

Catholic Women's League – Montreal Archdiocesan Council – 2005-2006

Spiritual Advisor's Remarks – To the CWL & the K of C – 051101

Dear Sisters and Brothers, Members of the Catholic Women's League, and of the Knights of Columbus, you are among many organizations today – both religious and secular – that are challenged by contemporary culture to find new ways to connect with your respective constituencies. Times have changed. We come from a society within which people tended to define themselves not only by who they were and where they came from, but also by what group they belonged to. If a recognized leader proposed an activity or idea, the membership tended to go along with it, or not, but tended to do so in a block, altogether.

In our day, people may still identify with trends or ideas, but they will still want to distinguish themselves as individuals within that movement or activity. The common complaint in churches and organizations is about the difficulty, even impossibility of “getting people to join” either membership or participation. Yet, a good look around us reveals a plethora of individual initiatives, movements, and organizations, causes and activities. There's just as much human interaction and activity as ever there was, only the “buzz” is no longer happening in all the familiar places, or those familiar to elders.

So, how does an aging organization, or one in which the members are naturally aging but are not recruiting sufficiently to keep the median or average age down? We are all familiar with the adage that the young are best suited to evangelize the young, and there is a fair amount of truth to it. What then might be our role, as elders, in a process we used to be part of in our youth, but which somehow has passed us by? What happened in our youth that caused us to remain in responsibility and leadership so long, when the expectation was that the next generation of youth would step up to meet the challenge?

Could it be that at some point we, or others of our generations, would have wanted “fresh blood or young bodies” to step up and carry on what we had been doing? In other words, we might have just wanted their bodies, or labour, but not their souls, or ideas? We may have wanted them to do things, but to do them our way, not in accord with their own new ideas, which may have seemed strange, or weird, or unorthodox to us, or simply not in accord with the way things “are supposed to be done” or we were familiar with.

If this is the case, then a possible strategy for us might be to watch and search for young adults of the younger generations who have a heart for evangelization, for the Gospel, for God, for people, and listen to them better for a start. It would be ever so natural for them to have ideas about how to reach out to their peers, and it just might be our most important contribution to mentor them and help them try to implement their ideas. The Lord is undoubtedly sending us younger adults, but if we don't have eyes to see them as they are, we may only see them as inadequate shadows of ourselves, or of the pattern we've known and are relentlessly trying to reproduce. Why not let them be themselves, and find some way of understanding and supporting them?

If they are to evangelize their generation, they will need our help, prayers, and support. Are we ready and willing to give it, and be ready to adapt our organization locally to accommodate younger generations, and perhaps at an executive level, “take care of business” and do the necessary reports and organizational work?