

**HOMILY**  
**BY ADAM CARDINAL MAIDA**  
**“PUT OUT INTO THE DEEP” MEN’S CONFERENCE**  
**ST. JOHN CENTER, PLYMOUTH**  
**MARCH 1, 2003**

My brothers in the Lord:

As St. Peter said at the Transfiguration, I say to you today, “Lord, it is good that we are here!” Today’s conference is the fulfillment of one of the dreams that I had in re-founding the St. John Center for Youth and Family just a few years ago. To see this great atrium filled with so many of our brothers in the Lord is a cause for great celebration. This conference would not have been possible without the dedicated work of the staff of St. John Center, under the direction of Deacon John Ball. In particular, I want to acknowledge and extend my personal heartfelt thanks to Father John Riccardo, who has worked tirelessly and poured himself into the mission and ministry of St. John Center. As I extend my words of thanks, there is one additional person I would like to recognize. He is a good friend of mine and his vision for supporting Catholic men in their faith provided the seed that would blossom into this wonderful conference today: Thank you, Mr. Michael Timmis.

I am truly inspired by the enthusiasm and faithfulness of all of you gathered here today. There is an excitement in the air. Your presence here is a sign that the Holy Spirit is doing something new in our midst. Today, we gather in this new venue at the new St. John Center for Youth and Family for the first annual archdiocesan men’s conference. Quoting from today’s Gospel, it can be said that today we are experiencing “*new wine...poured into fresh wineskins.*”

The theme for today’s conference echoes the words of the Gospel of Luke when Jesus invited the apostle Peter to “*Put out into the deep.*” As the Gospel account tells us, “*When they had done this, they caught a great number of fish.*” As I look out upon all of us gathered here today, I want to say to those who have helped to organize and promote this conference, you have caught a great number of fish! Many people refer to concerts and sporting events as being so popular that they have a sold-out crowd. My brothers, this conference has proven so popular that today we have a sold-out crowd at the St. John Center for Youth and Family!

One could ask, what is the purpose or benefit of a conference such as today’s, which is planned and designed in a special way for men. The scriptures tell us, “*iron sharpens iron.*” By gathering here

today, and encouraging each other in our faith, we have the opportunity, as men, who confront common challenges and life circumstances, to truly be “iron” to each other, so that we may encourage and “sharpen” each other in our faith.

In some cultures and in many sectors of our society today, some people think of matters of faith and religion as predominately a “woman’s job.” Our faith is indeed a sacred gift given to and nurtured by so many women in our lives. And yet, today, we stand here in solidarity as brothers in Christ and also proclaim that, as men, we commit ourselves to stand strong in our faith. We all play an indispensable role in casting our nets into the deep and passing on the faith to others. All of us, in our daily lives, are called to joyfully reflect our faith in Christ and to draw others closer to Him, whether it be in the workplace or at home.

In our second reading today, St. Paul responds to those who might request a “letter of recommendation” testifying to his fidelity. He responds by pointing to his true “letters of recommendation.” He points to the people of Corinth and says that they are his “letters.” St. Paul recognized that the fruitfulness of his ministry was accomplished through the Holy Spirit and his faithfulness was shown in the lives and hearts of those to whom he had ministered.

Today, we ask ourselves what people are our “letters of recommendation”? How have our lives played a role in helping to shape the hearts and minds of others so that they may draw closer to Jesus? Have we “put out into the deep” and brought others closer to Christ?

My brothers, we are not free to choose whether or not we will be role models to others. We *are* role models. The only open question is: “What kind of role models will we be?” As husbands and fathers, brothers and sons, employers and employees, we should never underestimate the role that we play in affecting and shaping the lives of those around us. By how we live and act, by how we speak and treat others, we can have a profound impact in bringing others to drink the “new wine” that is offered to us in Christ.

There is of course the adage that “actions speak louder than words.” A recent study showed how true this is, even in the workplace. One of our local papers last Sunday reported the results of a study concerning hospital staff members and whether they washed their hands, as required, after coming into contact with a patient. The study found that it didn’t matter whether the hospital had new and more

readily accessible sink facilities. Rather, it concluded that “the influence of a senior doctor was so great, that if he did not wash his hands while making rounds, the staffers with him washed up only about 10% of the time.” The center for disease control actually stated that “there is a need to educate hospital ‘role models’ to wash their hands so that students or technicians see it’s an important part of patient care.” Of course, this study confirms what we already know. People follow their role models; for good or for ill.

That is why it is so important for us to pray for those who serve in leadership roles. In a particular way, we pray for our elected officials, whose actions and decisions affect the lives of many people and influence the course of world affairs.

My brothers, we are all called to be good Christian role models. If we say we believe in God and that Jesus is important in our lives, we must back up those words with our actions. Among us today, we have fathers, husbands, sons, single men, young men and older men. In the workplace, people should see us as models of faith and virtue. In our families, our children look to us to see the faith lived out. In whatever state in life we find ourselves, let us give witness in our lives to the love of Christ.

To those who are fathers: you can never show your children too much love. The unique role of a father in affirming and loving their sons and daughters is indispensable. Some people spend their entire lives hungering for the love of a father that they never experienced. To all the fathers here, let your sons and daughters know that you love them with all your heart. When they experience that total and unconditional love from you, their earthly father, they will grow up with confidence and a deeper love for our Heavenly Father.

As I reflect upon my own life, I am eternally grateful for the role my father played in raising me in the faith. As I am sure all of you can attest to in your own lives, my own father helped me to become the man I am today. I recall, as a young boy, watching my father join with my mother, kneeling at the side of their bed, praying their night prayers. As a child, someone could have told me that I should pray, but without seeing my own parents modeling that lifestyle to me, that command to pray would have rung hollow.

As valuable as our religious education programs may be, the words imparted by any catechist will never have their intended effect if parents are not reinforcing those words in the home. Fathers are not

free to simply delegate that crucial role in their children's lives to others as if it is the role of religious "professionals" or, as if it is solely the responsibility of their wives.

To those of you who are husbands here today: As St. Paul tells us, "*love your wives.*" You can never tell your wife too many times that you love her. The love of a husband is modeled on Christ Himself, a complete sacrifice of oneself out of love for their spouse. In both our second reading today and in the Gospel passage, we are given the image of a marriage to express the deep love that God has for his people. Jesus refers to Himself as "*the Bridegroom*" and we, the Church, are His bride. As you live out your marriage in faithfulness and love, others can see in that marital love a reflection of the love that Christ has for all of us.

All of us here present, of course, are sons. To those among us whose fathers are still living, take the opportunity to strengthen and reinforce that relationship. Thank your fathers for all the good they have done for you. If your father's love was lacking or imperfect, then open your heart to forgive him and never forget the powerful affect that a faith-filled son can have on even the most distant of fathers. Any of us today are also free to ask the patron of all fathers, St. Joseph, to be our "spiritual stepfather," calling upon his intercession and seeing him as our role model.

At this time, I would like to recognize another set of "fathers" among us, our priests. These are men who have freely given up the opportunity to serve as natural fathers so that they may be true spiritual fathers for all of us. All of you know that this past year has seen an almost uninterrupted barrage of headlines which can, as the Holy Father says, "cast a shadow of suspicion" over all of our good and faithful priests. My brothers, as I am sure you are aware, our Archdiocese is blessed with many fine and holy priests.

To those among us today who are single men: Of course, many of you will find your calling to married life. However, I believe that some of you have been pondering whether the Lord is calling you to serve His people as a priest. My brothers, open your hearts to the possibility that God may be calling you to become a priest. Life as a priest is rich and rewarding. Among some of the married men here today, perhaps you have considered whether the Lord is calling you to the Permanent Diaconate. I would ask anyone here who thinks the Lord may be calling them to become a priest or deacon, to commit yourself to

using this upcoming season of Lent as a time to begin praying and seriously discerning the possibility of an ordained vocation in the Church.

To all my brothers here present, let us together “Put out into the deep.” In the workplace and at home, you have the opportunity to cast your net far and wide. Each of us, today, has a “great number of fish” to catch. Let us begin within our own families to reinforce and pass on the faith. Let our love for Jesus effect all that we do in our workplace and among our friends. People should be able to see in our words and actions that there is something special. That something special is the love of Christ burning in our hearts and shared with others.

As our Holy Father Pope John Paul II stated in his apostolic letter at the beginning of the new millennium, *“Let us go forward in hope! A new millennium is opening before the Church like a vast ocean upon which we should venture, relying on the help of Christ.”* My prayer, joined with that of the Holy Father, is that our experience here today at this first annual Archdiocese of Detroit Men’s Conference would move us forward with continued enthusiasm, so that we may offer the “new wine” of Christ’s love to others. I join with the Holy Father in saying to you *“[I]t is not to a dull everyday routine that we return. On the contrary, if ours has been a genuine pilgrimage, it will have as it were stretched our legs for the journey still ahead. We need to imitate the zeal of the apostle Paul: ‘straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on towards the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.’”*

With the intercession of St. Joseph, St. Peter, and St. Paul, let us together “Put out into the deep.” May Almighty God bless you now and always. Amen. Alleluia.