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## From March 10, 2006 Edition of The Pilot

### Thousands attend men's, women's conferences

By Christine Williams

BOSTON — Over 8,500 men and women were called on to improve their relationships with God and work together to do His will at the Boston Catholic Men's and Women's Conferences held March 3 and 4 at the Boston Convention and Exhibition Center.

The men's conference was formed last year as a means to strengthen the faith of individual Catholics and the Archdiocese of Boston as a whole, said Scot Landry, co-founder and co-coordinator of both conferences.

The second annual men's conference not only caught the attention of Catholic men in the area — over 5,200 attended this year's gathering, over 3,000 more than last year — but also the region's Catholic women.

Only a month before the men's conference was to be held, Landry agreed to meet with women who wanted to organize a conference this year and hear Father John Corapi, SOLT, of EWTN, who was already scheduled to address the men's gathering. Even on such short notice 3,300 women attended.

Landry said he and the rest of the planning team had already learned from last years' men's conference to "think boldly and take big risks."

The conferences are among the largest ever held for Catholic men and women, which "given everything the archdiocese has been through in the last five years is a wonderful sign of hope going forward," said Landry.

The success of the events, he said, is not the number of Catholics who participate but what each individual will take away from the experience and how that will energize their faith in their daily lives.

Landry said he has received "enormously positive" feedback from this year's participants and plans are already underway to hold men's and women's conferences on the first weekend of March next year.

Father Corapi's words about "Spiritual Warfare" at both the men's and women's conferences were especially popular, he added. Father Corapi's talks were closed to the media.

Father Corapi said Catholics need to recognize that they live in a world that is hostile to their faith and their religion, and they need to do something about it. He added that surrender is not an option, Landry said.

Father Corapi, who has a military background, referred to the similarities between physical and spiritual war. He said that Catholics are losing the war, especially in Massachusetts, which has a high percentage of Catholics but, at the same time, some of the most hostile legislation to the faith such as the legalization of same-sex marriage, Landry said.

According to Landry, Father Corapi told the men and women that Catholics had stood on the sidelines



Over 5,200 attended the second annual Boston Catholic Men's Conference held March 4 at the Boston Convention and Exhibition Center. The day before, over 3,000 gathered for the first ever Boston Catholic Women's Conference. Pilot photo by Peter Smith

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for too long and needed to get serious about their faith and engage in debate on important issues.

The women's conference on March 3 began with several sessions, confession and adoration at 4 p.m. Sister Olga Yaqob, an Iraqi nun and hermit in the archdiocese spoke about "A Way to Recognize God's Call."

"My sisters, it is very easy to know God's will by knowing Him very well," she said.

In order to know God well, they must become women of prayer and pursue an intimate relationship with God, she said.

Our "'wounded diocese' needs women of prayer to make miracles in our diocese," she continued.

The remainder of the evening consisted of four back-to-back keynote addresses —two of which were given by Father Corapi — beginning at 6 p.m.

Erika Bachiochi, a theologian and mother of three, spoke about "The Divine Love Story: Return of a Prodigal Daughter."

Bachiochi said that God calls Catholic women to pray every day, serve others and let their love for all overflow.

"God expects much of we Catholic women," she said. "God needs you to be a saint."

But God gives Catholic women the means to do His will, and His love is more real than any problems. With His help women can build up the kingdom of God and change the world, she added.

Cardinal-designate Seán P. O'Malley also encouraged the women to pray, saying "Without prayer we are practical atheists."

He then spoke about the Lord's Prayer, highlighting important details about each line of the Our Father. Jesus, in teaching us the prayer, was telling us to trust in God and His love because God wants what is best for us, he added.

"When God's will is done on earth, it is heaven," he said.

Marita Terefenko, a parishioner at St. Patrick Parish in Watertown, said she thought the entire conference was "right on target."

"It's about everyday. How do we live our vocation as baptized lay women?" she said. "Women are searching. We're longing for this."

Terefenko said Bachiochi elevated motherhood while Father Corapi's words edified attendees and encouraged them to develop their spiritual tools to use in their vocations, she said.

"As parents there's nothing more important that we do in our lives than to help our children into heaven," she said.

Teresa Rocha-Ruiz, who regularly attends Mass at St. Clement Eucharistic Shrine in Boston, said she came to the conference in order to immerse herself in a spiritual community. She moved from Mexico five years ago.

Rocha-Ruiz said she especially enjoyed the comments of Cardinal-designate O'Malley because he stressed prayer and finding time for God.

"That's something that touched my heart. I should be looking for more silence in my life," she said.

The men's conference featured confession, adoration and four keynote speakers — including Steve Bollman and Sean Forrest — as well as a concluding Mass.

Preacher to the papal household, Father Raniero Cantalamessa, OFM Cap. spoke about how husbands should love their wives as Christ loves the Church.

"Reading the words of Paul with modern eyes, a problem soon arises. Paul entreats the husband to love his wife, and this is fine with us. But then he entreats the wife to submit to her husband, and this seems unacceptable in a society that is firmly, and in my opinion correctly, aware of the equality of the sexes," he said.

The answer is not to eliminate the troubling passage but to understand that God calls the wife to love

the husband, and just as that is reciprocal, so should submission be. The entire passage begins with an entreaty to both husbands and wives to be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ, he said.

Father Cantalamessa concluded by saying that if couples invite Jesus into their marriage, He can repeat the miracle of Cana on a spiritual level.

"The presence of Jesus can change always the water of routine, coldness into the wine of enthusiasm, generosity and joy," he said.

Scott Hahn, like Cardinal-designate O'Malley at the women's conference, took up the subject of the Lord's Prayer at the men's conference.

The prayer begins with "Our" Father, not "My" Father because as Catholics we pray as God's family. God has given us a unique gift by allowing us to call Him Father, he said.

"It's 'Our Father,' not just our master, our Lord, our lawgiver and judge. He is all of those things, but it is fatherly law. God gives us commandments because He knows us more than we know ourselves," he said.

We cannot repeal God's laws because our family is not a democracy, he said.

"If we got all 435 members of the House and 100 members of the Senate to repeal the law of gravity on Monday, the president signed it into law and they got on the roof of the White House to celebrate by jumping off together ... would they break the law of gravity? Would not the law of gravity break them?" he asked.

God wants us to be home with Him in heaven and has instituted His laws wisely and lovingly, he added.

"The only real tragedy in this life is not to lose your job or to lose a loved one or to have some kind of serious illness. The only real tragedy in this life is to have lived and died without ever becoming a saint. Because that is the one and only thing for which we were all made," Hahn said.

"We have to be holy and nothing less or we're wasting our time on this planet," he said. "I've got to tell you brothers in Christ, we have a holy heritage and this legacy is alive. We as Catholics have a great gift to give to this country that we love, and it is our faith. We live it out in our families."

Cardinal-designate O'Malley celebrated the Mass at the conclusion of the men's conference, saying in his homily that God calls us to conversion.

"What the Lord demands of us is that we be ready to change. He tells us to be foolish and not to conform to the normal attitudes of the society in which we live," he said. "It is in being changed and in penance that we discover the Gospel."

He encouraged the men to make this Lent the best in terms of their prayer, works of mercy and acts of penance.

"The Church needs for you, the Catholic men of Boston, to witness to our faith in Jesus and your love for His Church," he said. "For those of us who love the Catholic Church we see what a treasure Christ has left us. Our responsibility is to be witnesses in today's world. Too many Catholics have slipped into the witness protection program — we must invite them to come home to Christ and the Church."

