

President's Report

May, 2020

Bernadette Schaefer, MDCCW President

In anticipation of our 66th M D C C W convention on June 13, I've been looking through the album of newspaper clippings, photos, and other mementos that date back to the organization meeting on March 30, 1954. That first meeting was held at St. Bernard Church auditorium in Madison. In one photo, women wearing hats are seated at long rows of tables filling the auditorium, with little space to walk between rows. Looking at the picture, I sense the excitement and expectation permeating the room as women from all deaneries of the diocese gathered to organize the Madison Diocesan Council of Catholic Women.

The 4th annual MDCCW convention was held in my home parish, St. Clement, Lancaster on April 15, 1958, the centennial year of the apparitions of our Blessed Mother to Marie Bernadette Soubirous (my patron saint) at Lourdes, France. Bishop O'Connor selected the convention theme, "Mary Help of Christians," and named Our Lady of Lourdes patroness of the convention. His devotion to Our Lady of Lourdes went back to his early years as a priest when she responded to his request for a special favor. In 1919, after a touch of poison gas during WWI injured his voice, he made a pilgrimage to Lourdes. He promised Mary that if she would keep his voice in good condition, he would use it in the service of her Son. Thirty-nine years later he continued to fulfill that promise as first bishop of the Madison Diocese.

As I looked at the newspaper clippings of that convention, I was excited to recognize several people in the pictures and a couple of names in the articles. Reading about the junior choir singing at Mass reminded me of many times my friends and I gathered in the balcony of the church with Sr. Annarose, music teacher, choir director, organist, and my first violin teacher.

I was probably one of the singers that day in 1958.

I felt a surge of spiritual adrenaline while reading this sentence, "The Prayer to Our Lady of Lourdes, one of the prayers with which Bishop O'Connor begins each day, will be printed on the reverse side of the convention holy cards."

The card was not saved, but the prayer is one I have prayed many times in moments of anxiety, fear, uncertainty, or to ask for a special favor. Most recently, during the COVID-19 pandemic, I have been praying it daily. Perhaps some of you would find it helpful so I am sharing it with you here. May Our Lady of Lourdes stay close to us and our families and help us put our trust in her Son during this difficult, stressful time.

Prayer to Our Lady of Lourdes

O ever Immaculate Virgin, Mother of Mercy, Health of the Sick, Refuge of Sinners, Comfort of the Afflicted, you know my wants, my troubles, my sufferings;

deign to cast upon me a look of mercy. By appearing in the grotto of Lourdes, you were pleased to make it a privileged sanctuary whence you dispense your favors and already many sufferers have obtained the cure of their infirmities, both spiritual and corporal. I come, therefore, with the most unbounded confidence to implore your maternal intercession. Obtain, O loving Mother, the granting of my requests. Through gratitude for your favors I will endeavor to imitate your virtues that I may one day share your glory. Amen