

Author energized after a trip to Rome and the Vatican

BY EMILY M. OLSON
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Donna Cooper O'Boyle returned from her trip to Vatican City last week inspired, her head filled with the words of the many people she met during a conference dedicated to women's dignity and their place in the world.

Mrs. O'Boyle, whose books focus on Catholicism as it pertains to motherhood and women, as well as her mentorship with Blessed Mother Theresa, was a delegate in the Vatican City's Pontifical Council for the Laity's International Congress. The congress, a week of meetings, seminars and discussions, focused on the 20th anniversary of *Mulieris Dignitatem* on the Dignity of Women, written by the late Pope John Paul II. The writings are published online at dignityofwomen.com.

What made her trip challenging was the fact that days before she left Connecticut, she and her daughter were in a serious car accident on Railroad Street in New Milford. Mrs. O'Boyle's Mountaineer van was struck from behind by a young driver in a truck. She suffered head, neck and back injuries and is still recuperating. When she left for Italy, she was in bad shape, but was determined to make the journey anyway.

"I wore a neck brace, but not all the time, and I had terrible headaches and pains. But in spite of that it was a wonderful experience," Mrs. O'Boyle said. "I wouldn't have missed it for anything."

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—DONNA COOPER O'BOYLE, CATHOLIC AUTHOR

Mrs. O'Boyle joined 260 other women from countries around the world for the congress, and also brought along two of her daughters to share in the experience. Their hotel was in Rome, which gave them a chance to do some sightseeing during the trip in early February. But most of the time Mrs. O'Boyle was sequestered with her fellow delegates in the congress, discussing and listening to ideas on how to improve the quality of women's lives around the world.

"There were three days of intense workshops that ran from morning until night," Mrs. O'Boyle said. "There was so much to take in. It was pretty amazing. It is so energizing to be with people from all over the world. For me, that was one of the most exciting things about the experience."

The *Mulieris Dignitatem* is an important element of Mrs. O'Boyle's own work and writing career, she said, because it focuses on the dignity of women in modern society, and helping women, particularly mothers, retain pride and dignity for the work they do to raise their children and stay faithful to God. She is happily married to her husband, David, and has raised

five children with the faith that being a mother is a God-given honor that must not be overlooked, she said.

"Being a mom is an amazing vocation, but I think that today women get confused and depressed sometimes, because society doesn't always recognize what being a mother really is," Mrs. O'Boyle said. "It's hard for women to be confident in their role. I feel my role from our Lord is to help mothers, and let them know they are doing a good job; I know how hard it is. It's not easy to raise children today. You're in the trenches with the diapers and the dishes, raising these little consciences, and it's those little daily things a mother does that make all the difference in the world."

The pope's letters in the *Mulieris Dignitatem* address many of those issues, she said, adding that it thanks women of all ages and all kinds, and acknowledges all that's happened to them over the years, and how he wanted to help them. "It deals with how women should be treated with dignity ... he wrote a lot about how that dignity should be equal, for men and women, and we are gathering to dis-



Photographs courtesy of Donna Cooper O'Boyle

Above left, the author and friend Theresa Tomeo; right, Mrs. O'Boyle with a member of the Vatican guard.

cuss it and talk about how we can continue to help women today," she explained.

During the conference, Mrs. O'Boyle and her friend, Catholic radio host Theresa Tomeo, interviewed a number of women from other countries and were interviewed by others for their own peers at home.

"I talked to women from Africa, India and Germany, and I was interviewed by Vatican radio while I was there," she said. "I talked about my books and the news bureau chief had me over for dinner ... it was pretty exciting."

The impact of the trip is still sinking in for Mrs. O'Boyle, who is still recovering from the accident. "I hope women all over the world will one day be able to reflect on this docu-

ment from Pope John Paul II," she said.

Another honor was having several opportunities to see the new pope at the Vatican.

"I had two audiences with Pope Benedict, and that was pretty exciting," she said. "People see him as pretty intense, and he is, but he's also a very loving man, full of heart. He's different than Pope John Paul II, but he has his own gifts to give. Pope John Paul is who I grew up with, and so he was a big part of my life and it's nice that I was able to see this pope during my visit there."

"I couldn't talk to him, but he spoke to us and thanked us for coming, and gave us his blessing and prayed for us to continue our work," she continued. "That's what we need-

ed to hear. There's certainly a lot of work to do, because there are so many wounded people around us, women who get mixed messages about who they should be in today's society. We need to help them."

Mrs. O'Boyle will be holding a Tea and Fellowship event at Borders Books in Danbury March 29, where guests can buy her books and hear about her trip to Italy, and a book-signing at the Bank Street Book Nook Saturday, April 5, from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. To learn more about Mrs. O'Boyle's books, upcoming appearances and signings, visit her Web site at www.donnacooperoboyle.com, or visit Amazon.com for purchases. She has also set up a blog about her visit to Italy on the site.