

**The Catholic Women's League of Canada
Nova Scotia Provincial Council
President's Annual Report
2019**

Submitted by Glenda Carson, Nova Scotia Provincial President

I am privileged to offer this annual report reflecting on the information submitted by our Nova Scotia councils. Our average parish reporting response was slightly less than 60 percent, with a broad variance across standing committees. This response rate is an increase from last year. As well, there was a positive change in the number of responses by standing committees among several of the reports submitted. This is a positive note indicating that parishes are attempting to fulfill the organizational roles and to report on those committees that remain without a chairperson in their council. The standing committees were most often lead by our more experienced senior members, although more members new to our organization have stepped forward into some leadership roles. Of great significance is the quality of the activities reported by our councils, reflecting that our members are indeed “women united in a common purpose” embracing our organizational core values of faith, service and social justice.

Our parish councils have generally embraced our National theme, “Care for Our common Home”, both in prayer and as a focus in presentations and activities. Members gathered in prayer and spiritual reflection during their monthly meetings. The rosary played a strong central part in their spiritual lives, being recited at meetings and gatherings within their councils, parishes and communities. Our deceased sisters continue to be respected and remembered through funeral honour guards, prayer services and Masses of Remembrance. The Feast of Our Lady of Good Council remains a special day, celebrated with Masses and social gatherings. Attendance at ecumenical events was best represented by participation in the World Day of Prayer Services. Our members' dedication to their faith and church is evident in their very active service in church ministry.

Councils used resources on websites and in communiques when developing services and programs to enhance the spiritual growth of their members. Lay formation programs are available to members in our province but more easily accessed by those in larger communities. Suggestions to allay this inequity across the province included the encouragement of members living in smaller, more rural areas to seek online programs and the formation of lending libraries, perhaps at the diocesan council level.

Members have also taken advantage of broader continuing education funding for both faith and secular based programs through bursaries and scholarships at all levels of the League. However, the number of applicants tends to be low, indicating a possible need to promote these opportunities better. Learning experiences were also provided by the parish councils through guest speakers and presentations. Genetics was an area that councils reported a desire to obtain a

greater understanding, especially in relation to the current issues with bioethics. Our past presidents were identified as council role models and mentors. While engaged by some councils for some leadership and mentoring roles, our Honourary Life and Life Members remain an untapped resource in our province.

Our membership continues to decline annually. The small annual growth we experienced through the recruitment of new members and reinstatement of memberships was lost by attrition due to members not renewing their membership. In 2018 the provincial council appointed a special committee to reflect on disbanding the Diocesan councils in light of our membership attrition. Their report was presented at the 2019 provincial convention in which the committee members determined it was premature to remove the Diocesan councils. The financial concerns and leadership issues experienced in our province are not driven by the organizational structure. Rather, they are affected by membership decline related to retaining members and challenges with member engagement. It appeared important to address the core reasons for these challenges rather than eliminate potentially supportive council structures. There will be another planned review in five years.

Among the special committee recommendations was the need for leadership development at all council levels and flexibility in structure and events. This would aid member participation and assist parishes in meeting organizational requirements, goals and values. There is great hope that changes brought through the national strategic planning will assist in meeting some of these needs. The provincial and diocesan councils did initial planning for more localized leadership workshops, including information on the National strategic plan. Financial support for these leadership initiatives was budgeted and strategies to meet the needed human resources for the presentations were explored. To aid in building spirit the provincial council supported a fund-raising project that would assist members to attend the national convention in Montreal for our centennial year.

Many councils reported that less than half of their members were active in their councils. Factors affecting this and some of the non-renewal of memberships were lack of interest, age and ill health. Parish council presidents were encouraged to ensure that their ill and infirm members were supported in their membership fees, even if they are unable to be active in events. Many of these members have long terms of service that require recognition when they reach a stage in life where they can no longer be an active participant in League functions. However, membership service is well recognized at the parish level through the awarding of service pins. Re-affirmation and new member ceremonies could perhaps be used more by parish councils to celebrate and respect those who are serving as leaders and those who have accepted the invitation to become a sister in the League.

The elimination of the 1-800 number by the national office did result in a positive change with members looking more to their diocesan and provincial executive officers for assistance in problem solving council needs. For example, information on budget preparation and information

on parish insurance renewal was offered through our provincial treasurer. In the past, parish councils would often reach out to the national office for some of this information. Members also looked to web sites, social media and email for information and to stay connected. The League Magazine and executive officer communiques remain the most popular resources for members to stay abreast of League information. While recognizing the importance of in-person connections, teleconferencing is being used more often for executive meetings in order to reduce time and cost for travel. Other conveniences for council administration, such as the online membership renewal, seems to require more promotion and support as only about fifty per cent of our parish councils are using this resource.

Human trafficking and pornography were two main focuses for our members from an educational perspective as well as bringing these concerns to the attention of their communities and politicians. Sanctity of life concerns and support for the faith development of our youth and families and vocations were a priority in our parish councils. Members participated in the community viewing of the movie “Unplanned” as well as activities such as Walks for Life, Vigils, Masses and 40 days for Life. Members continue to be strong advocates for better support for palliative care in our country. They participated in the “12 Hours of Prayer for Palliative Care” and engaged in learning events that enhanced their understanding of the experience and importance of palliative care.

Our members also continue to be actively engaged in community outreach and enhancement of the quality of life for those disadvantaged and those facing injustice. Some councils did focus on the concerns and struggles of our Indigenous People and how we, as Catholic women, are called to seek ways to build relationships and a common understanding. Participation in community celebrations of the National Indigenous Peoples Day on June 21 by some members was a positive step to building relationships.

Members were also strong in their actions to relieve the suffering of others and assist in the building of strong futures for our children. They provided financial and material support and many hours of service as volunteers to the homeless, the hungry, the disabled and those suffering abuse. Support was also given to programs and services for youth and parent programs, skill training, and anti-poverty initiatives. Most councils provided bursaries and scholarships for the youth in their parishes and financially supported school meal programs and the purchase of school supplies for those in need. Seniors and those sick and house bound were provided with special celebrations, entertainment and teas as well as home and residence visiting that included bringing the Eucharist and praying the rosary. Members also volunteered to meet the needs for newcomers to Canada and assisted them to attain needed skills for employment such as learning English. Our councils also provided generous financial support to organizations such as the St. Vincent de Paul Society, Catholic Missions in Canada, CNEWA, Chalice and Save a Family as well as secular organizations such as the Red Cross. Many members did support Development and Peace as individuals given the endorsement of the Share Lent and Fall Action Campaigns by our provincial bishops.

Our members took an active interest in governmental affairs and community action despite most councils not having a legislation chairperson. Members reflected on the variety of bills and resolutions identified by the committee chairpersons and those connected with the National theme. This included positive recognition for the Nova Scotia Plastic Bag Reduction Act, participation in the online survey related to the federal government changes to the Canadian euthanasia law and support for the Coalition for the Health Care and Conscience campaign to address concerns around this legislation.

While the number of reporting councils was low for the resolutions standing committee, there was an increase in the number of councils actually having a chairperson. This hopefully reflects rising interest in resolutions at the parish level, although this standing committee does present a leadership challenge for most councils. As many of the chairpersons were new to their role, there is a need to build knowledge and confidence in the resolutions process in our province. As well, it still appears important to facilitate a better overall engagement by our members in the importance of resolutions to our organization. Councils did act on existing League resolutions by following up on action plans, often through letter writing. Information on the changes being made to the resolutions process during 2019 was communicated to members at all levels. A workshop addressing the development needs for this standing committee was planned for the year, 2020.

In summary, while our councils continue to face some core challenges, their annual reports identify a strong, continued passion and dedication to the core purpose and mission of our organization. This, in turn, promises a good strength for building a positive future as we step forward into our next 100 years.