have gathered their mothers, grandmothers, sisters and friends to attend the conference, often referred to as a spa for the soul. The mission of the conference is to foster an appreciation for the personal dignity of women, to encourage women to know and love God and to inspire women to use their feminine gifts to transform the family and society.

"This is our first time coming to the conference. We were excited to have time to get together and grow spiritually with one another. We are all from different ministries and enjoy having this time together as women," said Cati Reyna, one of 14 women attending from San Fernando Cathedral. Rhonda Esparza from St. Leo the Great Parish shared her enthusiasm. "This is a great way to celebrate our faith

as women who share the same beliefs and it allows us to support one another in our faith journey."

"The Catholic Women's Conference is an opportunity to truly discover the true meaning of femininity and to discover the teachings of the church that lead us to a deeper relationship with Jesus. As women, we are always giving and serving, it's our nature; and it's our nature to multi-task. The conference is a time to receive and to be renewed in the midst of a very busy and noisy world," commented Mary Jane Fox, co-founder and director of the Pilgrim Center of Hope along with her husband, Deacon Tom Fox.

And the women indeed did receive. The conference was sold out, with 800 women in attendance. "It was amazing to see the sea of souls who were totally eager and open to what was being said. You could tell they had Jesus in their hearts and they were being filled with the Holy Spirit. To see how happy and prayerful they were was an awesome experience.

They were being fed and excited to take what they had experienced and go out and build up the



Katherine Jass Lopez | Today's Catholic

Mother Adela Galindo, SCTJM, foundress of the Servants of the Pierced Hearts of Jesus and Mary, talks to Mary Jane Fox. Below, speaker Sharon Lee Giganti.

kingdom of God," said Julie Reyna, a member of the steering committee who served as master of ceremonies.

Beginning with prayer, the ladies gathered Friday evening with the recitation of the rosary, which was especially fitting as it was the Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary. Mother Adela Galindo, SCTJM, foundress of the Servants of the Pierced Hearts of Jesus and Mary, invited the women to reflect on "If You Only Knew the Gift of God."

"The sisters and I have been praying for you for months so the gifts of God could be understood in your hearts. Jesus spoke to the heart of a woman, a Samaritan woman, with very simple yet piercing words — if you only knew the gifts of God. This evening Jesus comes to encounter you at the well of this conference; he desires to have a profound dialogue with you. This gift he has for us defines our dignity and

vocation is to love and transform humanity. I pray his love touches us so deeply it changes the direction of our lives. Jesus wants his women back; they have been stolen and lied to. He knows the devil has stolen us and I believe he is determined to get us back. We women are the apples of the Father's eye, the princesses of the Father's house; when he looks at us he sees his favorite daughter," Mother Adela told the women.

The evening concluded with a Mother Adela and Deacon Fox leading a eucharistic healing service. "Tonight was very powerful. To hear the words of Mother Adela and then to be in the presences of Jesus is a great gift. It is important for women to be here and take back Mother's message to our families and our communities," said Gloria O'Connell from Our Lady of the Atonement Church.

Saturday began with Mass celebrated by Archbishop

Gustavo García-Siller, MSPS. "Dear people of God; faithful women, as we pray together may we hear the words of the Gospel that our Blessed Mother heard from Elizabeth: blessed are you. Your life and your vocation is truly a blessing for the world. If we open our hearts we can discover God in our hearts. Women you have a mission to fulfill and I pray your mission will arise from your hearts," Archbishop Gustavo told the women.

Throughout the day participants had the opportunity for eucharistic adoration and reconciliation as well as hear presenters.

Amber Pilkington, therapist for the Dignity Women's Center, shared her personal journey for finding peace with body food and God. "When food does not satisfy we are not looking for food — we are looking for God. God designed us to eat; no food is bad because God created all things that are good."

Sharon Lee Giganti, a former New Age instructor and now a committed Catholic, warned the women of the new age deceptions in our society and the negative impact it creates. "I am so happy to be here to shed light on this new age deception that is in our world. These things are harmful and not the works of God," she said.

Best-selling author and speaker Elizabeth Ficocelli spoke about the role of our Blessed Mother and what we can learn from her. "We are living in a time of grace — there have been more visions of Mary than in any other time and place. She is coming to give us an important message — to battle against evil. She is calling on us to pick up our spiritual weapons — prayer, the rosary, fasting, sacramentals — and to do our part as women," Ficocelli said.

"The speakers were all so powerful — I have really enjoyed being here. They have all spoken from their hearts and shared very personal testimonies. It was just what I needed and I can't wait for next year's conference," said Elsa Lopez from St. Andrew Church in Pleasanton, who met her two sisters from Houston at the conference. "My sisters and I stayed at a nice hotel, had a spa night and then came to be fed here — the weekend was a spa for the mind, body and soul," she said.

"Praised be the Holy Trinity and our Blessed Mother for a blessed, grace-filled and joyful Catholic Women's Conference. We were very sad to turn away around 200 women due to the limited seating. Plans for next year are under way and the conference will be Sept. 21-22 with a 1,200 seating capacity venue. We hope to continue for another ten years, with God's grace, in leading women to discover their true dignity and vocation as daughters of God," Mary Jane Fox said.



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