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## Go and teach all nations

Posted on August 5, 2008 by Brian Lazzuri editor@thecasket.ca



Catholic hip-hop artist Bob "Righteous B" Lesnefsky teaches Steubenville Atlantic participants a dance move. Young people from across Atlantic Canada gathered at St. F.X. this past weekend for the Catholic youth conference. (Brian Lazzuri photo)

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It wasn't quite like the Eagles but sounds of hip-hop, rock and roll and screaming fans filled the Keating Millennium Centre Friday night while t-shirt sales were heavy.

Nearly 800 youth were on hand to hear Righteous B and the Ben Walther Band perform during this year's Steubenville Atlantic. The concert was not a typical one but the event did offer up a peaceful easy feeling. Joining the youth were eight bishops, more than a dozen priests and more than 100 volunteers.

Steubenville Atlantic was one of 19 weekends held across North America this summer. The youth events began in 1976 at the Franciscan University of Steubenville, Ohio. This year 40,000 youth attended the conferences that include: music, praise and worship, prayer, fellowship, Masses, talks, times for reconciliation and workshops.

Becoming witnesses for Christ (Acts 1:8 — "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.") was the theme for the weekend. Performers and speakers centred their talks on how young people can witness the Gospel.

Friday night, conference host Bob "Righteous B" Lesnefsky challenged the youth to "be open to the opportunity to encounter Christ by opening the door of your hearts."

He went on to describe the weekend as an opportunity to let Jesus into their lives and how God pursues everyone.

"We often miss the fact that God of the universe is constantly pursuing us. He says, 'I want to enter into your life, even the messy parts,'" Lesnefsky said describing the reality of the Christ's death on the cross.

"The cross beckons us to give God a chance to respond to his love," he said.

Following Lesnefsky on stage was Deacon Ralph Poyo of New Evangelization Ministries. Deacon Poyo led the evening's Eucharistic Adoration session. He spoke on the Church's belief in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

"God wants to be present to us so that we may practice being in his presence," Deacon Poyo said. "Do you believe that Jesus loved you so much that he would die on the cross for you? If you believe how will it change your life? Open your heart and go back to the cross and trust in His love for you."

Later, as the 800 participants knelt in prayer, Deacon Poyo blessed the crowd during benediction.

On Saturday, participants gathered for prayer and Mass before breaking into single-sex groups for a talk entitled "Witness of the Body." Participants later had a choice of a variety of workshops before returning to their groups for small group sessions.

The discernment of vocations was one of the topics during Saturday's workshops. Father Dominic Foster, TOR, the director of evangelization at Franciscan University was the facilitator for the session. He encouraged participants rid themselves of self-centeredness and to be Christ-like — prepared to lay down

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their life for another.

“When you surrender you are caught in the generosity of Christ. Surrender and follow the Holy Spirit. Be a good disciple now so you will be ready for the call,” Father Foster said.

New Jersey youth minister Caroline Gambale’s workshop focused on witnessing to the family. She spoke of her own family and the effect her sister’s addiction to drugs has had on it.

“You have to choose to love them and live your faith,” she said.

The youth minister offered practical advice on how to witness that love. The advice included the simple things like keeping ones bedroom clean, praying for family members, loving family members no matter what, offering forgiveness and asking for forgiveness.

Brad and Joia Farmer spoke on the value of marriage. Beginning with the book of Genesis, the Farmers spoke about how man and woman were created for each other. They said that their own marriage has faced difficulties but their faith helped them along the way.

“Marriage mirrors a person’s spiritual life. There are times you are fired up and there is deep passion but there are moments that God takes away that feeling but it is a greater act of love when you do something even when it does not feel good.”

Gene Monterastelli spoke about sharing the Gospel. He said it is important to share ones stories with others but the most effective way of evangelizing is when people start asking questions. Then they are inquiring and are more interested he said.

“Live the Gospel message of love. Shed the light of Christ living through us by giving time to others,” Monterastelli suggested.

There were also workshops on how to pray and social justice issues. Saturday ended with worship and praise, a talk on “The Holy Spirit – the Power to Witness” and adoration.

Sunday morning, the youth were challenged to look beyond themselves and to embrace the call to love others. While APeX, a Christian vaudeville act, spoke to the young men, Joia Farmer spoke to the young women. During the session youth heard peer witnesses from Leadership, Evangelization and Discipleship (LEAD) participants. These young men and women spent the week prior to Steubenville Atlantic learning how to pray with others, witness the Gospel through sharing their experiences with their peers and answer difficult faith questions.

The conference concluded with a final Mass concelebrated by seven bishops and nine priests. Bishop Raymond Lahey was the homilist for the Mass. The Bishop spoke about the power of the Holy Spirit and the ability of the youth to witness the Gospel.

“It was the Holy Spirit that pushed the disciples out into the world,” Bishop Lahey continued. “They were comfortable in the upper room but the Holy Spirit said it was not good enough. They had to go out, go forth and teach to all nations.”

“It is this same Holy Spirit that has also been given to us. It is the same Holy Spirit that can transform us. It gives us strength and courage to be Christ’s witnesses.”

Bishop Lahey said the Holy Spirit descends upon the faithful during baptism, confirmation and every time there is a celebration of the Eucharist.

“We who receive the body of Christ and are made one with Christ are given the power to be witnesses. Our witness is a united one with the Church,” he said.

Connecting Steubenville Atlantic to the recent World Youth Day celebrations in Australia, Bishop Lahey offered up three great witnesses for the youth to follow. Blessed Mary MacKillop, Blessed Peter To Rot and St. Peter Chanel. MacKillop was a young girl who founded a religious community. To Rot was a lay catechist during World War II and Chanel was Marist priest who helped convert many in the Oceania region.

Whether it is in the classroom, the locker room, sports fields, in politics or wherever they may be, the Bishop suggested that the youth present have the unique opportunity to bring Christ to places that priests, religious and bishops could not.

“We are called to be witnesses to Christ to the ends of earth. The ends of the earth begin right here, right now. The Holy Spirit remains as alive today just as much as the Holy Spirit was the first Pentecostal Sunday. Let our hands, our feet, our voices do the work of Christ.”



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