

CONVENTION 2017

September 6-9, 2017 Dallas, Texas

The 97th Annual Convention of the National Council of Catholic Women was held at the beautiful Anatole Hilton in Dallas Texas. Over 600 women and 45 priests gathered together to celebrate the theme, *Catholic Women: Living the Joy of the Gospel!*

The local volunteers did an outstanding job taking care of every little detail to which they were assigned with grace and a great big Texas smile. Their beautiful Meditation Room provided a place of quiet respite and their amazing set, stage assistance and volunteer choir for the fundraiser, *Sister's Christmas Catechism*, could not be beat. Everywhere one looked, a lovely volunteer was standing, waiting to assist. They carried off the Silent Auction perfectly. The flowers they obtained to decorate the meeting stage and the Liturgy Space were beautiful and kept to the orange and gold colors of the Convention. We cannot say enough about the care and devotion to detail these volunteers provided to make this Convention so welcoming and comfortable. We are so grateful for their work, prayers, and concern for others throughout our Convention. It would not have been possible without them.

Our NCCW office staff must also be commended for the planning, packing, staffing at Convention, answering endless questions with patience and good cheer. They were everywhere helping out and our gratitude to them is immeasurable.

Prior to the official Convention kick-off, an optional comprehensive tour of Dallas was offered on September 5th. The following day, an optional tour of Fort Worth Highlights included a longhorn cattle drive right down the main street! Tour participants returned full of stories noting the fun they enjoyed together as they learned about this part of Texas.

On Wednesday, September 6th, the day began with exhibitors setting up 38 tables with items ranging from art work, jewelry, olive wood carvings from the Holy Land, information from Catholic Mobilizing Network, the National Catholic Partnership on Disability, delicious food items, religious books and broadcasting, lovely baby items, socially responsible investing advice, our NCCW Associates,

Friends of NCCW for WUCWO, the NCCW Leadership Training and Development Team, the University of Dallas and Youth 2000 USA, and our wonderful Gold Sponsors, Catholic Relief Services and Cross Outreach. This year we also had a Silver Sponsor that came to us through Carmel Communications.

Our Convention Charity was Under the Clothes and Over the Toes and their area of the hall was loaded with wonderful donations that will be distributed by the Dallas Ladies of Charity, an affiliate member of the NCCW.

A beautiful Leadership Liturgy (open to all) was held with the Chair of the Spiritual Advisors, Rev. Richard Dawson, as the principal celebrant. Following Mass, the Board of Directors met and heard reports concerning our finances, convention updates, resources, and office updates and learned that Andrea Cecilli, NCCW Executive Director, has been selected as the author to complete our history for our 100th birthday in 2020.

The NCCW Leadership next enjoyed a luncheon with Mother Susan Catherine Kennedy as the speaker. Mother had been a county judge among many other career highlights before her husband died. Their children being grown, she sought entry to religious life only to find that orders rejected her due to her age. She mentioned this at a lunch with her bishop and he offered that perhaps she was being called to be a foundress and after much prayer this is exactly what she has done. She founded the Daughters of Divine Hope and her talk proved quite interesting and most inspiring.

In the afternoon, an open Board Meeting was held followed by a presentation by Kathy Bonner for First Timers at Convention. Kathy provided much useful material so that everyone could get the most out of Convention.

Wednesday evening we had a very special treat courtesy of Carmel Communications, a Silver Sponsor of Convention. They provided a free pre-release screening of a major movie, *Same Kind of Different as Me* and we were privileged to have the author of the book, Ron Hall, with us to speak with us after the movie. It was a very beautiful true story and everyone present gave a standing ovation at the movie's end and again to Ron Hall.

Thursday morning began with Confessions for those who wished to take part in this healing Sacrament. We are so grateful to our Spiritual Advisors who so kindly offered this Sacrament to our attendees.

Early morning board meetings followed for the Nominating Committee, Associates, and the Friends of NCCW for WUCWO. Our ever popular NCCW Store, Silent Auction, and exhibits also opened to greet the day.

At 9AM, participants gathered for the Opening General Session where President Sheila Hopkins greeted our assembly. Beth Mahoney, Chair of the Spirituality Commission led us in a beautiful opening prayer after which the Knights of Columbus 4th degree Color Corps, 3rd Texas District, presented the Flag of the United States of America to which we pledged our allegiance. Janet Regan, Province Director of Detroit, then led us in a wonderful rendition of *God Bless America*. Introductions were made by President Hopkins of the Executive Committee, the Board of Directors, Theresa Boscia, our NCCW representative at the United Nations in New York, our lovely past presidents in attendance: Mary (Winkie) LeFils, Joan McGrath, Joann Hillebrand, Maggie Gray, Ellen Bachman, Bobbie Hunt, and Patty Johnson, Rebecca Woodhull having been introduced as immediate past president with the Executive Committee introductions. Linda Clark was next presented as the Lead Coordinator for the Leadership Training Development Team, Karen Painter as our representative to the Religious Alliance Against Pornography, our staff: Andrea Cecilli-Executive Director, Bernadette Corso -Membership Services, Laraine Bennett – Editor and Communications Manager, and Alexandra Lahoud -Administrative Assistant. Maryellen Tibbs, our bookkeeper, remained behind at the office for us. President Hopkins also introduced our Gold Sponsors: Catholic Relief Services and Cross Catholic Outreach.

We then heard greetings from the San Antonio Province Director, Marla Johnston, who provided a great big warm Texas welcome. She was joined by the co-chairs of the Dallas volunteers, Marilyn Ramsey and Rose Harder and Dallas DCCW President, Stacy Cuzik. A letter of greetings was then read from the Supreme Lady of the Knights of Peter Claver Auxiliary. We then received personal greetings from Helene Shephard, National Regent of the Catholic Daughters of the Americas, Margaret Ann Jacobs, National President of the Catholic Women's League of Canada, Sara Perla from the USCCB, and Maribeth Stewart who read a letter of greetings from the President General of the World Union of Catholic Women's Organisations (WUCWO).

President Elect, Maribeth Stewart, then introduced our keynote speaker, Mary Rice Hasson who spoke to us on the theme of How to Be a Joyful Catholic Woman in a post-Christian World. She encouraged us to embrace our “label” of Catholic women proudly. To understand how our Catholic identity informs our lives in whatever station we hold and to draw comfort and strength from being women with our unique gifts, offering them to the world and the Church. Inspiring and gracious words given us, we were truly blessed to have Mary, a fellow NCCW sister, with us at Convention.

Renewed with Mary’s words, we broke for lunch, our Spiritual Advisors gathering for their annual luncheon and meeting with their Chair, Rev. Richard Dawson. Thursday afternoon we reconvened in the beautiful Imperial Ballroom to hear our Commission presentations. First was Spirituality who presented: Women on a Journey-Sharing Our Stories. We were reminded of all the incredible work we do to bring Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy to our world. Throughout the presentation, we were invited to pray and reflect after we heard beautiful stories of our Council and our Council sisters. We then heard from the Executive Director of the National Fund for Catholic Religious Vocations who thanked us for our Vocation Purse Club and read us letters from the orders who received financial aid from our efforts. Small colorful paper purses on each table were full of donations at the end of the talk that came to over \$2500! What a wonderful expression of faith in this program to assist young women with vocations to the religious life.

Next, the Leadership Commission addressed the difficulties of securing new women for leadership positions by using a wonderful skit. They then provided a great Power Point talk on mentoring that went with a mentoring handout in our convention bags.

Last, the Service Commission had Kathy Bonner speak powerfully on Domestic Violence, showing us how simple it is to use the new step-by-step NCCW Guide to Help End Domestic Violence. They concluded their session with a video that demonstrated how to make mats for the homeless from the plastic bags one receives at various stores like grocery stores.

A beautiful Opening Liturgy followed that was enhanced with the voices of an 80 person choir from the Bishop Lynch Catholic High School. How wonderful to see these many young persons offering praise to God so reverently. Unfortunately, Bishop Parkes, our NCCW liaison to the USCCB, was unable to join us for

Convention due to health reasons. The Chair of the Spiritual Advisors, Rev. Richard Dawson, stepped in and we all experienced that bonding and beauty we have come to know from our NCCW Convention Liturgies. Thanks, too, to our liturgy coordinator, Anne Boyer, for her always wonderful work.

Over 345 attendees gathered Thursday evening for the hilarious *Sister's Christmas Catechism: The Mystery of the Magi's Gold*. Again, our volunteers were wonderworkers providing a set backdrop that appeared to be an old-fashioned brick wall with a blackboard in the center, a Christmas tree decorated with paper chains, a teacher desk heaped with wrapped "gifts," bookcases filled with old fashioned textbooks, a big crucifix on the wall, a statue of Mary, a picture of President Kennedy, a picture of the Pope, a large plastic Nativity scene of Mary, Joseph and a light-up Baby Jesus in a manger. In short, just everything you might recall from your grammar school days if you attended your parochial grammar school! One of the local Dallas volunteers belongs to a theater group and they made the set! Their director also kindly set up the entire stage and then trained a "choir" made up of volunteers who led the audience in a warm-up audience participation rendition of the 12 Days of Christmas. It was such fun. He then began to lead us in Jingle Bells when we heard "Sister" enter the room admonishing us that we should be singing hymns, not secular music and making us sing the line "in a one horse open sleigh" as "with Baby Jesus in the sleigh." And from there, the hilarity ensued ending in a living Nativity scene with audience members dressed up using bedspreads, lampshades, towels, etc. -just like grammar school with the help of Sister's assistant who was really the local volunteer from the theater group! In between we laughed as audience members were admonished for chewing gum, looking at their cellphone, passing notes, etc. It was an evening where many said they have not laughed so hard in a very long time! At the end, "Sister" spoke beautifully of the real sisters who spent so many years teaching us and really giving their all for us and asked if when we left, if we had a few dollars, that we put them into a collection basket. Well, we ended up with over \$800 that will be donated to an order of retired sisters. What a great way to end the day.

We began Friday morning outside in the Sculpture Garden on a gorgeous day. We gathered there to be led through the Joyful Mysteries of the Holy Rosary in a rosary developed by our Spirituality Commission that is titled, *Rosary Meditation on the Dignity of Women*. Based upon several papal writings to include *Amoris*

Laetitia, Mulieris Dignitatem, and *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, it was a most peaceful and lovely way to contemplate the dignity and vocation of women and to reflect on how our NCCW assists in the full realization of our role as Catholic women in today's world. What a beautiful way to start our day with our Heavenly Mother.

At 8am we gathered for breakfast after which we heard from a most extraordinary young woman, Stacy Thomlison. Using her amazing life story (to date!) she showed us how trusting in the path that God gives to us leads one to a fulfillment that can never be achieved from following what the world calls success. Currently serving as a missionary for FOCUS in Rwanda, Stacy recalled her early life, her highs and lows, and demonstrated that even when God does not seem to be listening, He really is! We just need to be still and listen and take the hard step of trusting completely in His plan for us. A truly gifted speaker, though she protests that she is not a professional speaker, Stacy had everyone in tears and smiles throughout her presentation. How blessed we were to have yet another NCCW member as a keynote presenter at our convention.

We next met for Mass where we greeted our Past Presidents who each carried a yellow rose to the altar where the flowers were placed in a vase near a lovely portrait of Our Lady; A beautiful way to recognize our Council "Mothers" and our Heavenly Mother. The intention of the Mass was for our deceased Council members and our liturgy was made even more glorious with the choir from Prince of Peace Catholic Community from Plano, Texas.

In the afternoon, President Sheila Hopkins called the Annual Business Meeting to order and after observing the required formalities, we heard reports from the President, Treasurer Rose Martinet, Past President Rebecca Woodhull, Chair of the Spiritual Advisors Father Dawson, Convention Chair Maribeth Stewart, and the Nominating Committee Chair Cathy Berry. Pat Reymann, Parliamentarian and Chair of the By-Laws Committee then presented two By-Law amendments. After discussion, the first, which made the language clear about voting members on the Executive Committee, was passed. The second, limiting the term of Province Directors to 2 two-year terms, was referred back to the committee. Patty Johnson, Chair of the Resolutions Committee then presented six resolutions to the voting members: Cultural Diversity, Mentoring, Respite, Legislative Advocacy, Praying for Our Country, and Return of Lapsed Catholics. All passed, though some

with minor modifications. The resolutions as passed may be found on our website. We then heard a report detailing all the work undertaken on our behalf at the UN by our representative, Theresa Boscia, and an update from our representative to the World Union of Catholic Women's Organisations, Maribeth Stewart. That night, most attendees met for delicious and fun province dinners.

The final day of Convention began with Confessions for those who wished. The Friends of NCCW for WUCWO held their annual meeting with a breakfast. At 9AM, we gathered in General Session to listen to our speaker for the day, Dale Recinella, who explained how his ministry and that of his wife, bring the light of Christ to those in the deepest despair in our prisons, particularly those who are sentenced to death. He moved us deeply as he related how laws prevent the presentation of new evidence that could clear some inmates and of how prison, in general, rather than being a place of rehabilitation, becomes a place where those incarcerated can become hardened. The ministry he brings to these inmates can let them see the love God has for them even as they spend their sentence for their crimes. He spoke of how ending someone's life, even though they may have committed a terrible crime, is not the answer to end the pain of the victim or their family. He also spoke of the importance of ministering to the families of the inmates, the families of the victims, and those charged with guarding the prisons. The conditions and the effects of capital punishment on all these people made clear that far more than the offender suffer. He asked us to sign and hand in the card in our convention bag that calls for an end to capital punishment if it is still practiced in our home state. In summary, he spoke to us of how prison ministry can illumine the lives of those incarcerated, making them better people, and how it touches the lives of all those involved.

We then moved into a most entertaining session presented by the LTD Team called, *LTD Live-Dallas Edition!* Using the format of a morning talk show, we had segments on cooking, weather, news, etc. all with information on how the LTD team can help you establish or rejuvenate your Council of Catholic Women. It was a really clever way to deliver this important message and was enjoyed by all.

In the afternoon, we began our sessions with the 7 Dolors of Mary Rosary, guided by a Power Point and our Spirituality Chair, Beth Mahoney. It was touching and beautiful, relating Mary's sorrows to those experienced by mothers,

grandmothers, aunts, really anyone who loves a child and sees that child hurt in any way.

President Sheila Hopkins began the Closing Session and we heard a beautiful prayer led by Rebecca Woodhull, Immediate Past President. We heard reports from Linda Clark for the LTD Team; Karen Painter Legislative Advocacy Chair and NCCW Representative to the Religious Alliance Against Pornography who stressed the insidious damage the pornography industry has done to family life and to the lives of our youth; the President of the Associates Judy Pappagallo who presented Sheila with checks for the printing of various NCCW resources and other needs and also a \$1000 donation for the Vocation Purse Club that will be an annual gift from the Associates; and a report Betty Koch President of the Friends of NCCW for WUCWO that outlined their support for WUCWO and its projects.

We then felt the conflicting emotions present as the time came for the installation of our new Province Directors. The outgoing directors served well and surely they will miss being on the Board, as they will be missed. The camaraderie that grows as they work together for two years will not end but will be changed. They should be proud of the work they accomplished as they now hand off to their replacements. The outgoing directors were called to the stage and received the applause due their hard work. Then, the new Province Directors were called to the stage, accepted their charge and were presented with their name badges.

After they were seated, the President Elect, Maribeth Stewart, called the Executive Committee to the podium where they presented Sheila with a gift in honor of her term as President. Father Rick then asked us to join in a lovely blessing over Sheila. This was followed by a standing ovation.

Joyce Scott, Philadelphia Province Director then invited the members present from Pennsylvania to the stage where they presented a video and talk that invited all to our next Convention: Pittsburgh from August 29-September 1, 2018!

We then went to the Liturgy ballroom where we celebrated the Closing Liturgy led by the Most Rev. John Gregory Kelly, Auxiliary Bishop of Dallas. Prior to the conclusion of the Liturgy, the officers to be installed were called to the stage by President Sheila Hopkins and one by one, accepted their office: Teresa Sarzynski,

Secretary; Jean Kelly, President-Elect; and Maribeth Stewart, President. This was met with a standing ovation and then Mass concluded.

That evening, we met for the last time at this Convention in the Imperial Ballroom to enjoy a wonderful banquet highlighted by the beautiful costumes and dancing of a folklore group preserving the culture and dance of Mexico. It was a stunning display of artistry and everyone present enjoyed a great evening.

Thank you to all who came to our Convention 2017 in Dallas, Texas and a very special thank you to our local volunteers and our NCCW staff. It was an honor and a pleasure to serve as Convention Chair. See you next year in Pittsburgh!

May God bless all of you and Our Lady hold you in the protection of her mantle.

Maribeth Stewart

NCCW President