

Ontario Provincial Council
68th Annual Convention
The Americana Conference Resort and Spa,
Niagara Falls, ON
July 5-8, 2015
Spiritual Development Committee

Oral Report

One Heart, One Voice, One Mission is a perfect catalyst for the integral role women play in the lives of other women, society and the Church.

Throughout the history of the Catholic Church, laywomen and women religious have played a variety of roles; in turn the church has affected societal attitudes towards women in significant ways. Motherhood, by its very nature is unique to women, it is given an exalted status within the Catholic faith, with Mary being officially known as Queen of Heaven. Currently women constitute the majority of members of consecrated life. The Gospels suggest Jesus himself broke with convention to provide religious instruction directly to women. Women have always played prominent roles in the life of the church; including Old Testament figures, the Virgin Mary and female disciples of Jesus, theologians, abbesses, monarchs, missionaries, mystics, martyrs, scientists, nurses, hospital administrators, educators and religious sisters.

Some examples of these prominent women in the church are:

St Hildegard of Bingen St Hildegard of Bingen was born in 1098, the 10th child of a knight. She was a precocious child, experiencing visions from the age of five. Pope Eugene III recognized Hildegard as a seer. Nearly 1,000 years after her birth she is celebrated as a feisty Benedictine abbess, mystic, physician, musician, being extremely knowledgeable on many subjects. Hildegard founded two abbeys; she composed the liturgical drama *Ordo Virtutum*, which is thought to be the oldest surviving morality play. During her lifetime medieval society believed that sickness was a punishment from God. But Hildegard held a remarkably bright view of humanity. She made detailed studies of how to treat the sick. Her work *Physica*, a medical textbook, was controversial, because it described methods of healing women. She also supervised works of art. Hundreds of years after her death, Dante and Leonardo di Vinci listed her as an inspiration.

Phyllis Bowman Phyllis Bowman was a journalist on Fleet Street before she became involved in the parliamentary struggle for the rights of unborn children and people at risk of euthanasia. Bowman was born Jewish, had a period of agnosticism and then converted to Catholicism. Her faith and her pro-life mission became entwined with decades of experience in lobbying politicians and in preventing attempts to legalize abortion on demand up to birth. Bowman founded Right to Life in 1999.

Blessed Mother Teresa Mother Teresa was a young Loretto sister when she received "a call within a call" to found the Missionaries of Charity to serve "the poorest of the poor". After obtaining Indian citizenship she did basic medical training, which prepared her for working in the slums. So difficult was the first year that she resorted to begging. But it wasn't long before more young women joined

her. For over 45 years Mother Teresa served the poor, the sick, the dying and the orphaned. Gifted with keen intelligence, Mother Teresa led the expansion of her order until shortly before her death in 1997. Today the order has over 4,500 Sisters and is active in 133 countries. Since her death, Mother Teresa has become a role model for people enduring the dark night of the soul. For over 40 years Mother Teresa felt isolated from God's presence, but her doubts never overwhelmed her.

Mother Angelica Mother Angelica grew up in the 1920s in Ohio, enduring poverty after her father abandoned the family and as her mother struggled with mental health problems during the Great Depression. She became a nun when she was 30, but in those days that was considered "a late vocation". By the 1970s Mother Angelica had written 50 booklets and recorded 150 cassette tapes. Realizing that her messages on the importance of Catholic identity could reach millions, she formed a tiny start-up in Catholic television, and in a few years she became a strong presence on North American cable networks. Her start-up, EWTN, is credited with being the catalyst in the sudden increase in Catholic radio stations across America. Mother Angelica's traditional habit of the Poor Clares of Perpetual Adoration has been a great advertisement for religious life and has resulted in a surge of vocations to her order. EWTN is recognized as the inspiration for the growth of Adoration chapels in the States. None of this would have happened without Mother Angelica's vision, drive, and fearlessness.

Eleanor Josaitis In the 1960s Eleanor Josaitis was a busy mother. She felt called to social activism after seeing footage of people being tear-gassed and beaten with clubs during the civil rights march in Selma, Alabama. When similar violence erupted in her home city of Detroit, Eleanor was convinced that her role in giving others equal opportunities was to educate marginalized people so they could enjoy career prospects. Collaborating with Fr. William Cunningham, she co-founded Focus: HOPE in 1968. Their goal was to fund and run practical programs. They created the Machinist Training Institute by purchasing an unused factory and outfitting it with modern metalworking machines. They provided everything from classes about doing interviews to basic literacy. If someone was not ready for training or missed primary school, time was taken to make sure that they received adequate education. Those who immediately benefited were women and minorities.

As you can see by these examples, ordinary women can make significant impacts on other women, society and the Church.

Pope Francis has said that women should play a greater role in society and the church, stating that this could be done without sacrificing their essential attention and contribution to their families. Women's distinctive skill sets and sensibilities make them invaluable not only for building "peace and harmony" in families, but for all of humanity, too.

I challenge you to go and make a difference!

This concludes my report,
Anne Madden