

Gifts of Speech News

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1. Father Chris at Sweet Briar College



Sweet Briar College was lucky to have a visit from Father Christopher Vorderbruggen, prelate of the **Legion of Mercy**, on the evening of Tuesday March 24th in celebration of Women's History Month. The Legion of Mercy is a multi-denominational private charity that works for the empowerment of girls and women in the U.S. and in

Mexico.

The Legion of Mercy's current project is in Juarez, Mexico - a city that has witnessed as many as 1000 murders of young women. In fact, the [National Organization for Women has called the shameful number of killings and disappearances of women in Juarez "femicide."](#)

The **Legion of Mercy** project in Juarez is called "Casita de Sarah." At Casita de Sarah five young women from the most violent part of Juarez have begun a new life, where they are supported in their quest for higher education and an empowered life of rewarding employment and self-respect.

Father Christopher was a moving and startling speaker. He told Sweet Briar students how easily young women can become victims of prostitution and trafficking. He described the brutality and subjugation trafficked and prostituted women are forced to endure, and he talked about the hundreds of unsolved murders that have taken place in Juarez since 1993.

He also discussed issues that directly effect students in the United States. Date rape happens to one women in four, he said, and by counting off the women in the room he brought that point home by saying to each forth woman "You're it!"

Father Christopher, who is a self-described feminist, made the suffering of powerless and impoverished women very real for the students and faculty of Sweet Briar College. He also made the students aware that sexual abuse happens on college campuses and in dorms everywhere, and that it has certainly happened right here inside the "pink bubble" known as Sweet Briar College. He pointed up that as long as women suffer anywhere - esp. in in developing nations - the work of feminists is not done. Even though the **Legion of Mercy** is small, every life saved and improved by participants and volunteers touches an untold number of other lives that are in turn uplifted and changed for the better.

Read more about the violence against women in Juarez [here](#).

If you read Spanish, please visit [Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa](#) or "May Our Daughters Return Home" website. This is a group of mothers, families, and friends of the Juarez victims who band together to put pressure on the Mexican government to pay attention to these cases. There is a link there for English speakers.

2. Rihanna and Chris Brown

I have to confess that normally a story about physical violence between two celebrities would hold little interest for me. One assumes that women with money can protect themselves. But the case of the alleged beating of Rihanna by her boyfriend Chris Brown is more than fodder for the gossip rags because it demonstrates, in black and blue, that even women with money are not insulated from domestic violence.

Both Chris Brown and Rihanna were nominated for the 40th NAACP Image Awards this year, which brings even more attention to the disturbing allegations of the case. Neither Rihanna nor Chris Brown made it to the awards because of the attack. According to USA Today "Brown and Rihanna canceled appearances at Sunday's (2/13/09) Grammy Awards after news broke about Brown's involvement in an assault on a woman the previous night."

According to the NAACP Image Awards website, "The NAACP Image Awards is the nation's premier event celebrating the outstanding achievements and performances of people of color in the arts, as well as those individuals or groups who promote social justice through their creative endeavors." Both Chris Brown and Rihanna are well-known to young men and women all over the world (partly due to Rihanna's Barbadian citizenship) and both have been honored as models of professional and personal success. Yet, the shocking blow-by-blow account of the alleged attack posted at [TMZ](#) is sickening - not only because of its brutality, but also because it shows how deeply violence against women is ingrained in young men AND women.

Chris Brown, an American citizen, is only 19 years old. Rihanna is 21. It is deeply disturbing that even a young, beautiful and wealthy woman is inclined to accept escalating violence from her sexual partner. If being beaten occasionally is something Rihanna accepts, how much hope can feminists

hold out to influence poor, powerless women to reject random beatings for themselves, their sisters and daughters?

And more bad news follows. According to Boston.com "Nearly half of the 200 Boston teenagers interviewed for an informal poll said pop star Rihanna was responsible for the beating she allegedly took at the hands of her boyfriend, fellow music star Chris Brown, in February." I'm quite sure that the 100 or so who blamed the victim in this incident were both male and female. We, dear reader, as feminists and educators fight an uphill battle against cultural conditioning and home-lives that teach boys and girls that females are appropriate targets for the release of male anger.

Read the Boston.com article for yourself at the link below and . . . let's work harder!

Link: <http://tinyurl.com/arfaaa>

3. Chinese Women Rebel at Forced Abortions

From the article:

Anger at the regime's extreme birth control regime is growing - Abuses of women's reproductive rights, some of which break China's own laws, are provoking outrage as Chinese public opinion wakes up to the persistence of forced abortion, compulsory sterilisation and even infanticide.

Be warned - the article linked below contains sickening details of infanticides committed in China in order to uphold their laws limiting families to one or two children.

Link: <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/>

[article5733835.ece](#)

4. Powerful Story of a Woman's Success

From the article:

An important figure in our country's history was a humble black woman who rose from poverty to become the first self-made female millionaire in the United States.

Madam C. J. Walker, a daughter of former slaves, became an entrepreneur, philanthropist, political activist, socialite and industrialist by revolutionizing the black hair care and cosmetics industry in the early 1900s.

Walker changed life for many Americans with hair care products that allowed blacks to experience trend-setting beauty, style and elegance. She also opened a new industry, especially to the women who sold her products. She was the founder of the Madam C. J. Walker Manufacturing Co., where she created marketing schemes, training opportunities, distribution strategies and innovative hair care and beauty businesses. Her work led to women's economic independence by providing lucrative incomes for thousands of black women when the majority of blacks had jobs such as laborers and maids.

Link: <http://www.heraldtribune.com/article/20090322/COLUMNIST/903221028/2127?Title=Powerful-story-of-a-wom>

5. April Web Site of the Month



Legion of Mercy

empowers women and girls for real change. Legion of Mercy volunteers become stewards of positive change

by creating educational opportunities, positive role models, and community building activities to empower and heal. From handing out food to home visits, creating literacy programs to teaching life skills, Legion of Mercy creates and participates in real, practical assistance to women and girls. The way out of poverty is education, practical help, opportunity, and love.

Link: <http://www.legionofmercy.org/>

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