

Advent by Candlelight: Women of Grace[®] in Georgia

by Women of Grace Staff

Candlelight filled the hall with a warm golden ambience as hundreds of parishioners listened to a speaker reflecting on the meaning of Advent. It was a probing talk, gentle yet pointed. “Is there ‘no room at the inn’ for Jesus because your life is too busy?” the speaker asks.

The room falls silent as the people ponder these words, seizing this rare opportunity to connect with the real meaning of Christmas instead of the shallow consumer version from which many of them came.

This was the scene at Holy Trinity Parish in Peachtree City, Georgia last December when the parish’s Women of Grace[®] study group sponsored “Advent by Candlelight.” Nearly 300 parishioners attended the event that began with Mass and was followed by a social and a speaker in the church hall.

What made the evening so unique was that every table was set by a pair of women from the study group and featured whatever tableware, linens, and finger foods they wanted to share. Even more special was the over-arching theme for the evening - the Blessed Mother – who was recognized in a very unique way.

“We had 26 tables and every table was named after one of Our Lady’s titles,” said Terri Thomas, 43, facilitator of the Women of Grace[®] Foundational Study and the Coordinator of Adult Faith Formation at the parish.

Rebecca Capezzuto, 45, who served as the facilitator of the morning Study, was in charge of displaying a different image of Mary at each table. She also created a small scroll containing a history of each title, an image, and a prayer that each guest could take home.

“I tried to choose apparitions or images that had the approval of the Church, such as Our Lady of La Salette, for example,” Rebecca said. “And I also tried to include a wide variety of ethnic images of our Lady such as Our Lady of Czestochowa and Our Lady of La Vang.”

The evening might sound like a lot of work to put together, but it wasn’t, says Phyllis Trocquet, 45. “It was a lot of fun! With two of us working together on each table, it was very easy. The co-hostesses were asked to provide the food but it was just simple finger foods such as little party sandwiches, slices of cake, *petit fours*, fruit salad. It was simple because we wanted people to focus on the meaning of the event, but also be hospitable and treat people as guests.”

“My daughter was my co-hostess,” said Pat Richard, 72, who also served as a facilitator for the Study. “We ended up buying different cheesecakes and cutting them up. It worked out beautifully and we had a great time setting the tables. They were each so unique.”

“Another thing that was so nice was that each co-hostess could invite specific guests to their table who might not otherwise have attended the study or an event at church so it was a great outreach,” Phyllis added.

At the end of the evening, parishioners asked, “When are you doing this again?”

“And they hung around forever after the evening ended!” Terri said. “It was such a beautiful witness of community and friendship, service, love for Our Lady and love for the Church.”

The Advent event was just one of several “Evenings of Grace” that the group sponsored during the course of the



A table dedicated to Our Lady of Lourdes

Study, which they took a full year to complete.

Terri first heard about Women of Grace® through her mother, who attended a conference in Cincinnati. Because the year was 2008 and the 20th anniversary of Pope John Paul II's landmark encyclical on women, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, the parish thought it would be the perfect time to host the Study.

Apparently, so did a lot of women in the parish. Eighty-four signed up for the course.

They decided to take their time completing the study and spent an average of two weeks per chapter while meeting for only four weeks at a time. Then they would take a break for a few months, during which time they would host an "Evening of Grace" at the parish to share what they were learning during that phase of the Study.

"For instance, in September we did two chapters which were followed by an Evening of Grace which was on Our Lady and understanding her role," Terri said. "In November, we did two more chapters and sponsored 'Advent by Candlelight.'"

Parishioners really seemed to enjoy the evenings, which always began with Mass and were followed by a social. They drew anywhere from 100 to 120 people with more than 300 attending "Advent by Candlelight."

"It is so beautiful to see the church full on a Wednesday evening!" Terri said.

Participants in the Women of Grace® Study hosted another special event during the parish's 100 Hours of Adoration.

"The women from the study group helped put a holy hour together for all the women in the parish," Rebecca said. "It opened with the Women of Grace® theme song. The women helped formulate the hour and took different roles speaking or leading at the holy hour."

This Holy Hour, which was compiled into a booklet, has been sent to Women of Grace® headquarters in Florida for possible future use by the ministry.

Women of Grace® has been a blessing to this parish, but most of all, to the women who took part in the Study.



Parishioner Amy Faber takes a seat at a table celebrating Our Lady of Altotting

"One of the biggest things that happened for me as a result of the Study is a better understanding of the importance of my vocation as a wife and mother," Phyllis said. "Society really does a number on all of us women, devaluing us, even though that's who we are. If we're married and have children, I found it difficult to really stay focused on that. The Study helped me to do that again, to see my priorities and to discern the other things I do in life in light of my vocation."

Pat, who describes herself as a "cradle Catholic" felt empowered by the Study. "I felt like I came out of there as a better Christian and a better Catholic," she said. "And it brought me closer to the Blessed Mother. I say my rosary every day now. I haven't done that since I was a little girl because I always focused on Jesus Christ, which I still do, but the Blessed Mother is a very big part of my life now. Anything I can find about how to emulate her, I'm just excited to read it. It's very different for me now."

As a facilitator, Rebecca had the joy of watching the women grow as they went through the course. "One thing I saw was their prayer life increased. I also think they gained a sense of trust, of stepping out in grace into the role God

called them to, trusting that He would give them an increased measure of the virtue they needed for the roles He was calling them to."

She also found that many of them are more active in the parish now. "Instead of saying 'I can't do that' now it's more like 'maybe the Lord is calling me to do this and if I step out in grace, He'll give me the grace I need to do it.'"

The study definitely lit a new fire in everyone.

"I've noticed that everyone is so hungry now," Terri said. "The course increased their hunger for more. They can't wait for the next study, the next retreat. It's like a fire's been lit and they understand that we have to continue this conversion process. It's not a one time thing and they're very open and excited about it."

We'd love to feature your Woman of Grace study group in Canticle! If you'd like to share your blessings with our readers, please contact the Editor at sbrinkmann@lhla.org.