

# 90 YEARS OF FAITH, FUN AND FULFILLMENT: THOSE INSPIRING WOMEN OF PEACE AND HOPE

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Guest Journalist

As members gathered for spiritual growth and camaraderie for the 90<sup>th</sup> annual national convention, it was evident that Bellele Guerin's vision for the League in 1920 – “that the CWL will arise fair, beautiful, strong and proud before the eyes of the world” – continues to uphold Canada's largest organization of Catholic women today.

“This is the day the Lord has made”....These words resonated among the assembled as National President Danielle McNeil-Hessian officially marked the opening of the convention held August 8<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> in Ottawa. Graced by the flags representing all provinces and the nation, the opening

On Gathering Day Doctor Nuala Kenny explored the gospel message of *hope* in the church and in our challenged world. Doctor Kenny defined two specific themes in the context of today's church, *Hope and the Gospel of Life*. Reflecting on the crisis within the church, she challenged laity and faithful clergy alike to take action and commit to healing dialogue. Doctor Kenny affirmed all women in their giftedness so desperately needed by the church today.

Later, Eleanor Glenn, a retired Ontario Catholic school administrator with a love for writing and directing, performed a one act play entitled, *The Servant at the Supper*. Inspired by the Ark of the New Covenant as it journeyed through



Eucharistic celebration was held at St. Patrick's Basilica in downtown Ottawa with Canada's parliament buildings set as its backdrop. The rain did not dampen the spirits of members as they embraced their theme *Women of Peace and Hope*. Over 700 members gathered to celebrate the League's 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Preceding the official opening mass, members were provided the opportunity to discuss in detail the League's resolutions prior to convention. Resolutions being fundamental to the League's existence, the resolutions dialogue drew over 200 members.

Members of the hierarchy who celebrated Eucharist included Archbishop Terrence Prendergast, S.J. of Ottawa; Archbishop Daniel J. Bohan of Regina; Archbishop Michael Miller of Vancouver; and National Spiritual Advisor Archbishop Martin Currie of St. John's and Bishop of Grand Falls. Bishop Douglas Crosby, O.M.I. of Corner Brook and Labrador and former national spiritual advisor assisted in concelebrating the closing mass.

her community, Eleanor's play captured the emotion and profound expression of Pelethia (a fictitious character), as she journeyed with Jesus at His Last Supper, through His crucifixion and resurrection experiences and on to pentecost, then concluding with the mission of St. Paul.

National council adopted two resolutions. The first resolution strongly urges the federal government to stop the export and ban the mining of chrysotile asbestos, a known carcinogen. Canada continues to mine and export chrysotile asbestos to developing countries. The resolution also urges the federal government to support the addition of chrysotile asbestos to the *Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade*.

A second resolution urges the federal government to implement a tax credit for children's participation in arts and cultural activities equal to the tax credit available for fitness activities.

In their ministry to serve, members of the Ottawa Archdiocesan Council were given an awesome responsibility and provided a most welcoming and enthusiastic atmosphere as this year's convention hosts. On Saturday evening, members enjoyed panoramic views of the Ottawa-Hull landscapes complete with dinner aboard a boat cruise. They enjoyed music and dancing and a dazzling display of fireworks, held in conjunction with the International Fireworks Display competition being held in Ottawa this year. Others dined and tried their luck at the buffet and casino night.

Throughout the business sessions, members wore period clothing representing the fashion eras of the past nine decades. Informative reports were received from all national officers and each provincial president, which chronicled the love, work and commitment of members across Canada. Members also enjoyed food and friendship at special luncheons held throughout the three-day event.

On Monday evening, a cheerful crowd enjoyed a buffet and Ottawa Valley Entertainment. This event featured Irish dancer Danielle Barrie, the RCMP Miserable Ride and Robin Averill, singer and entertainer. The equestriennes saluted National President-elect Velma Harasen as they performed their routines



with precision and form in their scarlet uniforms. While the replicated horses dazzled the crowd, the digestion of too much hay became a show stopper.

Called forward in faith, action and a further response to serve, 14 recipients of life membership were commissioned. New life members are Faith Anderson, Manitoba; Anne Arseneau, New Brunswick; Elaine Audet and Dodie Bond of British Columbia; Joan Bona and Mary MacDonald of Nova Scotia; Trucy Cornelis, Pauline Krupa, Maria Odumodu, Connie Parry, Josie Schill and Evelyn Theriault of Ontario; Mary Hagen of Prince Edward Island and Lise Medford of the Military Ordinariate Provincial Council.



On Tuesday evening, the merriment continued as members gathered in local restaurants for their provincial dinners.

Drawing from the tremendous support of its members, the League has generously donated over \$4 million to charitable organizations in 2009. Approximately \$476,000 was directly and indirectly donated to national voluntary funds. Organizations such as the Catholic Missions In Canada, Coady International Institute, Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace (CCODP), MaterCare International, pro-life programs and the World Union of Catholic Organizations (WUCWO) have benefitted from the League's support. The Catholic Health Alliance of Canada will receive approximately \$12,000 to continue its work in the area of palliative care. The League will continue to support MaterCare International as a national voluntary fund to December 2013.

A letter of concern was sent to Prime Minister Stephen Harper regarding the removal of mandatory status from the census long form. Members were concerned that the lack of information associated with the shorter version and voluntary long form submissions would impact the ability of organizations like the League to identify the diverse needs of the nation and address inequalities.

A letter was sent to the president of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, Bishop Pierre Morissette, to recommend further dialogue, transparent communication and reconciliation related to the recommendations contained in the CCCB's publication *From Pain to Hope*.

Motivated by faith and compassion, Velma Harasen and National 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice-President Cecile Miller gave details of their trip as part of the Coady International Institute's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary study tour to Nepal and India. Both recalled, in a special way, the plight and profound determination of the graduates of the Coady, as they shared their vision for sustainable communities in the areas of employment, education, governance, health and [peace](#).



Insightful and inspiring, National Chairperson of Community Life Mary Nordick shared her experiences of a trip to Burundi and Zambia as part of the CCODP bishops' mission. Mary's presentation bore witness to the plight and difficulties of the groups supported by CCODP. She also shared many success stories such as Women for Change of Zambia in their quest for sustainable development and the suppression of all forms of poverty. A beautiful song of worship and praise by Snatum Kaur, "Let Us People Love Today", was shared as an illustrative presentation showing the strength and determination of its people.



National officers accepted with faith their call to lead the League for 2010-2012. The closing mass was celebrated at Notre Dame Cathedral Basilica, Ottawa's oldest church. In his homily, National Spiritual Advisor Archbishop Martin Currie acknowledged that there is confusion within the church that is causing people to lose hope. "With confidence, the church will triumph", he stated, as the archbishop encouraged all to walk with hope in a troubled and broken world.

A gala banquet brought the convention to a close. At the banquet Danielle McNeil-Hessian who completed her term as national president was honoured and recognized. A 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary cake was unveiled and 12 honorary life members joined in celebrating the League's legacy of service "For God and Canada" since 1920 – a fitting tribute to commemorate the end of the Ottawa convention.

Overall, the convention marked a journey of incredible fidelity, faithfulness, fun and fulfillment.

The convention venue next year will be in Toronto from August 14-17, 2011. †



### HOLY FAMILY PARISH COUNCIL, NAMAQ, ALBERTA

Deb Ruetz, chairperson of communications for Holy Family Parish Council in Namao, Alberta, digitized the crest for machine embroidery using her Huscavama Viking sewing machine. In answer to many requests, a personalized apron was produced for each council member to wear when serving parish funeral lunches.

Deb has filed a VP3 file with national office and generously has offered it to any member who would like to use it for similar projects: table runners, tea cloths, banners, bags... the possibilities abound. To receive an electronic version of the VP3 file, please e-mail national office along with a written request for permission to use the crest.