Faith forums in March for women, men gain momentum

BY WARD MIELE
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NEWARK—With emphasis on the practical benefits of immediate registration, organizers of next month’s annual Day of Reflection and Catholic Men’s Conference are in the final planning stages.

Archbishop John J. Myers, an avid proponent of both spiritually enriching experiences, will be the main celebrant at the concluding Mass of both events.

Sponsored by the Women’s Commission, the 20th annual Day of Reflection takes place on Saturday, March 3, 8 a.m. to 5:15 p.m. A week later, on March 10, the fourth annual Catholic Men’s Conference, under the auspices of the Men’s Commission, will be held. Both forums return to the conveniently located campus of Seton Hall University in South Orange.

As the Day of Reflection draws near, Pamela M. Swartzberg, J.D., L.C.H.S., chairwoman of the Women’s Commission, said her group is excited about the upcoming gathering. “We want to encourage women to recognize their strength as true daughters of the King. With all the competing images of ‘woman’ in our culture today, it is important for us to recognize that our true identity comes from God. His grace is the source of our strength in our day-to-day lives. With the help of grace, women can ‘turn off’ the negative images imposed by our culture and experience the inner beauty that comes from listening to the Lord,” she explained.

Looking ahead to the Men’s Conference, Jorge L. Repollet, K.H.S., conference chairman, asked potential attendees to thoughtfully consider the event. “I often hear people say ‘I’m not quite ready to follow Jesus.’ Are we ever ready? Yet Jesus never asked or expected us to be ready.”

Jesus, Repollet continued, did not choose humble fishermen like Simon and Andrew “for their intellect, for fishermen of that day were simple people. Jesus was about to redefine what ‘fishing’ meant to these experienced fishermen. What excuses do we make for not following Jesus? Is it not our skill, talent, knowledge or money that counts, but simply obeying when we hear the call. Are we ready to accept the call and come, follow Him? If you are a real man, I dare you to attend the Men’s Conference on March 10 and experience this day and follow Him.”

The cost to register for the Women’s Day of Reflection is $25 per person. The Men’s Conference cost structure is $25 for adults and $20 for students between the ages of 14 and 23. Clergy and Religious can attend both events free of charge. For additional information about either gathering call (973) 497-4545. Online registration is available for both events (see Web sites above).

The themes selected for the women’s and men’s events are “Rise Up and Walk—Plugging into the Power of Grace” and “Come, Follow Me” respectively. Both feature English and Spanish tracks. For the first time at the Women’s Day of Reflection, the concluding Mass and will be a bilingual service.

Lenore Ford of Morristown, who has attended three Day of Reflection events over the years, urges area women to attend what she termed is a “spiritually exciting and positive experience.” It is, she stressed, a “beautiful day of faith.” In this “world of moral ambiguity, something that strengthens faith is more than worthwhile,” she concluded.

Retired teacher Maryann Lauber, from Saint Mary Parish in Nutley, has attended several Day of Reflection gatherings going back a decade. She has been especially moved by many of the speakers who often tell of how they found God again in their lives. Lauber has also been struck by the many younger women who attend. Asked how her spiritual life has been affected, she said it has brought her “closer to God.”

Looking ahead to the Men’s Conference experience, Daniel Yacykewych, a member of Saint Thomas the Apostle Parish in Bloomfield, called the gathering “life-changing.” He called upon men planning to attend to “come with an open mind and an open heart, leave everything at home.” Yacykewych placed equal emphasis on “making yourself at home among your Catholic family, they are your Catholic brothers. It will be a day you’ll remember. You will be touched, I promise. I was.”

After having attended the last two conferences, Matt DeVoti, a member of Notre Dame Parish in North Caldwell, said the gathering is a “great way to recharge your spiritual batteries.” Stressing the importance of such an experience for the younger generation, the general sales manager of radio stations WMTR and WDHA, said it is significant to see “thousands of other men of faith” attending the conference. For those contemplating attending for the first time DeVoti advised “open your mind and heart, put the rest of the week-end on hold.” The conference, he declared, is “good for your soul.”