

HONORARY LIFE MEMBER JOAN CHESSER



NATIONAL PRESIDENT: 1996-1998

Themes: *The Catholic Women's League of Canada: through service to the people of God [1997]*
People of God: A Time for Healing [1998]

In Joan's first president's message, she stated that assuming the presidency was an awe inspiring experience. In her last message as national president, she used that same phrase to describe her term of office. She was constantly awed by the generosity and service of members throughout Canada and, with humility, she was ever reminded of the gift and privilege of serving as national president. It is a gift she will always treasure and for which she continues to give thanks.

One of the League's themes during Joan's term of office was *The Catholic Women's League of Canada: through service to the people of God*. This theme was easy for councils to embrace as it is the very nature of members to respond to needs in their communities.

In the fall of 1996, the League engaged in the electronic media and offered members a website, an e-mail address and a toll-free telephone number for national office. These steps were significant in enhancing communication at all levels.

During Joan's term, the national executive: approved a position paper in response to the federal government's document *New Reproductive and Genetic Technologies: Setting Boundaries, Enhancing Health*; made a presentation to the Federal Environmental Assessment Review Panel on the Nuclear Fuel Waste Management and Disposal Concept; made a submission to the Immigration Legislative Review Committee; and, sent a response on the consultation paper *Reforming Criminal Code Defences: Provocation, Self-Defence and Defence of Property*.

In December 1996, the League joined with the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCBB), the Catholic Health Association of Canada, and the Knights of Columbus to form the Catholic Group for Health, Justice and Life. The group applied for intervener status in the Supreme Court of Canada appeal in the case concerning a pregnant woman whose addiction to solvents endangered her unborn child. The group also sought intervener status in a case involving a New Brunswick boy suing his mother for injuries received in the womb.

Many councils participated in the research project, *Exploring Canadian Values – The Society We Want*, designed to explore core values that Canadians upheld with respect to health, education and social supports.

Spirituality: A Day of Discovery was evaluated and Project

Grow was launched. Members continued to embrace new programs and promote ongoing training.

At the annual national convention in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador, in 1997, the Gathering Day presenter was Dr. Margaret A. Somerville from the McGill Centre for Medicine, Ethics and Law. She offered a clear picture of the issue of euthanasia. The MaterCare International Project was adopted by resolution for a period of one year, to be reviewed at the end of that time.

The League proceeded in partnership with Villagers Media Productions to produce a ½ hour program entitled *Welcome the Strangers*. The production was about faith communities that made it their objective to welcome the world's refugees and other newcomers to Canada.

In the fall of 1997, the League was invited to attend the CCCBB Plenary Assembly as an official observer. This was a significant step in the ongoing cooperation of the two groups.

A national vision committee was struck to engage the membership in studying the League's present and future. The aim was to make recommendations for the League's continuing vitality.

In 1998, the World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations North American Regional Conference was held in conjunction with the 78th annual national convention in Ottawa. Members and spiritual advisors received free registration for the conference, affording them the opportunity to experience this international connection.

Joan found that annual meetings with the federal government were always interesting and confirmed the League's earned respect and reputation due to well researched documentation. She felt that the highlight of most presidential terms was the opportunity to visit provincial councils and meet with members.

Most Rev. Peter Novocosky concluded his five year term as national spiritual advisor in August 1998. His term was marked with solid support and valuable input, often reminding national executive members of the value of a woman's perspective in its deliberations.

Joan is most grateful to the people who have walked with her, encouraged her, challenged her and befriended her. She believes that it is in giving that we receive. †