

WUCWO CORNER A SHORT HISTORY

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It is very probable that as soon as a site was selected for a church in any community, the women of that community would organize to assist in the process. It is who we have always been as Catholic women, united in the love of our God and faith and in service for all of God's people. It should not be a surprise to us that, according to the World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations (WUCWO) Story, in 1911 a council of Canadian Catholic women asked to join the newly formed International Council of Catholic Women's Leagues. Since that time, and for almost 100 years, Canadian Catholic women have been *companions on the journey* that is WUCWO. Today, Canadian members of WUCWO include the Ukrainian Catholic Women's League of Canada, Mouvement des Femmes Chrétiennes Inter Montréal, Sisters of Providence and The Catholic Women's League of Canada.

In 1910, Madame de Vélard, President of the Patriotic League of French Women, suggested uniting Catholic women's organizations globally. As mentioned above, in 1911, a Catholic women's group in Canada asked to join. By 1913, this union had representation from 27 leagues, located in 17 countries with a communications secretariat in Paris. The president was from Poland. During the First World War, the group ceased to function, resuming its activities in 1921.

At the Union's 5th International Congress in Rome in 1922, discussions included the trafficking of women and the preparation of women for civic responsibility. In 1928, the Union was granted representation by the League of Nations to sit on two committees - Traffic of Women and Protection of the Child. In 1932, the president of the Union "was the only Catholic delegate to speak at the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva." As new issues around the globe arose, they were addressed.

In May 1940, the Union's archives were destroyed in Holland "so that the invaders could not lay hands on them and use them to find people who had collaborated with us (the Union)." During the Second World War, the work of the Union went on locally, depending on the situation.

"In 1946, the United Nations created the Commission on the Status of Women before adopting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on December 10, 1948." The voice of the Union was there and is heard today around

the conference tables of the United Nations in New York, Geneva, Vienna, Rome, Paris and Strasbourg.

Today, WUCWO (name adopted in 1952) focus remains "to promote the presence, participation and co-responsibility of Catholic women in society and Church, in order to enable them to fulfil their mission of evangelisation and to work for human development." WUCWO has a membership of 100 organizations in 56 countries and consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council since 1947; the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization since 1948; Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations since 1953; International Labour Organization of the United Nations; and, the Council of Europe. At these venues, and with our sisters around the globe, WUCWO gives voice to the concerns of Catholic women. Through the years, WUCWO has protested religious persecution in Mexico, Iron Curtain countries, Poland and China, stated its abhorrence of racial discrimination, worked for peace, campaigned against the trafficking of women, fought against poverty, demanded the protection of all human life from conception to natural birth, worked with and for refugees, promoted disarmament, worked for the healing of the environment and against the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

For some of our WUCWO sisters, especially those with little or no access to government or media, The Catholic Women's League of Canada is their voice. The League meets with the federal government, whose actions have global results, and with the media, whose reach is also global. It is both opportunity and responsibility to become educated and to educate, to listen and to speak, as we ask for justice and peace for all humankind.

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