

# **The revitalization of a Sodality and a woman's reflections**

The Sodality of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Immaculate Conception, Towson, has been undergoing a gradual revitalization program for the past three seasons in order to recapture the original intent of Sodalities, which was founded in Rome (1563 A.D.) by Rev. John Leunis, S.J.

Worldwide, it has been an active apostolate since that time and has been established in more than 100. According to the "Modern Catholic Dictionary" by John A. Hardon, S.J., the word "Sodality" is "a general name for a confraternity of pious association of the faithful who work together with like-minded people for the strengthening of their own religious commitment and advancing of the Kingdom of Christ to others" following the example of our Blessed Virgin Mary.

Sodalities are numerous in the church, although they have been in decline over the past 30-40 years. Therefore, a few women at Immaculate Conception wanted to see if they could generate more interest in their Sodality, so it could continue to draw younger women into its apostolate of Catholic spirituality, evangelization, education and Catholic women's fellowship. To accomplish this goal, they conducted a survey to see what type of positive changes could be made to make the Sodality more viable in today's ecclesial culture.

The first thing they did was to reintroduce to eighth-graders to the Miraculous Medal. Other ideas emerged and a schedule of purposeful and positive events instead of business meetings was planned by a Sodality board of leaders. These events included an annual pilgrimage or a day of retreat, a baby shower for a pregnancy center to celebrate Jesus' birthday, first Saturday Mass and devotions with a Sodality breakfast forum, two annual Cenacles of Prayer in May and October, and an annual Spring Luncheon featuring a guest speaker.

Our spring luncheon, on April 18, featured Linda Brenegan, the director of the archdiocesan Respect Life Office, whose topic was "Authentic Catholic Womanhood." It was well-received by the 52 women of all ages in attendance. The

following are excerpts from that talk.

Mrs. Brenegan began her talk by asking three questions: What does it mean to be human? What does it mean to be a woman? What does it mean to be a Catholic woman? She reminded us of the Genesis account of creation, in which God looked at everything and saw that it was very good, and how He created a man in His own image, this new creature being truly someone holy and made in the image of God ... someone with God's own eternal Holy Spirit! She asked another question: Do we recognize God's image so readily as the angels recognized God's image right away in the face of Adam?

Of course, Mrs. Brenegan said, "Adam learned for himself the one thing lacking: another like himself. Alone he was not complete. He needed a companion. There was no one with whom to give and receive love, for being made in God's image, which is what he longed for. This is the only time that God says something in His new creation is " 'not good' - it is not good for a man to be alone." Therefore, God would create a "helper" or "help-mate." She went on to say "actually they need our love when we help them. And they love that."

She recalled how a Scripture scholar who used the more expressive word: a "life saver," a "counterpart" or "alongside," so Eve was to be a life-saver at Adam's side. She said that "God knew that man would need a life-saver. Eve would be that for Adam - and vice versa. And that ... the most important role of woman has to do with saving life and also ... being a life-giver, responsible for perpetuating the whole human race. Mrs. Brenegan said that "women have been entrusted with saving and preserving the image of God in the whole world. She asked two more questions: Have we become the destroyers of God's image? Have we become the destroyers of God's image when we should be the life-savers? Having said this, she asked us to think about the sacred vessels used at Mass and how they must be purified after Mass because they have touched God. She said that "women were created by God as Life-Savers, Life-Givers, Sacred Vessels" and that "we need to re-discover our roots, our roles as defenders and givers of life." Furthermore, "as women, we are made for love, to give love, to nurture, develop and protect others in our lives, our families and our professions. God cherishes each of us. God has a plan for each of us. He places us where He wills and calls us to a specific way of life, a way of living, a

mission. We ... are all called to live as faith-filled Catholic women."

Mrs. Brenegan shared how Adam learned - it is not good to be alone. She said that "since we are created in God's image - the Holy Trinity which is a community of persons - we find fulfillment living in community. It is natural to us. Community creates culture. But what is culture and just how is it formed? It has to do with perceptions about humanity and values."

She recalled that Pope Benedict says, "No one can understand the world at all, no one can live his life rightly, so long as the question about the Divinity remains unanswered. Indeed, the very heart of the great cultures is that they interpret the world by setting in order their relationship to the Divinity. Faith itself is cultural. It does not exist in a naked state, as sheer religion. Simply by telling man who he is and how he should go about being human, faith is creating culture and is culture." She asked two other questions: "Are we living our faith so as to reform and inform our culture? What are we to do?" She said that we are to "live this great gift of our Catholic faith. It is our only hope, our only strength and through it, we will persevere to the end, as St. Paul says.

Her final words of advice are that "in these days when it seems the only news is bad news, and evil seems to be gaining the upper hand, let us continue in faith and take St. Paul's advice: 'Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, do; and the God of peace will be with you.' "

*Mrs. Hoffman is a parishioner of Immaculate Conception in Towson.*