

NEWS / LOCAL NEWS

## Women over 40, underserved, attend conference focused on their needs

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A conference aimed at women in midlife brought 70 women from 25 parishes together Oct. 21 and 22 at the Hyatt Regency in Fairfax. For women over 40, the first Future with Hope Conference was tailored for them by Future with Hope Women, a local group begun by four Catholic women in the Arlington Diocese.

Speakers included Patricia Lorenz, author of 14 books including *57 Steps to Paradise: Finding Love in Midlife and Beyond*; Vicki Thorn, founder of Project Rachel and executive director of the National Office of Post-Abortion Reconciliation and Healing ; and Lisa Mladinich, author, host of Shalom World TV's "WOMAN: Strong Faith, True Beauty," and founder of AmazingCatechists.com.

This is their first conference, but Colleen Kiko, one of the founders of Future with Hope Women said, "If the Holy Spirit calls this to be an annual conference, as the prayer and promotional support we are getting in particular from the Arlington Diocese Council of Catholic Women seems to indicate, we will be obedient."

Emily Borman of Our Lady of Hope Church in Potomac Falls said she was drawn to the conference because it was aimed at midlife. She said she remembers many opportunities for formation and fellowship as a young mother, when she wasn't able to take advantage of them.

"Now that my children are in college, it's wonderful to have the opportunity to gather with other women for fellowship and encouragement," said Borman.

Lorenz spoke Friday about finding love, joy and laughter in midlife. Thorn opened Saturday's presentation. Her focus was on finding joy and healing in faith and community as women come to terms with the physical and emotional wounds they face after 40.

"You don't have to have had an abortion to understand how important that message of healing is to women at this life stage," said Kiko. "We welcome grandchildren, mourn the loss of loved ones and retrace, over and over again, the mistakes we made earlier in life and secretly question whether the Lord truly can forgive us."

Each woman was given an image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd. Thorn pointed out that the sheep being carried on Jesus' shoulders had a different perspective on Jesus.

"When we're suffering, this is us, when we're suffering, we ask where is God. It's at those moments that you are so close to God that you can't see God," said Thorn. "God is showing us a different view of the world. We're being held tenderly, we're being held close. It doesn't mean we're absolved from talking to the shepherd."

"The problem we face is we don't know where we are wounded," she said. "We can't heal what we don't know."

Thorn said when women spend time with other women there is a chemistry of connection.

“The gift of this conference is you are all together, and present to each other,” she said. “Women should leave here with a healing vision.”

Saturday afternoon, Mladinich focused on finding true grace in midlife.

Lynda Rozell of St. Leo the Great Church in Fairfax said it was great to have peer support on being over 40 with grown children.

“It’s an underserved age in the church,” she said. “We’re learning how the saints handled it; meeting peers and seeing how they handle it.”

“We hope each attendee will leave bathed in the knowledge that the Lord has a hope-filled future for each of them,” said Kiko. “This is not a new ministry, but rather, an attempt to connect women with ministries, each other and the Lord.”

Last year, Kiko, Paula Hummel, Monica McBrady and Melanie Rigney attended the Edel Gathering in Charleston, S.C., a conference for young mothers. Kiko said while the demographic of the conference was a younger generation, it was instrumental to the foursome for organizing this conference.

They focused on community. Depending on where women are in their lives, what they need from community changes, according to Kiko.

“We wanted to give women an opportunity to discuss in person their needs and find out ways they can make friends with others in similar situations,” she said. “In a word, women need friends and we want to help them connect.”