

Report on the 2017 National CWL Convention

The 97th National CWL Convention in Charlottetown, PEI was one of the biggest conventions of the last few years with 938 delegates present. It was fun, inspiring, and at times, challenging. That was just the convention! Then there are the extras like the tours, socials, provincial dinner supper, prayer room, exhibits, items for sale, and banquets. It is too much fun and activity in too short of a time.

The official three-some of the Regina Diocesan Council consisted of Rev. Edward Hengen, Diocesan Spiritual Advisor; Yvonne Bachelu, President-Elect; and Janette Rieger, 1st Vice-President. Unfortunately, Diocesan President Marilyn Schuck was unable to attend because of family commitments.

The convention started with the Resolutions Dialogue, where we had our first look at the resolutions that would be presented at the floor of the convention. We discussed them at our tables and they gave us much to think about before hearing them discussed at the convention.

The opening mass at 5:00 pm was held at the beautiful St. Dunstan's Basilica, a short walk away from the convention hotel. It was a beautiful, warm evening. The main celebrant was Bishop Richard Grecco of Charlottetown, PEI with other bishops and priests in attendance. The church was full and it always a humbling experience to watch the flags of our country, League, and provinces entering the church, knowing that we are part of a wonderful, national organization of Catholic women.

Monday, August 7th started with mass. In his homily, Bishop Brian Dunn of Antigonish, NS reminded us that God is blessing us. He told us to ask ourselves what God is blessing in our lives. He also challenged us to listen to the Holy Spirit. We should ask ourselves what the Holy Spirit is prompting us to say and do for the good of the Church and the good of the League.

Ken Yasinski of Saskatoon gave 2 talks to the delegates on Monday morning. The first was *Becoming a Living Thank You*. He said that as we mature, we should be growing in gratitude. Gratitude is a matter of choice, and we need to develop the gift of gratitude. He said you can't complain and be thankful at the same time. It is one thing to say these things, but Ken also gave us the tools for change:

#1 Throw away the blame list – take responsibility for the mistakes and wrong choices in your life.

#2 Gratitude Journal – keep a journal and every single day write down 5 things that you are grateful for, and gratitude will become a habit and a virtue.

#3 Visual reminders – set your mind upon gratitude. Use a visual reminder such as a daily scripture passage out where you will see it.

#4 Express your thanksgiving – don't be afraid to express your thanks and your love!

#5 Recall times in your life when God moved perfectly for you – think of the many blessings that you have received over your lifetime.

Ken's next talk was *A Catholic Identity Crisis*. In this session, Ken told us that we need to know who we are as Catholics. When we don't know what it means as individuals to be Catholic, how can we share that with others? If we can't share, we are failing in our duty as evangelizers. We need to know our Church – he said every Catholic should own a copy of The Catechism of the Catholic Church, and we need to know Jesus – every Catholic should have a personal encounter with our Lord. What is one way to share our Jesus with others? When someone shares a trouble/issue with you, ask if you can pray for them. If they say 'yes', pray right at that time. Make the Sign of the Cross, repeat the trouble/issue, call upon the Holy Spirit to intervene and welcome God's blessing, ask Mary to intercede and end with the Hail Mary and the Sign of the Cross. Again, Ken presented inspiring ideas plus a practical guide for being an evangelizer.

Tuesday morning, August 8th, started with daily mass. Archbishop Albert LeGatt of St. Boniface, MB told us in his homily that while we do great work with the CWL, we as individuals need to pray for and develop a spirit of humility. Like St. Dominic, whose feast was celebrated this day, we are to spread the word of God with joy, trust, while always asking for humility.

Dr. Reginald Bibby was the guest speaker Tuesday morning. He spoke on *Canada's Catholics and Canadian Catholic Women*. He is a sociologist and has written several books on Canadian social trends. He presented many statistics regarding faith in Canada. The polls show that very few people are open to switching away from the Roman Catholic faith. They may not be attending church as frequently, but they are not switching to other faith traditions. The bottom line for the CWL is that they found that people are willing to give their lives and resources to things that they define as significant. Women will be open to greater involvement, **if** they find it to be worthwhile. And if we as CWL want to have an impact on people's lives, we have to have an impact on their families. Dr. Bibby suggested that since women are so pressed for time, the CWL's solution of declining membership does not rely solely on numbers, but we have to recruit members with a clarity of our goals for them, their families, and the League.

This led to Donna Dunn's presentation on *Building on Foundation, the League of the Future*. Some of the CWL members around the country were involved with this interactive presentation. The National CWL has a 5 year plan where it will determine, through a strategic planning process, the best future for the League. The steering committee consists of several CWL members who will continue to study the future needs of the League. The recommendations will be made to the National executive at their winter meeting. The strategic plan will address all levels of the League, and will include a review of our ideology and our core values.

The guest speaker for Wednesday, August 9th was Dr. June Webber. She is the Director of the Coady International Institute and the Vice-President, St. Francis Xavier University, in Antigonish, Nova Scotia. She presented on the Coady International Institute which is one of the CWL National Voluntary Fund recipients. The CWL money we give to Coady goes to fund scholarships awarded to women from other countries who come to the Coady Institute located at St. Francis Xavier University to learn leadership skills and sustainable development. They will return to their home countries to lead social change. Dr. Webber reviewed the work of the Coady Institute and she thanked us for the thousands of dollars the CWL has given over the years.

Interspersed with the guest speakers and reports were the prayerful ceremonies to honour the new Life Members, to remember our deceased CWL members, and for the lap quilts of love and mercy. Prayer is at the forefront of the convention as there is a prayer service to end every morning and afternoon session. The mornings start with daily mass, except for Wednesday when we have a closing mass. Every afternoon session reconvenes with a prayer service.

The business sessions were held on each of the 3 days of the convention. They include the standard business of a convention (adopting of standing rules, approving an agenda, etc.), plus the reports from the National Executive Chairpersons and each Provincial President. The Provincial Presidents presented their reports first. Some of them included a PowerPoint presentation showing photos submitted from their councils over the year. It is very interesting to hear the variety of work that goes on throughout the country. One has to remember Archbishop LeGat's words to not become too proud! These reports also provide inspiration for activities that we could undertake in our own councils. Standard comments from the reports included letter writing, workshops, fundraising for charities, and also, unfortunately, a decline in membership and an aging membership base. New Brunswick has voted for their 4 Diocesan Councils to disband and they will only consist of a Provincial Executive made up of the 46 parish councils. Most provinces reported some activities dealing with euthanasia in our country.

The National President and Executive gave reports of their work over the past year. National President Margaret Ann Jacobs gave a review of her very busy year. Among some of her visits were meetings with The World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations (WUCWO), with Members of Parliament, and with the Papal Nuncio to Canada. She is a member of the Strategic Planning committee. National Spiritual Advisor Bishop William McGrattan talked about the challenges facing the CWL. He mentioned that although we are a national organization, it is very important to continue to work at the parish level. We must hold onto our values and faith, and work towards a spiritual renewal. We are the Catholic voice of women in Canada and we must be missionary disciples. The members of the National Executive gave their reports and it is hard not to be amazed when you hear how much work is being done on all levels of the League.

National Resolutions Chairperson Joan Bona informed the delegates that 8 resolutions were submitted for consideration at this year's convention. Four were accepted to be presented at the floor during the convention, 2 were returned to the originating Provincial Council for further work, and 2 were forwarded to other National Chairpersons for action.

See the National CWL website at <https://www.cwl.ca/2017-resolutions/> for the 4 resolutions presented and passed at this year's convention. They are:

- 2017.01 Full Implementation of the Supreme Court Decision in R. v. Gladue for Indigenous Offenders
- 2017.02 Mandatory Age Verification Mechanisms for Adult Pornographic Websites
- 2017.03 Zero-Rated Status Under the Goods and Services Tax Provisions of the Excise Tax Act for Child Safety Products
- 2017.04 Protection from Coercion of Conscience for Healthcare Professionals

We were all invited to attend the 98th National Convention in Winnipeg from August 12th to 15th, 2018.

The convention ended with the Wednesday closing mass at St. Dunstan's. The National Executive re-affirmed their commitment to the League at the end of mass. The final event for the convention was the gala banquet on Wednesday night, which closed with the entertainment of The Dream Catchers – a Canada 150 Signature project comprised of very talented youth presenting a story of hope for the future through song and dance.