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New York conference for women on ethics in the workplace

The Murray Hill Institute held its second annual conference entitled "Integrity and Ethics in the Workplace," from October 12-13, 2001. Held at a hotel a few miles from "Ground Zero," the conference, like Manhattan itself, was keenly attuned to the thousands who died on September 11, 2001.

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During the conference Keynote Address, Dr. Karen Bohlin, Executive Director of the Center for the Advancement of Ethics and Character, Boston University, spoke about ethics and integrity in the workplace as exemplified by some workers who gave their lives in an effort to save others on September 11, 2001.

"Hundreds of fire fighters and police officers rushed into burning buildings in New York and Washington D.C., while thousands breathlessly fled only to meet their death when the towers crashed down upon them. At least one person refused to abandon a wheelchair bound colleague. A fire chaplain lost his life ministering to the souls among the rubble. Countless individuals surged forward supporting and encouraging one another through smoke-filled stairwells. Three men on a plane

mounted opposition against their oppressors knowing they would die.

"What gives people the ability to step up to the plate so courageously, to put their lives on the line? It's not just innate. It stems from principles, dispositions, and habits that have become a part of who they are and what they are ready to live and die for every day. Tragedy casts a spotlight on extraordinary behavior. But it also reminds us virtue and heroism are within our reach daily. Moreover, we can be sure it was a mark of many of the individuals whose extraordinary courage will remain on our collective memory forever. As most of us learned of the news we too were about our business: arriving to work or settling into our first meeting, task, or project for the day. We were no different from those who lost their lives. We are here. Our lives are changed forever, and we are called

to live differently. To honor the memory of those victims by living our ordinary lives better," said Dr. Bohlin.

Over one hundred women attended the conference, which also included presentations by Barbara Payne Rockett, M.D., American Medical Association Board of Directors, Mary S. Meade, Esq., editor of Veritas, and Kathleen Driscoll, Vice President of Direct Brokerage, John Hancock Life Insurance. Their topics covered "Feminism, Ethics, and Natural Law in the Judicial Professions," "Ethical Principles Guiding Medical Decisions," and "Ethics in Business, A Woman's Perspective."

"Ethics is simply knowing the difference between right and wrong," said speaker Kathleen Driscoll, who along with her job at John Hancock is a wife and mother of six children. "It means being true to your word ...

When you're living the truth, you know it. You feel it." said Ms. Driscoll.

Ms. Driscoll said that most companies with codes of ethics have developed in response to any of the following reasons: 1) lawsuits, 2) the company's long standing heritage and 3) as part of its very foundational roots.

Ms. Meade spoke about the importance of natural law as the foundation for positive law in society. She also talked about the importance of recognizing man as a social being.

Dr. Rocket explored the myriad of ethical issues currently being debated in medicine, e.g. stem cell research. A former president of the Massachusetts Medical Society, which publishes the New England Journal of Medicine, Dr. Rocket took a number of medical ethics questions from the floor after her presentation.

Founded in 2000 by a group of professional women interested in creating positive change in the workplace, Murray Hill Institute is a forum that provides opportunities for professional women to come together to engage in dialogue about their professional roles in society. The programs sponsored by the Institute are inspired by the work of Blessed Josemaria Escriva. Next year's conference will be held in the fall of 2002 in New York and is entitled "Josemaria Escriva: Work and the Meaning of Life."
