

Catholic Women's Conference presenter recalls friendship with Blessed Mother Teresa

BY KATHERINE JASS LOPEZ
FOR TODAY'S CATHOLIC

SAN ANTONIO • Women looking for a weekend of spiritual refreshment should circle October first and second on their calendars and plan to attend the ninth annual Catholic Women's Conference, "Come to Me," sponsored by the Pilgrim Center of Hope, A Catholic Evangelization Ministry. The two day confer-

ence will be held at Antonian College Preparatory High School and features inspirational talks, time for prayer and reflection, an opportunity to participate in the sacrament of reconciliation and a eucharistic healing service.

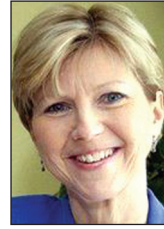
Since 2001, women from San Antonio and surrounding areas have gathered at the conference, who many refer to as a 'spa for the soul,' to spend time

rejuvenating their faith while building friendships with other women. "We have built a strong foundation rooted in promoting the dignity of women and it's been beautiful to see this ministry grow over the last nine years. The steering committee has cast out the net and brought together a lot of women who had been searching for this type of event — planned for them specifically," said Mary Jane Fox, co director for the center.

To ensure the women experience a 'spiritual haven,' the steering committee begins preparations a year in advance. "We have 12 ladies on the committee and through a very thoughtful and prayerful process, we come together to discern and ask the Holy Spirit to guide us in preparing a wonderful weekend for the women," Fox said.

Having nurturing and dynamic speakers present at the conference is a top priority for the committee and this year's five presenters bring a wealth of knowledge and insight on women's issues. One of the presenters, Donna Marie Cooper O'Boyle, will share her personal story of how she came to know and have a decade long friendship with Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta and how women today can carry out her mission to help the poor.

"It was by the grace of God in 1987 that my family and I were invited to attend Mass in the



Cooper O'Boyle

chapel at the Missionaries of Charity Convent and were told Blessed Mother Teresa might be there. The chapel was small and had no modern conveniences. As we were praying I sensed this presence and out of the corner of my eye I saw her and I was just filled with so much joy and peace; there was so much love radiating from her. After the Mass, Blessed Mother Teresa approached my daughter who had just genuflected in front of the Blessed Sacrament and gave her a hug and spoke to me and my family and that is where our friendship began," Cooper O'Boyle said.

It was through this friendship and the encouragement of Blessed Mother Teresa that Cooper O'Boyle wrote books for mothers, women and families, including one that shares the story of their friendship. "I actually kept it quiet for some time that I was corresponding with Blessed Mother Teresa and through the urging of others, I finally wrote 'Mother Teresa and Me: Ten Years of Friendship.' She really guided me so much in those years and when the time was right God let me know it was time to share the story," Cooper O'Boyle said.

Drawing from the ministry

and mission of Blessed Mother Teresa, Cooper O'Boyle became a lay Missionary of Charity and founded a branch of the lay Missionaries of Charity to encourage others to follow the beautiful example of service modeled by Blessed Mother Teresa. "I want to encourage women to say yes to God's call to serve others and help the poor just as my beloved friend did."

In her talk at the conference, Cooper O'Boyle hopes to motivate the women to serve others, beginning in their own homes. "Love begins at home; we don't have to run to Calcutta to serve those in need. Sometimes we just need to look around and take a closer look at those around us — our families, friends, communities. My hope is that women will see that God has a mission for each of us and part of that mission is taking our faith to the streets — no matter where those streets might be."

In addition to being an author, Cooper O'Boyle is a EWTN-TV host of "Everyday Blessings for Catholic Moms" and has appeared on radio and television championing the dignity of women and mothers. She serves God both at home with her family and throughout the world. For more information on the Catholic Women's Conference or to register visit <http://pilgrimcenterofhope.org/>.



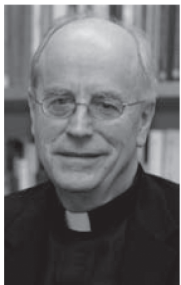
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The Rev. James Heft, S.M., Ph.D., served as the University of Dayton's Provost, Chancellor and Chairman of Religious Studies before joining the University of Southern California (USC) in Los Angeles as the Alton Brooks Professor of Religion. At USC, Heft has founded the Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies, of which he is president and Chairman of the Board of Trustees. A past member of the U.S. Bishops' Committee on Education and Chairman of the Board of the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, Heft co-founded a scholarly journal, *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice*. In addition, he has published and edited eight books and written more than 150 articles and book chapters. He served on the St. Mary's University Board of Trustees from 1995 to 2003.

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