

# ORAL REPORTS

The following abbreviated oral reports were given at the 88<sup>th</sup> annual national convention in Winnipeg, Manitoba. They have been edited for spacing purposes.

## PRESIDENT



**Lorette Noble**  
Candiac, Quebec

These past two years have been an incredible journey and the word “journey” is carefully chosen. I have travelled more in our country than ever before, attending 28 conventions at provincial and diocesan levels on a journey of discovery. This journey, among other things, provided fresh insights about the effect of our geography on the way some councils have to function. For example, innovative ideas must be used in developing the theme and opportunities provided to draw forth the sometimes hidden talents of members.

Mentoring is catching on and increasing. Many members who have held office on many occasions are now finding that becoming a mentor helps them to step aside and still remain involved, encouraging newer members to take office because they, the mentors, are there to support them. Not direct, but support them!

It was great to be present and bring greetings on behalf of national council to councils celebrating significant anniversaries of 50 years or more. An interesting phenomenon came to light over the course of these past two years at some of these anniversary events. Did you know that in some cases parish councils came into existence five years or more before a parish was established in the community?

Great efforts are being made to make conventions enriching learning experiences and enjoyable social events. Where time and geography allow, workshops are being offered so that members attending can go back home with new ideas and perhaps a new way or two of doing things. In other words, better use is being made of members’ time when they make the effort to attend.

On a more sobering note, it’s not a secret that membership has been declining over the last few years. This is not an unusual phenomenon in groups as long lasting as the League and, even though there is some good news from some parish councils that have maintained or increased their membership, it was decided at the beginning of this year to engage the services of an outside group of consultants with a view to creating a practical strategy

to attract more women to join. You will be hearing more about this in the coming months.

By now many members will have received the latest volume of the League history spanning the years from 1990 to 2005, written by member Sheila Ross, of Calgary, who was helped in her research by national office staff. At the end of the book she states, “...with an active membership of 98,647 Catholic women, the national executive is looking to preserving tradition while allowing clear realities to foster adjustments in the League.” This is true, isn’t it? A lot of parish councils are trying to do this.

The League, like several other similar organizations, is facing the reality of an aging membership. Mind you, it might well also hold the record for the most amazingly active, and creatively active, aging membership of any group! You only have to read the annual reports that are quite breathtaking in the vast scope of day-to-day activities. Members never seem to pause for a moment and say, “I don’t think I’m quite up to the job, you know. Getting a bit old, I think!”

Nevertheless, in today’s society the norm is for women to continue working in their careers even as they raise their families and this must be seriously taken into account. Women, therefore, have less time to devote to activities outside their homes. So, when they look at members and hear what they do, might they be a little intimidated, or might they find the challenge stimulating?

Something that might be considered is choosing a project that speaks to and touches the hearts of the grassroots members, becoming their League activity plan for a year or two. Honorary Life Member Claire Heron (1994-1996) gave a couple of ideas at the WUCWO North American Regional Conference of how specific projects can energize even a small group. I heard of some wonderful ideas these past two years such as one diocesan council setting a goal of raising \$2,000 so that Catholic Missions In Canada may buy new shoes for their mission parishioners; the project was called Walking in Love. Another diocesan council took up the challenge of one resolution on developing a healthy lifestyle by encouraging members to record and report how many kilometres they walked in the year. I remember the instigator of this idea coming dressed up as a nut...you know, a health nut...when she gave her report.

One provincial council took its public speaking workshop a step further and invited the participants to submit a two-minute written presentation, with the best of the crop being read at the provincial convention. The two examples I heard were beautifully written, and very well presented. What a wonderful

way of encouraging members to develop their creative writing and public speaking skills. I saw how proud they were to read their work to those attending that convention and you can imagine how pleased they were at the applause!

There was nearly always a question box at the conventions. On one occasion I was asked what members can do to make women of the First Nations feel welcome as members. There are no easy answers to questions like this, but airing the concern sets us thinking and, once a seed is planted, the chances are that there will be results. Then there was the occasion when a fair number of parish councils were reporting very good results from their membership drives and I was asked to tell these councils to share with others the reason for their success! The good news is that I'm sure they heard each other and got in touch!

What have been some achievements this past year? Looking at it from the national level, and in a quite special mark of acknowledgement of and confidence in the League's advocacy role with government, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops wrote asking for support of a resolution it had passed and sent to the government on the death penalty as it affects Canadians abroad. National council was asked to write to the federal government in support of the bishops' resolution and at the same time encourage members to write letters on this topic of grave concern.

The League delegation that went to government last November had an interesting experience when visiting Environment Canada. A young senior policy advisor met with us. After we presented the 2007 resolutions as they pertained to the ministry, he said the following, "You know, when my colleagues in the office saw who was on the agenda for this morning I was sent along to meet you because I'm the Catholic in the office, a Ukrainian Catholic". "That's fine", we replied. He continued, "But I must tell you that what I have heard of your concerns has blown my mind. You have covered such a vast array of subjects! Wait 'til I tell them in the office about our meeting." It was good to hear this, because it's true that sometimes people are surprised at how well prepared the delegation is and how low-key is the approach. It's the League's strength.

The League was invited to present a brief to a committee of the Canada Revenue Agency when it held pre-budgetary hearings late last year. National Chairperson of Resolutions Betty Anne Brown and National Chairperson of Legislation Mary Nordick drafted the brief which I presented when the hearings took place in Montreal. The League received praise and commendation from an unexpected source! When it came time for her to speak, the representative of the National Council of Women of Canada said that she agreed with every point made in our brief!

Bonds have continued to be strengthened with ecumenical sisters of other Christian groups such as the Anglican Church Women, United Church Women, Women's Missionary Society, and Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada. A couple of months ago I had the pleasure of attending the Women's

Missionary Society annual council meeting where, for the first time, it had a panel of representatives from the church groups mentioned above and the League. We were invited to give a short presentation describing our group, mission and activities. In my presentation, I spoke of the League's advocacy role. At the end of this meeting, when the women were envisioning their future plans, they felt they should also adopt an advocacy role as part of their mission, a move that received resounding support from the moderator of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. This is good news indeed!

National officers and life members have attended several conferences this past year. Why do League members attend and participate in these conferences? To begin with, the League is invited, and it is a tribute to be invited. It also gives an opportunity to share the League's values and mission, and bring back information to enrich the League's perspective on issues. The reports on these meetings and conferences are available through national office and really are interesting to read because they are filled with resource information and ideas on the topics they cover. I encourage members who are interested to consult these reports. There may be ideas for parish council action or resolutions.

There were two more events of note this past year. One was the 49<sup>th</sup> International Eucharistic Congress in Quebec City, where I was so delighted to meet members from every province. They were part of their diocesan groups and wore CWL pins and scarves.

The other was the awarding of the Order of Canada to Dr. Henry Morgentaler. A letter was sent to the governor general of Canada expressing members' distress and asking that this award not be presented. The letter may be found on the website.

Finally, coming back to membership, I suggest that each one of us, essentially a parish council member before anything else, should resolve to go home and think of one idea we can bring to our next parish council meeting when the holidays are over, that could become a part of or the core of a plan. Let's write it down, make sure it's realistic and set a time-line. Then, make sure all members know about this plan, convince them to come on board and get them involved in publishing it in the community, with pictures, songs and bells if necessary, so that everyone knows about it. I'm sure by next year there will be cause for celebrating what will have been achieved. Won't it be fun to hear these stories?

I thank the national executive and staff members for their extraordinary support throughout my term of office. Each one has been a joy to work with. It might often have been quite a challenge keeping up with the work, but there's never been a dull moment! Thank you for the privilege of serving you, my sisters in Christ. My time here is nearly over, but I am and will remain an active parish council member.

What exciting times lie ahead! God bless and keep us all constant in our love for one another! ✠