

88TH ANNUAL NATIONAL CONVENTION HIGHLIGHTS

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Guest Journalist

Some 750 women of faith from across Canada gathered from August 10–13, 2008, at Winnipeg's Delta Hotel for the 88th Annual National Convention of The Catholic Women's League of Canada. They represent almost 98,000 women from all parts of the country and in the armed services. Among them are women of all ages working in all professions including teachers, physicians, nurses, farmers, lawyers, and professors.

The World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations (WUCWO) North American Regional Conference drew an attendance of 331 from all parts of the continent from August 8–10, 2008. Indeed many members attended both conferences and brought their energy and a spirit of camaraderie to both events.



Opening Mass at St. Mary's Cathedral

Hospitality was offered in a wide variety of ways. Individually hand-crafted convention bags filled with information, prayer cards, sunflower pens, seeds, lapel pins and bookmarks were presented to each registrant. Cheerful and timely advice was offered by an army of local members who also offered welcome health breaks during the sessions.

National President Lorette Noble noted "a flow of themes of *Love One Another* and *Women as Peacemakers* between the national and international organizations and a unity of resolve to be heard at the national level and at every level of government." Both organizations use their voices, gifts, skills and funding to advocate for the protection of those marginalized by oppression, war, hunger and abuse.

The membership and supporters gathered at St. Mary's Cathedral for a joyful opening mass, presided by Archbishop James Weisgerber, of Winnipeg, and concelebrated by five bishops and many priests; the mass was celebrated with liturgical dance, a full choir and instrumental ensemble.

To a trumpet and organ fanfare, a procession of provincial flags entered the cathedral for the official opening ceremonies. An honour guard was provided by the Knights of Columbus. Greetings were brought by all levels of government and representatives of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. Greetings were also brought by WUCWO President-General Karen Hurley.

On August 11, the Gathering Day keynote address on End-of-Life Issues featured Executive Director of the Canadian Catholic Bioethics Institute Dr. Moira McQueen, Executive Director of the Euthanasia Prevention Coalition Alex Schadenberg and Senator Sharon Carstairs. McQueen noted that, "Dying is the most important thing we do. For the faithful, it is a prelude to being with God." She and her fellow presenters stressed the need for careful discernment on decisions made regarding comfort care and the withdrawal of treatment. All agreed that caring for physical, spiritual and emotional needs enhance the quality of life for all patients. Carstairs praised the excellent palliative care provided by health care workers in many regions she has visited. She urged that their efforts be supported through legislated national strategies for excellent end-of-life care in all parts of Canada.



National Chairperson of Community Life Dr. Rayleen De Luca with Senator Sharon Carstairs

As well as a full slate of business meetings, a number of resolutions were adopted on such diverse matters as prevention of human trafficking at the 2010 Olympic Games, restrictions on the sale of products containing triclosan, toxic substances in household products, accurate food labelling, transportation tax credit for rural post-secondary students and revision of the federal *Youth Criminal Justice Act*. All members were urged to write letters to federal government officials including the prime minister, appropriate ministers and local members of parliament regarding these resolutions. They were also urged to educate themselves and their communities on these matters and monitor the government's responses. A national delegation met with federal government officials last year regarding a federal response to the 2007 resolutions.

On Tuesday, guest speaker Debra Lefebvre presented information on the Buy-A-Net Malaria Prevention Group. She explained that a contribution of \$6.00 buys a bed net that can last up to five years and provides education on its use in Africa, where malaria kills over 3,000 children every day. Malaria is easily preventable, treatable and curable. Through education, access to health care and building trust, lives can be saved.

Business sessions continued throughout the conference, concluding with the rite of elections. A full slate of excellent candidates was presented. After careful discernment, the following incoming executive members were elected: Danielle McNeil-Hessian – president; Velma Harasen – president-elect; Betty Ann Brown – first vice-president; Cecile Miller – second vice-president; Peggy Roche – secretary-treasurer; and chairpersons of standing committees: Pearl Bridgwater, Barbara Dowding, Judy Lewis, Mary Nordick and Terri Scott.

The closing Eucharistic celebration took place on Wednesday evening at St. Boniface Cathedral. At the conclusion of mass, the new executive came forward for a blessing and Danielle McNeil-Hessian received the gavel from Past President Lorette Noble. The convention ended with the procession of provincial flags.

Winnipeg is unique in being the home of three archdioceses. The League and WUCWO worshipped and were warmly welcomed in all of them. The variety of liturgies offered in various houses of worship and at the convention was most appreciated by the members as a highlight of the event.

During the convention, there was ample opportunity for connecting and reconnecting with friends. Saturday night, the convention hit the rails and traveled via the Prairie Dog Central vintage railway train to a country barbeque supper at the Hitch'n Post. The journey was interrupted by the sheriff and his deputy who rode up on horseback and stopped the train to search for a desperado. The image on the Wanted poster looked alarmingly like Manitoba Provincial Spiritual Advisor Fr. Martin Bradbury, right down to the roman collar. An arrest was subsequently made without incident. Later in the evening, enough bail money was collected to get Fr.

Bradbury sprung and the collection was diverted to Stop Child Execution. In true western musical tradition the evening ended with a production number – a line dancing lesson for all before boarding the train for home.



Saturday evening entertainment at the Hitch'n Post

A welcoming banquet was offered on Monday. Special luncheons for spiritual advisors, life members and honorary life members took place on Tuesday followed later in the day by provincial dinners in restaurants all over town. A gala banquet took place on the last night of the convention with entertainment from local singing group Emmaus.

Attired in tartan sashes, members from Newfoundland and Labrador enthusiastically invited everyone to the next annual national convention in St. John's from August 9-11, 2009. The energy and goodwill will continue to animate the members of The Catholic Women's League of Canada. †



88th National Convention pictures, including above collage, courtesy of Vince de Luca