

## LEGISLATION



**Danielle McNeil-Hessian**

Each year at annual conventions, national council adopts resolutions which become the issues for action by members. Many of these actions involve keeping abreast of the laws made by Parliament or provincial legislatures. Since the opening of the 39<sup>th</sup> session of Parliament, there have been 22 government bills tabled in the House of Commons.

One of these bills, and of particular interest to members, is Bill C-22 *An Act to amend the Criminal Code (age of protection) and to make consequential amendments to the Criminal Records Act*. This would amend the *Criminal Code* to raise the age of consent for non-exploitative sexual activity from 14 to 16 years. Resolution 2003.09 Age of Consent for Sexual Activity called for the age of consent to be raised from 14 to 18 years of age. While this bill does not propose to raise the age to 18, it will provide protection for youth between the ages of 14-16.

All bills are sent to committee after first reading. Contacting members of the committees who are studying the bills is one way to impact on the proposed legislation.

As well as the government bills, 149 private members' bills have been tabled in the House of Commons. One such bill is Bill C-211 *An Act to amend the Canada Health Act (Autism Spectrum Disorder)*. Resolution 2004.08 Treatment of Autistic Persons called for governments to address the needs of autistic persons by providing adequate funding for diagnosis, early intervention and treatment and family support systems. Bill C-211 will amend the *Canada Health Act* and require provinces to fund treatment for autism.

Bill C-338 *An Act to amend the Criminal Code (procuring a miscarriage after twenty weeks of gestation)* was tabled in the House of Commons. This bill would amend the *Criminal Code* to create as an offence the procuring of miscarriage after the twentieth week of gestation, subject to certain limited exceptions.

I would like to recognize the efforts of the sub-committee chairpersons for the past two years: Mary Ryan from New Brunswick and Irene Gabon from Ontario, as well as the legislation chairpersons across the country who study legislation at all levels of government. These dedicated women love legislation and are committed to providing opportunities for council members to bring resolutions to life and topics for new resolutions, special thank you to them.

As members, we should not only criticize the action of our law makers but we should congratulate them on jobs well done. Members should become involved in their communities as members of a political party and law makers. There is much work to be done in our country and we have the potential within the membership to be at the level of the decision makers.

## LAWS



**Marie Cameron**

While attending national conventions for the past many years, I have listened to other final reports of honorary life members and never realized that one day, I too, would be making my final report to this assembly.

As past president of the national executive, I have tried to be a mentor and I am pleased to report that the provincial past presidents across this country took their roles as mentors very seriously. Past presidents have also been updating archives of their councils. A national archives sub-committee has been appointed to ensure that all pertinent archival materials will be filed and safely stored.

The history of the League from 1990 to 2005, with the sub-title *companions on the journey*, has been finished by member Sheila Ross. The updated national history will be published soon. We are very grateful to Sheila for the amount of time she has spent researching and writing this history. I encourage all of you to obtain a copy to see just how active League members have been in the past 15 years.

Most years, the past president's report included a statement about some councils reviewing or studying part of the *Constitution & Bylaws (C&B)*. This year, I can tell you that a majority of parish councils studied the C&B due to the amendments process. I received many letters and e-mails concerning the proposed amendments and know that there were lively discussions at the parish level.

Some members were concerned that the League was being called an "association of the lay faithful," which is how organizations such as ours are defined in canon law. Their concern was that the League no longer would be a women's organization. I think that was clarified by the fact that our organization continues to be called The Catholic **Women's** League of Canada.

At the honorary life members table, we are fortunate to have such tremendous mentors and initiators and I

look forward to sitting with them in future years: Mary Matthews, who was resolutions chairpersons when the League first started presenting the annual resolutions to the federal government; Dorothy Brocklehurst, who can still out-sing anyone; Jean Mahoney, who has taught me that a retired person can share her talents and abilities with other organizations; Irene Lefort, who organized the first WUCWO General Assembly in Canada; Ardis Beaudry, who convinced me to be chairperson of a very enlightening theme day in Victoria, British Columbia, when I was a scared diocesan president; Lucille Cullen, whose archival skills are still being used on the national archives committee; Heather Kolla, who initiated many organizational manuals and workshops which are still being used; Claire Heron, who has an ability to speak so eloquently on issues which face Christians today; Joan Chesser, who made us think and envision the future of the League; and, Vivian Bosch, who wrote all those interesting booklets of prayers and workshops which are still being used.

Three honorary life members no longer with us, but whom I knew and also were mentors to me, were Betty Aitken, Ruth Cooney and Sheilah Pellerin.

All of you are my sisters in the League. I challenge each one of you to be mentors to new members, to support members who are already on parish, diocesan, provincial or national executives, and to encourage Catholic women in your own parish to join this wonderful organization we call the League.

Thank you for the privilege of serving you on the national executive.

are international in scope. The committee consists of the national chairperson of community life, the national chairperson of resolutions, the national chairperson of legislation or her designate, the Canadian board member of WUCWO and the appointed participants of the annual Foreign Affairs Canada Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) Human Rights Consultations, as well as the executive director as an ex officio member. Life members Anida Simurda and Diane Curley have looked after our presence at the annual consultations, and they prepared the United Nations resolutions display table.

I felt that this committee would enable the national executive to better discuss and look after international issues. For a long time, human rights have been handled all over the world through a commission. A commission doesn't hold as much weight as a council. This year, the United Nations established the Human Rights Council – it has been changed to have more clout. The League participates at the Human Rights Consultations with NGO status and we will continue doing that.

For many years, Honorary Life Member Claire Heron has been the League's voice at WUCWO. When I was at the General Assembly in Arlington, Virginia, it was wonderful because so many Canadian women were there. How important it is for us to be there. For many years, Claire was our representative to WUCWO and we supported her as much as we could. We appreciate the work she has done in her position as North American vice-president and Canadian board member. Claire has been a mentor to me and to everyone else who dares to ask her questions. Thank you from all the women of Canada for being our proud presence at WUCWO.

## INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



**Agnes Bedard**

As international relations chairperson, the president is responsible for activity that is international in scope. That means she is responsible for CCODP, MaterCare, the Catholic Near East Welfare

Association, the National Council of Catholic Women (our American counterpart), and WUCWO. Although some of these organizations fall under other standing committees (e.g., CCODP), the president oversees them all.

To assist the national president, it was decided that an international relations committee should be established and on that committee would be those people whose portfolios

## ALBERTA MACKENZIE PROVINCIAL PRESIDENT



**Ella Eil**

Once again, it is my privilege to bring a report of the activities of your League sisters in Alberta Mackenzie Provincial Council. Our mid-

winter meeting was held in February. David Bouchard, a fieldworker for the Canadian Religious Conference (CRC), gave an excellent presentation on the trafficking of women and children. The CRC is hoping to present "Lost in Traffic," a play about trafficking, in communities across Canada.

Several of our executive members attended conferences, some reporting directly to the national executive. These conferences included the Catholic Conference 2006, Catholic