

IBVM history was made in July when 207 Canadian and American Sisters assembled at Loretto Convent in Wheaton for a six day Conference entitled "Claiming the Vision". The Conference culminated months of discussion in local and regional groups as well as input from a gathering in April with alumnae and friends of the IBVM.

The daily plenary sessions were conducted by Brian O'Leary SJ from Dublin and Lavinia Byrne IBVM of London. They set about the task of helping us deepen our understanding of our IBVM roots and how to translate them into contemporary life.

Brian O'Leary opened the Conference with two presentations. He started with a paradoxical contrast between the glorified baroque tomb of St. Ignatius and the starkly simple gravestone of Mary Ward in a Protestant Church near York with its moving inscription: "To love the poor, persevere in the same, dy and rise with them, was all the ayme of Mary Ward". A common largeness of heart, capacity for friendship, burning zeal and unwavering trust, despite seeming failure, led these kindred souls to share in the triumph of the Risen Christ. What, we were asked, made Ignatian spirituality seem so attractive to Mary Ward and how can her understanding of it become that of her Institute in 1989?

The apostolic vocation, Brian reminded us, was not invented by Ignatius. It is simply the spelling out of Luke's version of the call of Jesus. At the heart of the apostolic vocation is the desire to find God and it can never be separated from helping others and service of the Church in which it is incarnated. Both Ignatius and Mary Ward clearly perceived their mission vocation as a "gift from God our Lord" whose love overflowed to all people.

The second day Lavinia Byrne introduced the topic "vocation to mission", in terms of both Mary Ward and of the Church which, especially since Vatican II has stressed the universal call to holiness and the need of on-going discernment of "the signs of the times". In responding to "what is mission", Lavinia said it consists of the constant call and response to the needs of the world, rooted in the Divine activity within the Trinity and in the words and example of Jesus, especially in His command to "go and teach all nations". Perhaps only since Vatican II can we fully appreciate the ripples of horror aroused by Mary Ward's insistence that women, too, can be witnesses, missioned by God.

On Wednesday, Brian directed his remarks to the interrelationship between Obedience, Community and Discernment and how this is experienced in the life of a missioned apostle.

Lavinia, on Thursday, reminded us of the foundresses of the three branches of our Institute: Mary Ward, Francis Ball and Theresa Dease, all three in their early twenties when their foundations began. Their mission sent them and their followers to the four corners of the globe. At this time, Lavinia suggested we reclaim Mary as patroness of our Institute and our special role model. Mary's seclusion and apartness, both in the scene of the Annunciation and as the Pieta at the foot of the Cross should have for us a special meaning which was echoed in the words of Mary Ward, "He was very near and within me in my solitude... He held my heart."

The final day was a recapitulation of what is meant by being a Community for Mission. Lavinia's insights resonated with our own need to translate the "contemplatives in action" of our Constitution into everyday terms.

The week ended with a beautiful closing ritual outdoors at Wheaton. It will long be remembered as a time of insight, grace and gift for the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary.