

Catholic Women's League of Canada

Nova Scotia Provincial Education & Health 2017 Annual Report

Introduction

With much compassion, heart and dedication, members of Catholic Women's League of Canada in Nova Scotia continue to serve God, Church, and Country. Through their many activities and with a united voice, these women of God outwardly demonstrate their faith with a genuine desire to affect positive change in our world.

For this reporting period (2017); approximately 50% of councils within the province of Nova Scotia responded.

Catholic Education

Despite the lack of a Catholic School system in the province, all parishes report an awareness of, and the manner through which Religious Education is delivered at the parish level. Councils have financially supported youth attending Steubenville which provides young Catholics the opportunity to experience spiritual growth and the freedom to unreservedly express their faith. Most councils support programs which serve to facilitate, teach and develop the Catholic faith; notably; the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA), Baptismal, and Marriage Preparation at the parish level.

Councils continue their support for local public schools throughout the province with donations to aid and sustain breakfast and lunch programs, clothing drives, educational supplies, and extracurricular activities, such as after school projects and bursaries.

Over half of reporting councils indicate that they are neither aware of, nor in support of any monitoring or encouraging of parental participation, either in public schools or with parish educational activities. Of noted concern in this very important area is the seeming lack of councils involved with 'family life' teachings within their school system. The concern noted being, that within the scope of 'family life' the subject matter which involves the functioning of the human body to include; sex, safe sex, the use of contraceptives, gender specificity/identity, to include trans gender and notwithstanding opposing views by Catholic parents, does not always reflect the teachings of the church.

Literacy and Continuing Education

Councils encourage and monetarily support the educational and spiritual growth of high school, university, and post graduate students through scholarships and bursaries being offered annually. Parish and diocesan levels offer amounts from \$100.00 to \$1,000.00 annually. Provincially, at their 2017 Annual Provincial Convention, the annual Marion Hipditch-Littlepage award to a graduating student of The Atlantic School of Theology (AST) the was raised from \$200.00 to \$500.00. Councils report an awareness and financially support national and international bursaries which include the CWL National Bursary Fund, Coady International Institute @ St. Francis Xavier University, Antigonish, Nova Scotia, the National Evangelistic Team (NET) Ministries of Canada, and Catholic Christian Outreach (CCO); an organization which challenges university level students to lives that demonstrate the richness of the Catholic faith.

Some council members and chairpersons are full time educators in both English and/or French languages. The vast need, and notable appreciation for the efforts of the CWL and its many councils who contribute to a continuing educational support system, is reiterated, not only by their many efforts to raise funds, but more so by the increasing number of applicants annually.

The dynamics of the education system in Nova Scotia is changing to reflect a different landscape. A continued decline in the birth rate, as well as outmigration for the purpose of sustainable employment have added to a number of school closures in many smaller communities with children having to be bussed to larger facilities further away from their immediate communities. Sadly, councils report that dynamics such as these have made it difficult, if not impossible for them to logistically provide the same noteworthy support of the past.

Wellness and Sickness/Disease

Members throughout the province continue to proactively monitor and address the many issues that create discontent and division in our world. Among the many topics that affect us, prominent again this year is the continued concern of ensuring timely access to mental health professionals and follow-up programs, particularly for young adults. Prominent as well is the need to ensure protection of the rights of professionals and/or institutions from any law that would compel complicity in acts which they, for reason of conscience or religion, consider to be morally wrong. Another issue viewed by members to be of great concern is the importance of Palliative Care and Hospice within their communities with the 12 hours of ‘Prayer for Palliative Care’ being reported as a huge success with members providing prayer areas in their homes, discussion group participation, raised funds and provided information to local palliative care facilities. One group of caring members provide ‘Prayer Shawls’ to the sick or gravely ill. This beautiful creation is has a pocket with a beautifully embossed CWL logo patch which houses a rosary and prayer card. These shawls are, and have been reported to have been very comforting to the recipients. Councils continue to knit and sew quilts for palliative care.

Councils offered senior safety sessions facilitated by members of their local police departments.

Other councils report the teaching of ‘at home’ exercise routines during monthly meetings as a means to promote a healthy lifestyle. Councils promoted and supported a new initiative of St. Martha’s Hospital Foundation entitled “Time is Now” which will support improved patient services to that area, to include, but not limited to such issues as drug use and abuse, mental health and youth suicides.

Across the province, CWL members continue their good works with a united voice and most councils report at least a minimal knowledge base, either written or ‘other’ in-depth knowledge, in response to their involvement with/in the many existing CWL issues.

Of the reporting councils, most have read and are aware of the recent Heart and Stroke Foundation’s report entitled “The Kids are Not Alright.” In addition, with regard to mental health, “Partners for Mental Health” provided a link to the “Right by You” campaign which offered free resource tools to caregivers and/or parents as a means to begin conversations with youth; this particular initiative was well received by approximately, one third of all reporting councils. Concerning multiple chemical sensitivity (MCS); of the two reporting diocesan councils; one reported 21% of those reporting who participated in any way; the other reported no participation.

All councils reported to being somewhat or more involved in various other important community based issues such, as but not limited to; The Arthritis Society, Cancer Society, Autism Canada, Diabetes Association, Mental Health Association of Nova Scotia, Heart and Stroke (Relay for life) The Children’s Wish Foundation, Cystic Fibrosis Society, Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) local homeless shelters, transition houses, youth clubs, soup kitchens, MaterCare, Mass For Shut-ins, Project Rachel, Birthright and others.

Both diocesan councils reported to have studied and further followed-up on Resolution 2016.02 ‘Eating Well with Canada’s Food Guide’ and 2016.03 ‘Warning Labels on Food and Drug Products.’ Members

lobbied the Minister of Health and the Prime Minister to ensure these important subjects remain a genuine focal point. Councils also educated members on the importance of following through on their work by demonstrating their concerns by providing information when/where necessary and by providing healthy food choices at CWL functions.

Councils within the province; especially the submitting council, are closely monitoring with much hope and anticipation, any future response that may arise from a resolution entitled “Banning the Marketing of Food and Beverages to Children” that was passed and submitted to the National Committee by Nova Scotia Provincial Council. At the time, it was decided by the National Committee that this particular resolution would not move forward; a decision that piqued interest and continues to raise many questions among members. Of particular concern to date, is the knowledge that dieticians from across Canada are providing seminars as a means to provide a compelling view of the issues and to further, stress the need for regulations on the matter. Councils would like to see such issues and concerns addressed by any required online survey.

Environment

Overall, the March 25th International Earth Day initiative was not well received by councils, and with some noted disappointment, we can only say that perhaps participation for this initiative was not reported. Some environment issues however, *were* well received. Councils continue to address the issue of striving for a more sustainable environment through a concerted effort by all members to reduced use of plastics such as water bottles, plastic bags, the proper disposal of organic waste, recycling, reduction of Styrofoam products, and where possible, reduction of paper usage. Some councils report to have implemented waste reduction strategies at their functions and meetings. To date,

few councils have read or showed interest in Laudato SI or have studied renewable energy or wind turbine technology.

More recently, in this category, as Provincial Chair of Education & Health, I have advised our two Diocesan Chairs of the pending action relating to Resolution 2015.03 and the resulting action of The Pest Management Regulatory Agency's recommendation to immediately ban one of the three most damaging neonics, with another recommendation expected to come forward in 2021.

It is with much pride that we duly recognize and appreciate our sisters in the league who have worked so diligently to bring this resolution forward. In general, members report to being aware of the value of resolutions and that through them we can continue the need to address the many looming concerns that face humanity and our planet. By voicing our concerns in writing to our members of parliament through the content of Resolution 2015.03 our members have spoken loudly. Resolution 2015.03 is case in point, which our voices matter. Uniting in one voice for a common cause should remain a principal topic as we join with other nations on a similar course to ensure a continued effort toward an overall environmental well being.

Genetics

With regard to advantages and disadvantages of the technological development in light of the teachings of the Catholic Church; members reported a knowledge base of fair to good with a noted desire to study the subject further. One council reported to subscribing to The Canadian Catholic Bioethics Institute Newsletter with a desire to learn more on the subject being reported by one diocesan chair.

Suggestions

At parish council levels, we are hearing from members that despite a few challenges or wrinkles in the apron, councils continue to remain positive and uplifting.

The following issues that have been voiced by councils during this reporting period;

As with last year, members find the annual reporting process does not adequately reflect nor allow for the explanation of the different kinds, or level of individual council involvement. Because of this, and the technology required to complete the annual reports; some of our very important older, more experienced members express the feeling of being left out and underappreciated.

Some discord does exist and has been reported about the need for parish councils to apply proper election protocol as it is written and further, members have voiced a genuine concern for the need of a separate election protocol for use at the parish level where, and for the most part, past practice has been to gratefully accommodate those who are willing take a chair, regardless of where, and how long they have served in any position.

Members are quick to remind us that these are volunteer positions and too, that most younger members have families and/or are in the workforce, and older members can't take up the slack. This continues to make it difficult for councils to fill positions or to recruit and retain members. Some members continue to say we can't do it all and more work and expectation leads to the further apprehension of members to take a position. Others believe we could do with less chairs and/or the amalgamation of two or more positions into one might better serve councils at all levels. Many councils report to only being able to serve their parish and immediate communities and have chosen to do just that.

I leave these concerns with the very capable hands of those who are in a position to affect change.

This concludes my report.

Sandy Mellish, Nova Scotia Provincial Chairperson