

New Orleans deacon calls men to fight for their faith

Above all else, Catholic men are warriors called to battle – says Deacon Larry Oney.



Deacon Larry Oney

The New Orleans deacon was the keynote speaker at this year's Men of Integrity Conference at Holy Trinity Parish in Spruce Grove, Jan. 31-Feb. 1.

"We need men who are on fire with the Holy Spirit, so that they know what they're being called to," Oney said. "We're not just workers, husbands and fathers; we're warriors in the spiritual realm. We have to see our place in divine destiny – we're in a spiritual war, and that tide of warfare is not going to end until Jesus returns."

For nearly 20 years Catholic Family Ministries has hosted the Men of Integrity conference, bringing together 400 Catholic men from across Alberta for a weekend of faith and fellowship. As he described his journey from an impoverished childhood in Louisiana to rebuilding his life as a Catholic, Oney's impassioned and charismatic testimony resonated with many.

His message of spiritual warfare particularly struck 18-year-old Gabriel Dusterhoft.

"What challenges men to be men is that we're not called to be fence sitters," the High Prairie resident said. "We're called to be protectors of our family,

our country and most importantly our faith. Deacon Larry mentioned that we Catholics can sometimes be passive and quiet, and I agree with him that we have to be more assertive.”

“If we’re going to ask God for something – ask it big and with commitment. That really stood out to me.”



Gabriel Dusterhoft

But in a secular society like Canada, that mission comes with its share of obstacles. Dusterhoft noted many challenges facing young Catholic men, especially in the pursuit of chastity. In an age when pornography is easily accessible, many Catholic men pick up the habit at an early age – long before they realize its dangers. It’s what holds back many young men who want to grow in their faith, said Dusterhoft.

“It’s one of the biggest challenges for me: not having custody of the eyes, not being able to look at women properly and the disrespect that results from that,” he said. “In my life I once slipped into a kind of relativism, of not caring or understanding what the Church teaches. It started with pornography and gradually led to me to losing interest in my faith.”

Oney has spoken at various retreats and conferences over the last 30 years, both as a lay evangelist and now as a deacon. Whenever he speaks with young men, he says pornography is their most common struggle.

“We know now that pornography is a great weapon the devil is using today,” he said. “But whether it’s pornography, alcohol, gambling – men need to address the idols in their lives that are keeping them from worshipping God, and banish them.”



In his charismatic style, Deacon Larry Oney called men together for a 'holy shout', as part of the Men of Integrity conference, Jan. 31-Feb 1 at Holy Trinity Parish, Spruce Grove. Kyle Greenham, Grandin Media

In fighting his own idols, Dusterhoft's greatest resource has been the support of other Catholic men. For the past four years, he has attended the conference with his dad and brothers.

"Sometimes when I've come here, just being in the company of fellow Catholic men and the Lord, this is actually where I've found my greatest peace," he said. "It was in opening up to my brother about my struggles that really set me in my journey back to the faith. So if we have this attitude of being warriors for our faith, we have to work together."



Patrick Schiller

For organizer Patrick Schiller, this gets to the heart of the Men of Integrity conference.

"Our hope is to bring men together, build them up in their faith so they can be better husbands, fathers, and men," said Schiller. "With that comes the daily battles of living in a secular society. It's building a sense of community that will encourage Catholic men to be witnesses in the world, to live out that integrity and their faith."

But more than conquering struggles and vices, Catholic men need to fully grasp their role in the Church, said Oney.



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“To execute our mission, we have to understand what the mission is,” he said. “I think many men are confused about that. Some men just think they need to be a good husband to their wives, and they do. But as members of the faithful, they have an even greater mission ... to evangelize. The whole Church needs to have a missionary attitude.”

“We as men need to do more to advance the Kingdom of God.”

First-time attendee Kevin Manser agreed that many Catholic men lack purpose. In his home parish of Innisfail, he says men often shy away from the councils, prayer groups, and other aspects of parish life.

“I feel like there’s such a calling right now for Catholic men to really grow their faith and take on leadership,” said Manser. “In a lot of marriages among my friends, in terms of their devotion and their involvement with the Church, the wives are setting the better example. I think we as men need to bring our strengths as fathers and husbands back into Church life.”

Manser believes conferences like Man of Integrity play a pivotal part in reinforcing that strength. It’s an experience that has inspired him to grow the

numbers for next year's conference.



Kevin Manser

"It's a great opportunity to meet other men and realize we're not in this alone," he said.

"As men we need to have that community, especially in our spiritual life. It'd be great if every man here went home and brought a friend next year. This place would be packed.

"I already have a list in my head of who I want to invite next year."