

ORAL REPORTS

The following oral reports were given at the 89th annual national convention in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador. They may have been edited for spacing purposes.

PRESIDENT



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We have stayed the course and continued to serve the church, promoting social justice for 89 years. I am but one small cog in this organization, and

this convention completes my first year as national president. I would like to thank the members of the parish councils across the country without whose commitment and dedication there would be no League.

I encourage you to read the reports included in the 89th *Annual National Convention Program & 2008 Annual Report* as they are an account to the membership of what was accomplished. Reporting to members annually is not only a means of celebrating accomplishments, but the financial reports provide an accurate accounting of how monies were spent. Please share these reports with other members in your council.

In March, I represented the League at the First International Conference on Life, Family, Development: The Role of Women in the Promotion of Human Rights, sponsored by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, the World Women's Alliance for Life and Family, based in Rome, and the World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations.

In his message to participants Pope Benedict XVI said, "... given the distinctive influence of women in society, they must be encouraged to embrace the opportunity to uphold the dignity of life through their involvement in education and their participation in political and civic life." He added that, because of their "unique 'capacity for the other', women have a crucial part to play in the promotion of human rights, for without their voice the social fabric of society would be weakened."

The conference began with a presentation on Christian anthropology. Other topics, including trafficking of women and children, family breakdown, abortion, bioethics and poverty, were discussed as threats to the church and society. After each presentation, there were discussions on current issues that impact on society and the challenges faced by women. I was one of two delegates from Canada and one of four from North America.

In my opinion this conference could be the beginning of dialogue between women's groups and the church. It was a pleasure to meet women from around the world and listen to the differences, not only of opinions but of challenges, facing them while working in their communities.

In March, Nova Scotia Provincial President Marian Hepditch-Littlepage passed away after a battle with cancer. Marian was present at the national executive meeting in February. She loved the League; it was a source of great strength for her. Her courage, dedication and faith were gifts to us.

In an effort to respond to all the invitations received by the national president, I was fortunate to be able to send a representative to diocesan and parish events when I was unable to attend. Members of the national executive ably represented the League.

I have travelled across the country attending provincial conventions in an attempt to visit every province within my two-year term. You may think that this would not be a challenge as there are only 11 provincial councils. The problem is that many have their convention on the same weekend, the most popular being the first weekend in June. This year I attended seven provincial conventions and I thank those provincial councils that willingly changed their dates to help me meet my goal.

It was humbling to realize the importance of having the national president visit a province. Some special moments included the time I was able to spend with the members, or their husbands, as I was taxied to and from the airport.

The Ontario provincial convention was the first time I attended pre-convention special events planned for attendees; I spent time with the members while the provincial executive was in meetings. Midland is a beautiful scenic community and I was privileged to have guides who took me on a tour that included the Martyrs' Shrine. A tour of Sainte-Marie among the Hurons gave me an opportunity to talk to many members and experience the rich history of the area. I would like to congratulate the council on raising \$60,000 for The Call of the Poor in two years to celebrate its 60th anniversary; it was no small feat.

In Summerside, Prince Edward Island, I facilitated a group discussion where those present shared incredible stories of times when they had to step out of their metaphorical boats, out of their comfort zones, to make a change in their lives. I was touched by the ceremony of remembrance for members who had passed away during the year, and I was asked to place a carnation in memory of my own mother. The members took

up a collection and gave it to me for the victims of a fire in Nova Scotia. Their generosity had no end.

In Petawawa, for the Military Ordinariate provincial convention on Mother's Day, I was moved by the letter written by Minister of National Defense The Hon. Peter MacKay to mothers and grandmothers, recognizing the sacrifices that have been and are being made by military mothers – those who serve themselves and those whose children and/or husbands serve. To be present at the Mother's Day Eucharist was indeed a privilege. The military flag was carried into mass by a member in uniform, a mother of two children – a woman who has served in Afghanistan and continues to serve her country. To my mind, that puts "I'm too busy to join the League" in a whole new light.

While en route to Bathurst, New Brunswick, I experienced my first ever moose crossing, an awesome and frightful sight. Incredible stories of two past provincial presidents were most interesting, and at times humorous, as they described how they became leaders in the League. Here, I not only felt as if I was part of the League family, but part of the family.

In St. Eustache, Quebec, a wonderful tribute was given to the provincial president by her parish council that hosted the convention. There was a meal in the parish hall, served with love to those present. It was a special treat for me to attend the post-convention meeting and listen to the newly-installed executive make plans for the future, without worrying about what job I was going to be assigned.

In Medicine Hat, Alberta, I was able to appreciate the beauty of snow in June. A beautiful blanket of snow fell in honour of my visit to the city. I had the chance to reconnect with past provincial presidents with whom I had journeyed on the national executive. The Father Walter Krewski awards were given out to councils that had increased their membership in the previous year. Presentations were a cause for much celebration among those members present. Lorraine Hartsook's presentation, *Be Real*, an account through songs and words of her incredible journey, brought many of the delegates to tears.

Even my missed flight could not put a damper on my visit to Prince George, British Columbia. Along with participating in a beautiful, fruitful convention, I was very fortunate to spend an evening with the women of St. Mary Parish Council at its closing dinner. The youngest member, 16 years of age, was in attendance, along with two long standing members who were in their 90s. There were three generations of one family present.

In Nova Scotia, I celebrated the Feast of Our Lady of Good Counsel in the Diocese of Antigonish; the convention was hosted by St. John the Baptist Parish Council, New Glasgow. Members in the diocese really know how to plan a convention; it happened to be right across the street from a Winners store.

All of the conventions were unique. Each one had interesting speakers, theme developers and displays to enrich the hearts and minds of those present. All conventions had amazing banners representing the theme, *Women of Peace and Hope*, and prepared lovingly by members. There was evidence

of sharing and caring and abounding *faith, fun and fulfillment*. The members present definitely had the opportunity to grow in spirituality and gain additional knowledge about the League in their province.

Once again this year, a delegation met with members of the federal government and senior civil servants. The delegation presented the *2008 Resolutions Brief* and dialogued about the resolutions, which become League policy. The importance of sending a delegation to Ottawa can not be overstated as, at the very least, it heightens the awareness of League issues in Ottawa.

There have been many good examples of activities that took place on April 26th the Feast of Our Lady of Good Counsel and CWL Day of *Peace and Hope*. One such example was sent to me by the president of Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta Parish Council, Halifax. It focused on the theme as members participated in every aspect of a *Women of Peace and Hope* mass. Members distributed a prayer for *peace* to the congregation on arrival and the president spoke to the congregation regarding the Feast of Our Lady of Good Counsel. The Prayer of the Faithful included prayers for *peace*, the armed forces, and palliative care patients and their caregivers. Hymns of *peace* and *hope* were chosen. Members sat as a group and each one wore her pin on a special ribbon. The spiritual development chairperson led the congregation in a prayer for *peace* prior to the final blessing. I include this example in my report because it not only speaks to the creativity and dedication of the women in this council, but also to the willingness of the pastor and spiritual advisor to be involved with and promote the League within the parish.

As Pope Benedict XVI has declared this year the *Year for Priests* you are encouraged to celebrate parish priests, in particular those who are spiritual advisors. Plan a special event in their honour to celebrate the good things you have been given.

I have challenged parish councils to increase their membership by ten percent over two years. Congratulations to those councils that took up the challenge and reached the goal. Some have already surpassed the goal and others are close, but the good news is that there is still one year left for those councils not yet there. To quote Fr. Gary MacPherson, "For God's sake and the sake of the CWL, get going!"

I am confident that with God's help and the commitment of members in 2009, the League will thrive long into the future. I look forward to the activities that arise from the theme, *Women of Peace and Hope*, and to journeying with you as I continue as national president. May Our Lady of Good Counsel intercede for us and guide us as we go forward, striving to be *Women of Peace and Hope*. †



For God and Canada