

Workshop: Mothers of Love and Faith

(There are several places where you will need to become animated in order to add real excitement to this workshop. It will help greatly if it can be read over a few times when deciding who takes which part. Give it your own spin—your own words if you wish. And thank you for delivering it so very well! If you cannot lead Holy is His Name on your own, try to find someone who knows it and can lead it before you begin. Each table should have at least two copies of the Objects of the League and each participant should have a list of the questions to write about their mother and a copy of the spiritual opening and closing. You can engage at least six members in the closing spiritual).

The purpose of the workshop today is to:

1. Awaken and heighten our feelings and memories of love and gratitude to our mothers or to women who are/were motherly to us, and to mothers of the bible.
2. Connect these feelings with the Objects of the League.

The call to motherhood is hardwired to our very bodies. Of course, not every woman is destined to be a biological parent. And yet, each of us is called to bring life into the world, whether that life is physical, intellectual, relational or spiritual. Let me repeat that: each of us is called to bring life into the world, whether that life is physical, intellectual, relational or spiritual. Each of us have unique gifts that make this possible—gifts of sensitivity and intuition, gifts of communication and communion.

Let us begin our workshop with a spiritual opening.

Leader: Dear Lord, this day stretches out before us like a quiet ocean, calm and clean and potent with a possibility as we sing out the words of Mary our Mother, “My soul Magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.”

Song: “Holy is His Name”

1st verse: My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord and my spirit exalts in God my Savior. For He has looked with mercy on my lowliness and my name will be forever exalted. For the mighty God has done great things for me, and His mercy will reach from age to age. And holy, holy, holy is His name.

2nd verse: He has mercy in every generation, He has revealed His power and His glory. He has cast down the mighty in their arrogance and has lifted up the meek and the lonely. He has come to help His servant Israel; He remembered His promise to our fathers. And holy, holy, holy is His name.

Leader: Lord, help us to make the most of the beauty and opportunity within this day. We offer it to you through the following affirmations, confident that if we live what they contain, we will have lived the day well.

All: We believe the Lord loves and remains with us at all times.
We believe we play a unique, important role in the Lord’s plan.

We believe the Lord gives us all the strength we need in times of difficulty. We develop our talents, resources, and abilities to their best use.

We turn over to the Lord whatever we cannot change and set realistic goals to change whatever we can.

We strive to live this day humbly, realizing the presence of God within us all. Amen.

Mary of Nazareth (*wearing a sky-blue veil; any color of blue works or white. You can wear the material over your shoulder if you like. You can carry a rose, blue or white preferably, with a cross if you have access to these. Animation needed.*)

First depiction of women of the bible

I am Mary of Nazareth. I was in my teens, when the angel Gabriel informed me that God had chosen me to be the mother of his son. Being a devoted follower of the Jewish faith, I answered, “Be it done to me according to thy word.” Little did I dream that my response would mean I would become an unwed mother on the brink of divorce, a weary traveler giving birth in a stable, a refugee in a foreign land, an anxious parent worrying over a lost teenaged son, a misunderstood family member whose relatives thought my son was insane, a widow whose only son was in trouble with the law, and the mother of a criminal condemned to death by public execution. Only through God’s grace did I receive the courage to endure all this. But there were great joys too! My son, Jesus, was truly extraordinary—the most loving fascinating son any mother ever had—and **I was proud to be his faithful disciple and a pillar of his early community of followers, the church.** (*Emphasize this last line.*)

1 . What Objects of the League come to mind when listening to Mary?

(The objects will be listed on their table, so they should be able to answer your question. Object # 1 To achieve individual and collective spiritual development, #2 To promote the teachings of the Catholic church, #3 To exemplify the Christian ideal in home and family life, #4 To protect the sanctity of human life. #5 To enhance the role of women in church and society. There are really no right or wrong answers. You can ask them why they think that.) Any of these fit— Mary is a terrific role model for us.

2. Has your mother been a role model to you and for her community? (4-5 minutes)

We are now going to read you a story called “Mother” (*Read at a slow pace with lots of expression, do not hurry*).

The young mother set her foot on the path of life. “Is this the long way?” she asked. And the guide said, “Yes, and the way is hard. And you will be old before you reach the end of it. But the end will be better than the beginning.” But the young mother was happy, and she would not believe that anything could be better than these years. So she played with her children, and gathered flowers for them along the way, and

bathed them in the clear streams; and the sun shone on them, and the young mother cried, "Nothing will ever be lovelier than this."

Then the night came, and the storm, and the path was dark, and the children shook with fear and cold, and the mother drew them close and covered them with her mantle, and the children said, "Mother, we are not afraid, for you are near, and no harm can come."

And the morning came, and there was a hill ahead, and the children climbed and grew weary, and the mother was weary. But at all times she said to the children, "A little patience and we are there." So the children climbed, and when they reached the top they said, "Mother, we would not have done it without you." And the mother, when she lay down at night looked up at the stars and said, "This is a better day than the last for my children have learned fortitude in the face of hardness. Yesterday I gave them courage. Today I've given them strength."

And the next day came strange clouds which darkened the earth, clouds of war and hate and evil, and the children groped and stumbled, and the mother said, "Look up. Lift your eyes to the light." And the children looked and saw above the clouds an everlasting glory, and it guided them beyond the darkness. And that night the mother said, "This is the best day of all, for I have shown my children God."

And the days went on, and the weeks and months and the years, and the mother grew old and she was little and bent. But her children were tall and strong, and walked with courage. And when the way was rough, they lifted her for she was as light as a feather; and at last they came to a hill, and beyond they could see a shining road and golden gates flung wide.

And mother said, "I have reached the end of my journey. And now I know the end is better than the beginning, for my children can walk alone, and their children after them. "And the children said, "You will always walk with us, mother, even when you have gone through the gate. And they stood and watched her as she went on alone, and the gates closed after her. And they said, "We cannot see her but she is with us still. A mother like ours is more than a memory. She is a living presence."

3. Did you enjoy the Mother reading? What phrases resonated with you? (2-3 minutes)

We want to tell you about a project of one of the parish councils, St. Francis of Assisi in Cornwall, concerning mothers. The aim was to put together a booklet of short stories about their mothers or a woman who had been motherly to them. It was felt that it was very important to capture the essence of their mothers for posterity. Before embarking on this project, it was decided to host a workshop on writing appealing stories about their mothers. They had two guest speakers, one gave suggestions on how they could make their stories more engaging and interesting and one told them stories of mothers from biblical times. Time was taken out of their day to write a short story about their mothers and those who wished would read them aloud.

Following the workshop, some members of their council wrote two-page stories of their mother which was put into this booklet.

In order to help you to recall some of the memories of your mother, we are going to give you a page of questions to answer at your tables. These questions may jog your memory and help you formulate some information about her. Do not feel like you must answer all the questions. It will be for your own personal journal unless you wish to share some of it with us afterwards. We will take 15 minutes to write and then five minutes of sharing at your table followed by some group sharing.

(Question sheets need to be passed out here. They are below for your perusal.)

1. Who was your mother and what is her part in your being here today?
2. Is your mom still living? If not, when did she pass?
3. Was your mother a CWL member? What council? What positions did she hold? What are your memories of her time in the CWL?
4. Her siblings?
5. Her schooling/education?
6. Her stories about their fun times—sledding, skating, beaching, etc.?
7. Her wedding/honeymoon?
8. Her home?
9. Her children?
10. Difficulties during working years?
11. Church?
12. Travel?
13. Fun stories my mother told?
14. My mother's favourite quotes?
15. My relationship with my mother?
16. Her relationship with her grandchildren?
17. I loved being with my mother when...

Tell us a story of the faith of your mother.

- Writing 15 minutes
- Sharing by table, five minutes
- Sharing in the large group depending on time permitting.

Now, we hope you will return home and continue to write about your mother for your own sake and the sake of your children and of history. At the very least, we hope you have awakened some of your memories of her.

This is our second depiction of a woman of the bible: Eve (*holding an apple, very vivacious, lively! Don't forget to bring an apple*).

I am Eve, the mother of all the living. When my husband Adam saw me for the first time, he exclaimed with joy and delight. Although I am remembered mostly for my transgression of eating the forbidden fruit, let me hasten to point out that the Genesis story makes it clear that I was created in the image and likeness of God and as an equal partner to Adam “bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh.” Thus, I serve as a very important symbol of the dignity of all women. As for the apple, well, you could say that the devil made me do it!

What object of the League could we refer to when we think of Eve? She says she serves as a very important symbol of the dignity of all women. (*If you need to prompt them, #5 object is to enhance the role of women in church and society and #6 object is to recognize the human dignity of all people everywhere*).

What are some of the ways our councils can uphold the dignity of all people? (*You should have some thoughts of your own in case you need to prompt*). (*Approximately two minutes*).

We are called to assist people who are vulnerable and often imperfect in their living of family life without ever making them feel ashamed. Family life is under attack today from many quarters. Let us promote the ‘joyful love’ to which Pope Francis calls us in his exhortation on family life. A mother gives consolation, cares, cures, nourishes, teaches and educates. A mother is patient, she abandons herself, she gives herself entirely. The Church invites us to listen, to understand, to forgive, to hope and above all to integrate those who are excluded and marginalized; to care for and listen to those who suffer abuse, especially women and children. Throughout his life, Jesus showed us the face of God’s mercy towards the needy, the abandoned, the suffering and the excluded. Sometimes this means showing care for those who live family life in an imperfect way. Object #8 calls members to contribute to the understanding and growth of religious freedom, social justice, peace and harmony.

In the book *The Little Prince*, written by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, the fox speaks to the little prince about the secret of life:

“It’s a very simple secret: It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye.”

“What is essential is invisible to the eye,” the little prince repeated, so that he would be sure to remember.

“It is the time you have wasted for your rose that makes your rose so important,” said the fox. “It is the time I have wasted for my rose,” said the little prince, so that he would be sure to remember.

“Men have forgotten this truth,” said the fox. “But you must not forget it. You become responsible, forever, for what you have tamed. You are responsible for your rose...”

“I am responsible for my rose,” the little prince repeated, so that he would be sure to remember. (Fun time!)

OK, since our day has been focussed on women, we think it is important to speak of at least one man today, so here we go! (*Be expressive in telling this little story of Fr. Brian for a laugh. When you say, “Praise the Lord”, and “Amen”, lift your arms in the air and yell it out!*):

Father Brian MacDougall bought a horse. The dealer assured him he had made a perfect selection. “This horse was raised in a religious atmosphere,” the dealer said. “You can’t say ‘Giddyap’ to make him start. He won’t respond. You’ve got to say, ‘Praise the Lord.’ And instead of saying ‘Whoa’ to make him stop, you need to say ‘Amen’.”

Fr. Brian paid for the horse, mounted him and said, “Praise the Lord”. The horse began trotting toward Fr. Brian’s parish house. After a couple of kilometers though, a jack rabbit darted onto the road and spooked the horse. The horse took off at a gallop across an open field, directly toward a bluff that bordered a river two hundred feet below. (In PEI?) In panic, Fr. Brian forgot his instructions. “Whoa,” he yelled several times as he pulled on the reins, but the horse kept on galloping. Finally, at the last moment, Fr. Brian remembered. “Amen!” he shouted, and the horse stopped at the very brink of the abyss.

“Whew,” a gratified Fr. Brian said, “Praise the Lord!”

Your mother or a woman who has been motherly to you is always with you... She’s the whisper of the leaves as you walk down the street; she’s the smell of bleach in your freshly laundered socks; she’s the cool hand on your brow when you’re not well. Your mother lives inside your laughter. And she’s crystallized in every tear drop. She’s the place you came from, your first home; and she’s the map you follow with every step you take. She’s your first love and your first heartbreak, and nothing on earth can separate you. Not time, not space... not even death!

No one ever gave moms an instruction manual: A mother’s instinct just kicks in, and she becomes the glue that often holds a family close. A mother’s death can be devastating, and yet with faith and love and perseverance, we can pick up and move on, maybe even where she left off. May the memory of our deceased mothers remain forever in our heart until we meet again.

Closing spiritual prayer:

Leader: There are some strangers whom we’ve never met in the flesh whose stories have led us to trust the mystery within. We have come to know them and, in that recognition, have been blessed again and again. They have all been a part of the gospel that has enabled us to discover Christ within the shrine of our being.

Reader 2: Adam and Eve
Symbols of our beginning
Invited, like us,
Into the process of becoming.
You understand our fragility and our glory (Genesis 3:1-31). Sing in us the song of creation.

All: Pray for us!

Reader 3: Abraham and Sarah
Called into the darkness of the unknown
Tent dwellers and stargazers
Waiting and trusting (Genesis 21:1-6). Be stars for our journeys.

All: Pray for us!

Reader 4: Ruth and Naomi
Women of strength and devotion
Attentive and loyal to each other.
We need your deep loyalty and faithfulness. (Ruth 1:15-16) Bond us to one another as sisters and brothers.

All: Pray for us!

Reader 5: Mary of Nazareth
Mother of Jesus
Woman of incredible faith
First disciple of the New Covenant (Luke 1:46-55). Keep offering us to Jesus.

All: Pray for us!

Reader 6: Samaritan woman
Talking to Jesus at the well
Longing for a drink that would last forever
We, too, are thirsty for eternal life (John 4: 7-15) Give us a drink.

All: Pray for us!

Reader 7: Mother Teresa
Gospel woman, selfless vessel
Deeply involved in beatitude living.
We need your heart of compassion. Share with us your loving heart.

All: Pray for us!

Leader: Lord, we thank you for the gift of our mothers, through whom you brought us into this world for a life with you forever in eternity. We ask you to bless them and us, as we continue our pilgrimage from conception and birth to our heavenly home.

We ask you this in Jesus' name. In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

All: **Amen.**

Song: "Holy is His Name"

1st Verse: My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord and my spirit exults in God my Savior. For he has looked with mercy on my lowliness, and my name will be forever exalted. For the mighty God has done great things for me, and his mercy will reach from age to age. And holy, holy, holy is his name.