

A SNAPSHOT OF HIGHLIGHTS

Barb Dowding

National Chairperson of Resolutions

“Knock and it shall be opened....” and so it came to pass. Doors were opened wide as the national delegation to Ottawa was warmly and enthusiastically welcomed. Proclaiming a message of [peace](#) and [hope](#) as voiced by League members, and taking up the cause of those who cannot speak for themselves, National President Danielle McNeil-Hessian, National President-elect Velma Harasen, National Chairperson of Legislation Judy Lewis and I met with five federal government ministers, two parliamentary secretaries, the secretary general of the Canadian Human Rights Commission, one senator, the archbishop of Ottawa and the staff at the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. We are grateful to Ms. Julie Gaudreau, special assistant in the office of the prime minister, and League member Amy Sundberg for their help in scheduling appointments and making sure the doors would be open.



The delegation at lunch with Senator Callbeck.

In all of the meetings, the first priority was the 2009 resolutions, 2009.01 Exit Strategies for Prostituted Persons, 2009.02 Protection and Support for Foreign Victims of Human Trafficking and 2009.03 Hate Messages, but opportunities were also taken to discuss the League's opposition to Bill C-384 *An Act to amend the Criminal Code (right to die with dignity)* and engage in conversation around these and other topical issues.

Mr. Colin Carrie, parliamentary secretary to the minister of health, greeted the delegates warmly and showed great interest



in all issues presented, particularly Bill C-384. Topics included the importance of hospice palliative care as an integral component of the Canadian healthcare system (resolution 2007.03).

Senator Catherine Callbeck graciously hosted a beautiful lunch in the parliamentary dining room. A senator for



Archbishop Smith and Velma Harasen at the CCCB offices.

many years and former premier of Prince Edward Island, Senator Callbeck spoke of the many challenges, as well as opportunities, for women in politics. Her work on the Social Affairs, Science and Technology Committee prompted good discussion about the issues of poverty, Internet pornography and human trafficking. The delegates were pleased to learn of her support of Bill S-223 *An Act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act and to enact certain other measures in order to provide assistance and protection to victims of human trafficking* (resolution 2009.02). Senator Callbeck is truly a fine mentor for women, not only in politics, but in any area of leadership.

At the CCCB offices, delegates were delighted to find Archbishop Richard Smith, of Edmonton, among those who greeted them. Now vice-president of the CCCB, Archbishop Smith introduced Bishop David Monroe, of Kamloops, and Auxiliary Bishop Gerard Bergie, of Hamilton, who were there on committee work. Mr. Bede Hubbard introduced the staff, and delegates were given an overview of current work. It was clear that the League is highly respected and relied upon to continue bringing resolutions and concerns to governments at all levels. Archbishop Smith asked how the CCCB could help promote the League and delegates were encouraged to send copies of promotional materials to the CCCB office.

With Mr. Deepak Obhrai, parliamentary secretary to the minister of foreign affairs, delegates revisited League concerns regarding Resolution 2007.02 Global Accountability for Canadian Registered Mining Companies. Once again, delegates were assured that Canada has the highest of standards. The issues of human trafficking and the fact that Canada remains a source destination for child sex tourism, as well as concern about the protection of foreign victims, were also raised.

The Hon. Helena Guergis, minister of state (status of women), remembered delegates from the March meeting. The SOW office supports women in the areas of violence against women, leadership and economic stability. The minister is familiar with the plight of women in poverty and those who live on the streets. The complexities about human trafficking and strategies for women wanting to exit prostitution were



The delegation meets with The Hon. Helena Guergis.

discussed. She was commended for her dedication to the elimination of poverty by assisting women to learn new skills and become more self sufficient in their local communities.

The Hon. Peter Van Loan, minister of public safety, extended a very warm and sincere welcome which set the tone for discussions. He was interested in League resolutions especially as they affected his office, which is the second largest department in the government. On human trafficking, it was acknowledged that improvements around border controls and training have been undertaken. While trafficking at the 2010 Olympics is a concern, he noted it is truly a much bigger situation than that. The minister supported League efforts to speak out about this serious issue and added that it is important not to become complacent. Discussion occurred at length about a national sex offender registry (Resolution 2000.09 Establishment of a National Registry of Convicted, Dangerous, High-Risk Sex Offenders) and his proposed amendments to the *Criminal Code* (Bill C-34 *An Act to amend the Criminal Code and Other Acts*). He urged the League to follow the bill's progress.

Cyberspace security falls under his portfolio so the delegates talked about the Internet, pornography, Internet

luring and how citizens can better protect their children (Resolution 2003.08 National Strategy to Eliminate Computer-Based Child Pornography).

The Hon. Robert Nicholson, minister of justice and attorney general of Canada, welcomed the delegation and indicated he was always happy to receive the League. In discussing Resolution 2009.03 Hate Messages, the minister noted that a parliamentary committee has been struck to study the issue and he would wait for that report before making any comments. He said he was monitoring a current appeal case and recognized that people who are opposed to the removal of Section 13 of the *Canadian Human Rights Act* also feel strongly about the impact on victims of hate messages, for example, certain religious groups.

Minister Nicholson was thanked for the good work undertaken on the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* (Resolution 2008.06 Revision of the *Youth Criminal Justice Act*). He agreed with efforts to address the issue of human trafficking and wholeheartedly supported Member of Parliament Joy Smith's Bill C-268 *An Act to amend the Criminal Code (minimum sentences for offences involving trafficking of persons under the age of eighteen years)*. He spoke of his part in getting the age of consent raised to 16 and how important this is to stop Canada from being a destination source for sex trafficking. Regarding Resolution 2004.02 Children Living in Poverty, he believes that child tax credits will help eliminate hardship for low income families. Always gracious, he thanked the League for its dedication and encouraged members to continue in their advocacy for the less fortunate.

The Hon. James Flaherty, minister of finance, allowed extra time to discuss a number of key issues including core funding for persons wanting to exit a life of prostitution. He emphasized how important it is to work directly with provincial ministries regarding the distribution of transfer payments. Other ways to help homeless and/or low income



Danielle McNeil-Hessian, Velma Harasen, special advisor Jeannie Smith and The Hon. Robert Nicholson.

people is to educate them on the benefits of the tax system. It was noted the only way for people to access grants and assistance is through the income tax form. There was a lively discussion about the GST on funerals (Resolution 2006.05 GST Exemption on Funeral Services) especially regarding the fact that it is not an option in Canada to dispose of remains. He took good notes on this! In discussing child poverty, the minister told us about one project and how it was able to impact low income families.

Karen Mosher, secretary general of the Canadian Human Rights (HRC) Commission, along with her assistants was very interested in Resolution 2009.03 Hate Messages. She gave a good overview of the work and mandate of the HRC and its role for Canadians. An independent body, the HRC received 10,000 complaints last year, with 700 becoming formal cases. Only two per cent involved hate messages. Ms. Mosher explained that rather than repealing Section 13 of the *Canadian Human Rights Act* the HRC was seeking to amend it. Delegates received a copy of the *Freedom of Expression and Freedom from Hate in the Internet Age* report prepared by the HRC. It was a helpful meeting and provided an opportunity to understand and appreciate the important role of this office for all Canadians.

The Hon. Jason Kenney, minister of citizenship, immigration and multiculturalism, discussed the request for legislation to protect foreign victims of trafficking. While it



The delegation with MP Shelley Glover and The Hon. Jason Kenney.

was clear that the minister was not planning to introduce legislation in this regard, he understands the problem and is working to amend an existing policy which could see an extension of temporary resident permits to three years and possibly include some of the recommendations found in Bill S-223. He heard League concerns about the lack of training for immigration officers on recognizing trafficking victims and the impact on applicants of immigration officers having the discretion to deny temporary resident permits. The minister was very keen to host a national conference about human

trafficking that would include high profile professionals, police representatives and others who work directly with victims. Look forward to hearing more about this!

There was an opportunity to sit in on sessions both in the House of Commons and the Senate.

Formal meetings ended with a visit to Julie Gaudreau's office. She was interested in all of the meetings and pleased that all doors were opened wide.

Of a more social nature, Archbishop Terrence Prendergast, of Ottawa, kindly hosted an afternoon tea followed by a tour

of his beautiful home. With the 90th annual national convention taking place in Ottawa next August, it was a timely visit.

The League was praised, affirmed and encouraged to continue its work to stand up for Catholic values and to raise members' collective voices, especially at the federal level. Indeed, the League must continue to knock – that open door is the key to communication and understanding. †

ON-LINE MEMBERSHIP WEB SITE NOW AVAILABLE TO ALL COUNCILS

The on-line membership Web site has been tested by several councils across the country and is now offered to all. The Web site allows councils to add new members, change addresses and report members in a secure Web site. A unique access code is given to one member per council for security protection and the access code is changed as the executive is changed. Early response has been very positive and councils have expressed appreciation for immediate access to membership information. For further information or to request an access code, phone or e-mail national office.

NATIONAL COUNCIL REGRETFULLY ADVISES

THE PASSING OF LIFE MEMBERS

Pollyanna Kilgour

Oliver, British Columbia

Diana McKenzie

Granisle, British Columbia

Ruth Hazlett

Comox, British Columbia