



## **REPORT OF THE WUCWO REPRESENTATIVE TO THE NCCW BOARD – JUNE 2011**

A meeting of the full WUCWO Board was held in Rome from the 28<sup>th</sup> of May -01<sup>st</sup> of June, 2011.

The Executive Committee of which I am a member as the Vice President from North America met on the 27<sup>th</sup> of May in Rome a day prior to the start of the full Board meeting. We spent the morning visiting the Pontifical Council for Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People presided over by Bishop Veglio. The afternoon was spent in review of all the ideas sent from member organizations with regard to implementation of the WUCWO theme of Love in Action.

The full Board began meeting on the 28<sup>th</sup> of May. As is customary for these meetings, the business sessions alternated with a formation program. Our formation speakers were:

-Dr. Donna Orsuto, Co-founder and Director of the Lay Center, Foyer Unitas and Professor at the Institute of Spirituality of the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome who spoke to us about women who were important in the work preceding and during the Second Vatican Council

-Dot. ssa Flavinia Giovanelli, Undersecretary of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace who spoke to us about our role as women today bringing the Council's directives to fruition.

-Dot. ssa Fermina Alvarez, Member of the Secretariat of State, International Section, who provided a session concerning the Forum of Catholic-inspired Non-Governmental Organisations that was initiated by the Vatican in 2007.

We also heard reports from our international representatives. It is vital that we have professional women in these key roles as they are in arenas where they are speaking with lobbyists and lawyers well versed in international law so we are most fortunate to have these ladies representing WUCWO. The fora in which they work include the United Nations offices of ECOSOC (Economic and Social Council) in New York, UNESCO (Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) in Paris, the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organisation) in Rome, the ILO (International Labour Organisation) in Geneva, as well as the Council of Europe based in Strasbourg..

An election was held to select a Vice-President General. The Board member from Mexico, Monica Santamarina de Robles, was selected. We then elected conveners for the Permanent Committees. Much of the business conducted at the Board centered upon the ways that the Plan

of Action for this term, called Love in Action, will be implemented. This work will really be accomplished at the regional levels through the four permanent committees: Statues and Procedures presided over by Convener Rosaline Menga of the Cameroons; Finance presided over by Convener Joann Hillebrand, WUCWO Treasurer-General; International Committee presided over by our President-General, Maria Giovanna Ruggieri of Italy, and Communications, Information, and Publications presided over by Convener Maribeth Stewart of the US. Four working groups were also established: Liturgy, Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue, Young Women, and Peace. Each Board member was assigned to one working group as well as a permanent committee. These committees met separately and then made recommendations to the full Board with regard to implementation of the Love in Action Work Plan. It is through placing concrete actions around the Work Plan through these committees that we hope to be effective stewards of the mandate issued in Jerusalem at the Centenary Assembly. When the final Work Plan is available, I shall send it forward to our Main Office for dissemination to our NCCW. It is a beautiful plan, even as it stands now, and though it is taking a great deal of work to finalize- as it should, it is a wonderful document that I know you will find most inspiring.

During the meeting, we were privileged to spend time visiting the various dicasteries of the Roman Curia. Dicastery refers to the departments of the Roman Curia, the central administrative body of the Church. The dicasteries are divided among the many Congregations (such as the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith or the Congregation for the Cause of Saints), the Tribunals (such as the Roman Curia that judges among other things, cases for annulment of marriage), the Commissions, the Academies (such as the Pontifical Academy of Sciences or the Pontifical Academy for Life), and the Pontifical Councils.

As I mentioned earlier, the Executive Committee visited the Pontifical Council for Pastoral Care for Migrants and Itinerant People prior to the full board meeting. There, we discussed extensively the issue of human trafficking and the members present (the Vice Presidents for Africa, Asia-Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, Europe, and North America) recounted the different challenges faced in their region with regard to this issue.

The entire Board was received at the Pontifical Council of the Family where we met with Bishop Jean Laffitte. We discussed the work underway concerning the dignity and condition of women and he requested that we keep in regular contact. The Convener of the Permanent Communications Committee is charged with supplying a quarterly report.

We next visited the Pontifical Council of the Laity where we were welcomed by Cardinal Rylko and Ana Cristina Villa Betancourt, responsible for the Women's Section. Cardinal Rylko underlined the importance of our meeting since, "the promotion of women, her identity and mission in the Church and society is one of the Council's great priorities." He observed how 'obvious' things are no longer obvious in our post-modern culture due to the deep anthropological crisis we are experiencing; a sort of cultural revolution on a world wide scale that seeks to change fundamental concepts including that of gender. He stressed the need for three things for Catholic women to be effective: "Formation, formation and formation!" Our fundamental challenge, said Cardinal Rylko, is to be brave enough to go against the tide in our defense of the human person. He especially encouraged our presence in the international bodies where he said we have the mission of being a clear, brave voice. As Catholic women, we are no

longer called to be merely guardians of the faith but of human nature itself, as described in John Paul II's Letter to Women. We were reminded of the availability, on the Pontifical Council's website, of an on-line library, updated every two months, which is an indispensable tool for our formation and reference. ([http://www.laici.va/Women's section/ articles](http://www.laici.va/Women's%20section/articles). The site is in English, Italian, Spanish and French). The regional Vice Presidents were then asked to summarize the difficulties that face women and children in our regions. He addressed each of these and again reminded us of the necessity to speak out and act.

At the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Cardinal Turkson gave us a warm welcome. After our President General's introduction of our work, he said that he was gratified to hear that the Social Doctrine of the Church is our 'compass' and told us that a synod on the Transmission of the Faith is in preparation. He shared news of a pilgrimage which will be held to mark the 25th anniversary of the 1<sup>st</sup> World Day of Prayer for Peace that was organised in Assisi by Pope John Paul II. The theme of the present pilgrimage, planned for October 27<sup>th</sup> 2011 in Assisi at which Pope Benedict will be present, is "Pilgrims of Truth, Pilgrims of Peace". It is to be a day of reflection, dialogue and prayer for peace and justice in the world and will be preceded by a vigil in St Peter's Square, Rome. He asked for and will receive our collaboration.

After the General Audience with the Holy Father on Wednesday, June 1<sup>st</sup>, the members of the Executive Committee were received at the Secretariat of State, the oldest dicastery in the Roman Curia. It is headed by the Cardinal Secretary of State, currently Tarcisio Bertone, S.D.B., and performs all the political and diplomatic functions of Vatican City and the Holy See. The Secretariat is divided into two sections, General Affairs and Relations with States, known as the First Section and Second Section, respectively. We were graciously received by the Cardinal and by Monsignor Ettore Balestrero, the Undersecretary for Relations with States and Dot.ssa Fermina Alvarez. Mgr Balestrero told us of their high expectations concerning committed Catholic women and affirmed our valuable role. He reminded us of the importance of being active in international fora, particularly at the United Nations in New York at the Commission on the Status of Women and said that the most critical issues are those regarding life, family and discrimination. Mgr Balestrero endowed us with a mandate of action to defend and promote "non-negotiable" values through delivering an effective and clear message and in offering our collaboration, particularly on the regional level in Africa and Latin America. He requested and will receive a quarterly report prepared by the Convener of the Permanent Communications Committee.

In Paris, the Permanent Observer of the Holy See to UNESCO, Bishop Follo, has called for a Congress on the Dignity of Women and the Board agreed to accept his invitation to collaborate with him in this Congress. Prior to the Board meeting, our International Representatives prepared a questionnaire in preparation for this Congress and sent it to all member organizations and Board members to gather information for the Congress. The purpose of the exercise was to demonstrate the contribution Catholic women make to human development and dignity through education, nurturing, culture, and health care; areas that do not lend themselves to easy quantitation though they are essential signs of God's love. I completed the lengthy questionnaire and our organization was commended for its thoughtful and complete response. During our time in Rome, two of the international representatives asked to sit with me to develop further some of the areas mentioned in the survey; so, our NCCW came out well in this.

Following the Full Board meeting dismissal on the 01<sup>st</sup> of June, The Executive Committee met on the 02<sup>nd</sup> of June to continue our work on the Love in Action Plan. We also finalized goals for some of the Permanent Committees. For Communications, we shall revise our WUCWO website by the end of this year, expand our on-line newsletter by the end of the first quarter in 2012, and revise our magazine, *Women's Voice*, by the end of 2012. As Convener, I shall be responsible for coordinating these efforts as well as providing my comments and approval for all communications issued by WUCWO.

This Board meeting again underscored for me the differences and similarities in Catholic women around the world. The diversity of our cultures and problems becomes unified in our common efforts to live and teach our faith. It is a fascinating experience and one that still leaves me marveling at our ability to work together so well and grateful for the opportunity to be a part of this wonderful effort. The friendships formed span the globe yet we feel so closely bonded and that is an amazing blessing.

Since the Board meeting, I've been preparing the English translations for various WUCWO documents, helping to edit the next (25<sup>th</sup>) edition of *Women's Voice*, and preparing the English translations for our President-General's letters.

As regional Vice President for North America, I have been invited to participate in the Annual Convention for the Catholic Women's League of Canada in August and have accepted their gracious invitation.

It has been a busy but most enjoyable experience and I am pleased to be able to be of service representing our NCCW in such a wonderful, vital, and fascinating organization. –Maribeth Stewart