



2023 Annual Report Summary

CATHOLIC
and **LIVING IT!**



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Introduction:

It was a time of change and transformation for councils of The Catholic Women's League of Canada as a new council structure was adopted by a two-thirds vote of the membership in 2022. The new structure reduced the number of positions required at every level from 13 to eight. The new positions established were president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer, past president, chairperson of faith, chairperson of service and chairperson of social justice. By the end of 2023, the national level and 74% of parish councils had made the switch. The remaining 26% of parish councils intended to switch in January/February 2024. They were immersed in preparing for the change by identifying existing council activities and assigning them to offices in the new structure, seeking assistance from diocesan and/or provincial officers, explaining the changes to the membership, and accessing national resources to better understand the changes.



National Priority:

The priority focus for this nationwide organization for 2023 was to reestablish the connections between councils and levels that were lost during the COVID-19 pandemic. At the beginning of 2023, then National President Fran Lucas wrote, “Members’ faith and good work can be strengthened on their own or with the aid of others. Isn’t it more rewarding and possibly easier to do so with someone else? Yes, I am back to the relationship building message! Benefits to good relationships include healthier behaviours, a greater sense of purpose and better healing. Members can all speak to such benefits first-hand after coming through a trying three years, often being alone, separated from loved ones for extended periods and longing to gather with others. The desire of members to retain their parish council—to have a council that is meaningful to them, their parish and community—has been voiced many times. To be women of action, strong or even more vital than in the past, is always the intent. Only members can make that happen.”

An ambitious plan to have every parish council across the country receive a personal visit was rolled out. It required the financial resources of the national treasury, but more importantly, the cooperation and time of provincial and diocesan officers to make the visits. Beyond reestablishing lost connections, the visits took place to remind parish councils of the vital work they do in the community, remind members why they gather in community, and to ask what the visiting level could do to assist the parish councils.

Whilst the council visits were going on, Fran Lucas shared her concern for the unhoused in the second message of the year. In the spring issue of *The Canadian League*, she wrote, “Call, write or visit your local government official to request relief for the homeless situation or another issue in your community. Help local not-for-profits that support unhoused persons by volunteering or donating goods.... How else can I make a difference? Can I live in a more minimalistic way? Where do I have excess? Do I really need the three different bottles of hand lotion, half a dozen tubes of travel toothpaste, six white T-shirts and three pairs of running shoes? I need to do better at

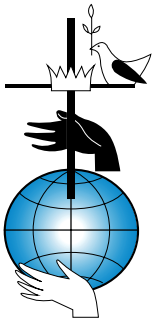
using up things before buying more. How about shopping locally to help small business owners to stay in business?”

The national level switched to the new structure in August 2023 when the election of national officers took place. The newly elected/acclaimed officers were National President Shari Guinta, National Vice-President Betty Colaneri, National Secretary-Treasurer Dorothy Johansen, National Past President Fran Lucas, National Chairperson of Faith Rolande Chernichan, National Chairperson of Service Joline Belliveau and National Chairperson of Social Justice Glenda Carson.

On the heels of the election, National President Shari Guinta affirmed her commitment to the Unity Outreach initiative and to a League that focuses on its future mission. She stated, “As councils at all levels transition into the new model, I am pleased to see the eager acceptance of the League’s forward mission. The work councils do, must do and will do, is streamlined and every bit as important, dedicated and diverse. The national executive/board listened to members across the country through the Unity Outreach initiative begun by then National President Fran Lucas and task forces have been put into place to plan for the future. These are exciting times for the League and for all members.”

By the end of 2023, two-thirds of all parish councils were visited at an investment in the grassroots in the amount of \$77,982. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive from both the visiting facilitator and the members themselves and served as a reminder of the importance of in person connections. Appreciation was extended for reestablishing the lines of communication, of listening, and of reminding members of the richness of their sisterhood and magnitude of service they offer to the church and the community. Councils expressed interest in knowing what each diocesan/provincial council would be doing with the information they received.





Representing Catholic Women

In May, then national president Fran Lucas and national president-elect Shari Guinta represented the League at the quadrennial assembly of the World Union of Catholic Women’s Organisations (WUCWO) in Assisi, Italy, where Honorary Life Member Barbara Dowding was elected to the WUCWO board as the regional vice president for North America. In September, National President Shari Guinta attended the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB) plenary session in Cornwall, Ontario.

Faith Standing Committee

The new standing committee of faith was launched in August 2023. The role as defined in the *Constitution & Bylaws* included the responsibility to encourage members to:

- Pray, individually and communally
- Uphold the sanctity of life
- Study Catholic teachings
- Stress the importance of the role of women in the church
- Foster vocations
- Advance ecumenism and interfaith endeavours

With prayer being central to the League and what sets it apart from other service organizations, councils assisted members in their communal and personal prayer life. A variety of prayer styles for meetings were used, including virtual offerings such as online rosaries and retreats or days of reflection.

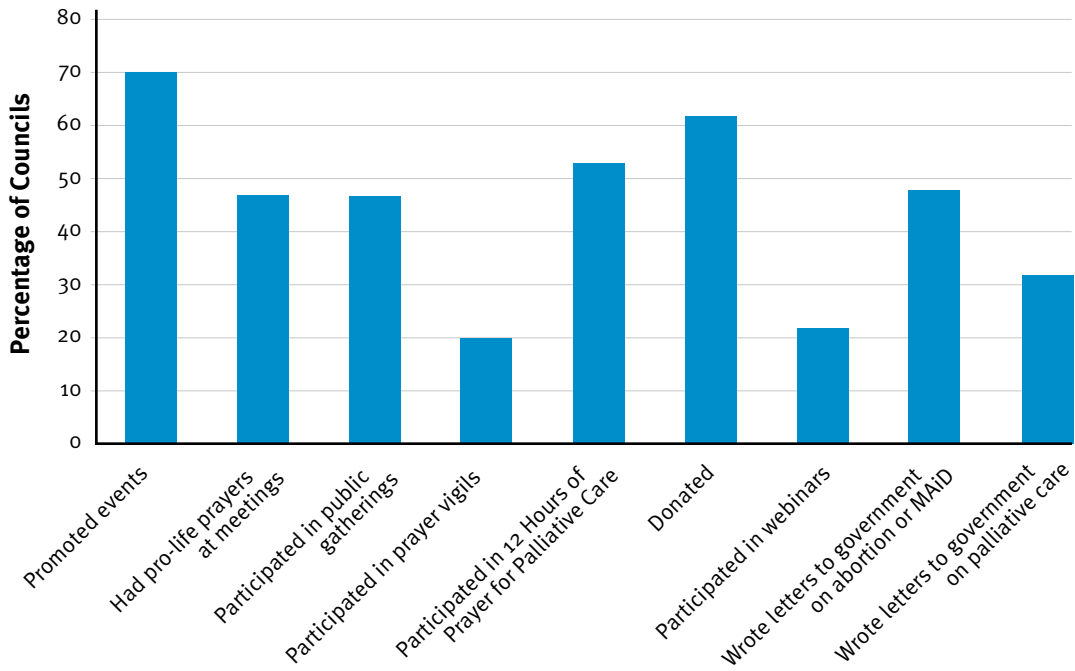
Assisting members and councils to develop spiritually and understand the teachings of the Catholic church were the focus of the national chairperson. Numerous webinars were organized and/or promoted to members across Canada on topics of Lent, the Synod on Synodality, a reconciliation rosary and Vatican II. Members were asked to pray and discern their own unique gifts and talents and how they could be of service to the League and to the church.

About 40% of parish councils participated in ecumenical or interfaith events. The most popular event was World Day of Prayer sponsored by the Women’s Inter-church Council of Canada. Also mentioned were ecumenical prayers groups, events and collaborative service opportunities. Christian faiths mentioned were Anglican, Baptist, Latter Day Saints, Lutheran, Mennonite, Methodist, Pentecostal, Presbyterian, Salvation Army and United. Interfaith events were fewer but included dialoguing with members of the Jewish and Muslim faiths.



The following chart outlines efforts taken to uphold the sanctity of life.

Pro-Life Activities





Service Standing Committee

The standing committee of service was also newly adopted at the national level in 2023 and combined some of the portfolios of three previous committees—Christian family life, community life and education and health. The set of responsibilities as defined in the *Constitution & Bylaws* included:

- Promote activities in service to members, the parish and community
- Advocate for and support services that include but are not limited to homelessness, human trafficking, poverty, bullying and racism
- Educate members about charitable needs, especially mission assistance at home and abroad

The new chairperson of service focused on six topics for the first annual report survey conducted under the new rubric—Catholic education, mental health, palliative care, environment, women’s health issues and support for immigrants and refugees.

Councils promoted Catholic education by sponsoring high school awards and scholarships, serving as school chaplains or on school boards, offering children’s liturgies adjacent to public schools, instructing students on praying the rosary, volunteering as tutors, supporting Catholic Education Week and World Catholic Education Day, hosting parental meet

and greet events and school barbecues, hosting poster, art, speaking, poetry or essay contests, hosting clubs over recess, donating books to the school library, assisting with the purchase of school uniforms, donating school supplies and to school breakfast programs, planning appreciation days for school staff, providing opportunities for students to complete community service hours, and encouraging taxpayers to direct their school taxes to support Catholic education.

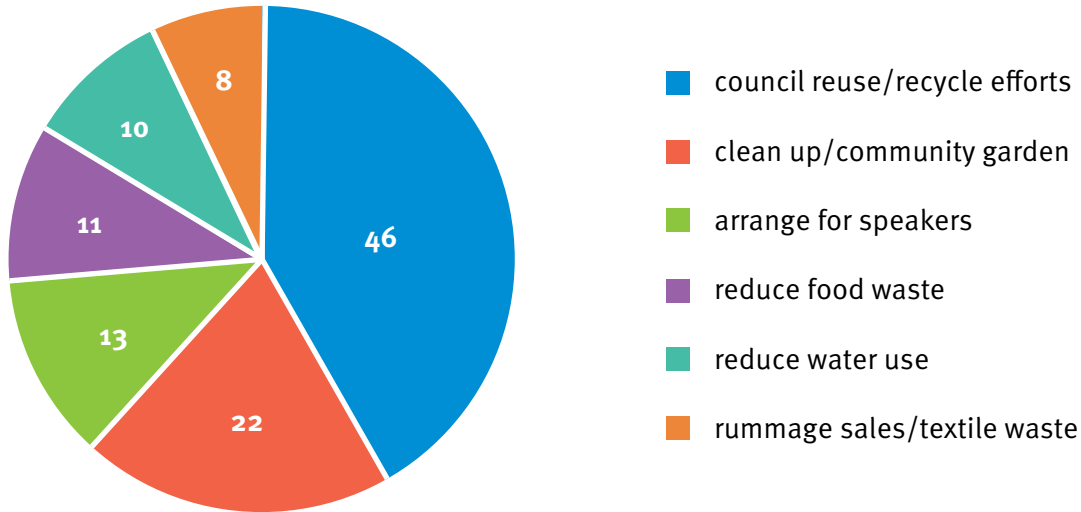
Seventy percent of councils focused on mental health as an aspect of their service pillar. Councils reported arranging for speakers on the topic of mental health and populations impacted such as the unhoused, seniors, victims of human trafficking and intimate partner violence, youth, the lonely and isolated, those living with food insecurity and those suffering from addictions. Canadian Mental Health Week was acknowledged, as was the increased risk of suicide and the lack of access to mental health support services. Some councils organized the League’s mental health postcard campaign, some promoted Bell Let’s Talk Day and some raised awareness about 988, the new national suicide crisis hotline. Some councils had speakers or organized retreat days devoted to self care and others performed corporal works of mercy by visiting, calling or sending cards to shut-ins.

Sixty percent of councils focused on palliative care during the year. Council activities included showing videos such as *Fatal Flaws*, listening to podcasts including the *Art of Dying Well*, arranging presentations, participating in webinars, holding group discussions, using *12 Hours of Prayer for Palliative Care* (6% of councils) and *Horizons of Hope: A Toolkit for Parishes in Palliative Care* (8% of councils), donating to and visiting local hospice, signing petitions and writing letters to government, holding postcard campaigns, acknowledging Hospice and Palliative Care Week and knitting prayer shawls.



One-quarter of councils undertook some activity to protect the environment.

Most Popular Council Activities to Address Environmental Issues in Percentages



One in five councils addressed women’s health covering the topics of abortion, access to feminine hygiene products, ageing, alcoholism, Alzheimer’s disease and dementia, anxiety, arthritis, blood donations, brain health, cancer, cardiovascular disease, cell phone use, celiac disease, chronic pain, colonoscopies, defibrillators, depression, domestic violence, exercise, fall prevention, food handling, foot care, grief support, macular degeneration, mammograms, Naloxone, nutrition, oil of oregano, pap

tests, prediabetes, post partum infant and mother care, respiratory illnesses, stress, suicide, unplanned pregnancy and vaccinations.

Councils provided support through the traditional means of donating various goods, services and time to newcomers to Canada. Newcomers came from countries such as Afghanistan, China, India, Kenya, Nigeria, Pakistan, Peru, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Syria, Turkey and Ukraine. The bulk of the refugees given assistance came from Syria and Ukraine.



Social Justice Standing Committee

At the national level, one resolution was adopted at the annual national convention, Resolution 2023.01 Combatting Textile Waste in Canada. Other topics considered by the national resolutions committee were child soldiers, compassionate care services and fast fashion.

Resolutions adopted at other levels of the League and acted upon by parish councils covered topics such as banning advertising of gambling, clean water, euthanasia, food insecurity, funding of prostheses, infanticide, keeping Christ in Christmas, homeschooling, human trafficking, loneliness, long term care homes care provision, lyme disease, seniors advocates, single use catheters and year round washroom accessibility in parks.

During the first months of 2023, the national standing committee chairpersons and honorary life member and life member volunteers reviewed the national position papers. Nine completed position papers were adopted by the national executive prior to the national annual meeting of members. The position papers were adopted:

- Abortion
- Euthanasia and Medical Assistance in Dying
- Health Research
- Matrimony and Same-Sex Unions
- Reproductive and Genetic Technologies
- The Use of Stem Cells for Research Purposes
- Truth and Reconciliation



- Waste Management
- Water

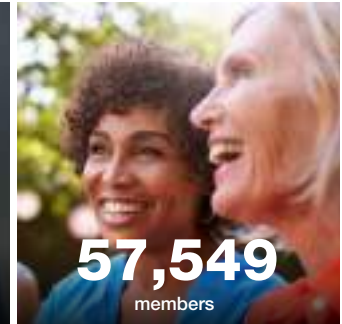
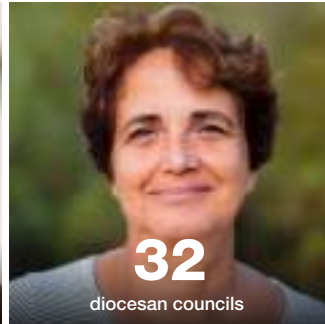


Parish councils listed the federal bills they monitored or acted upon. The list is extensive, however councils primarily focused on C-314 *An Act to amend the Criminal Code (medical assistance in dying)* that sought “to amend the *Criminal Code* to provide that a mental disorder is not a grievous and irremediable medical condition for which a person could receive medical assistance in dying.” The bill was defeated at second reading on October 18, 2023.

C-4	<i>An Act to amend the Criminal Code (conversion therapy)</i>
C-5	<i>An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act</i>
C-7	<i>An Act to amend the Criminal Code (medical assistance in dying)</i>
C-11	<i>Online Streaming Act</i>
C-14	<i>An Act to amend the Criminal Code and to make related amendments to other Acts (medical assistance in dying)</i>
C-18	<i>Online News Act</i>
C-22	<i>Canada Disability Benefit Act</i>
C-27	<i>Digital Charter Implementation Act, 2022</i>
C-36	<i>Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act</i>
C-37	<i>An Act to amend the Department of Employment and Social Development Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts (Employment Insurance Board of Appeal)</i>
C-38	<i>An Act to amend the Indian Act (new registration entitlements)</i>
C-39	<i>An Act to amend the Criminal Code (medical assistance in dying)</i>
C-41	<i>An Act to amend the Criminal Code and make consequential amendments to other Acts</i>
C-47	<i>Budget Implementation Act, 2023, No. 1</i>
C-214	<i>An Act to amend the Canadian Navigable Waters Act (lakes and rivers in British Columbia)</i>
C-216	<i>Health Based Approach to Substance Use Act</i>
C-217	<i>National Freshwater Strategy Act</i>
C-230	<i>Protection of Freedom of Conscience Act</i>
C-246	<i>Constitution Act, 2022 (representation of Quebec)</i>
C-262	<i>Corporate Responsibility to Protect Human Rights Act</i>
C-268	<i>Protection of Freedom of Conscience Act</i>
C-270	<i>Stopping Internet Sexual Exploitation Act</i>
C-281	<i>International Human Rights Act</i>
C-291	<i>An Act to amend the Criminal Code and to make consequential amendments to other Acts (child sexual abuse and exploitation material)</i>
C-295	<i>An Act to amend the Criminal Code (neglect of vulnerable adults)</i>
C-311	<i>Violence Against Pregnant Women Act</i>
C-314	<i>An Act to amend the Criminal Code (medical assistance in dying)</i>
C-318	<i>An Act to amend the Employment Insurance Act and the Canada Labour Code (adoptive and intended parents)</i>
C-322	<i>National Framework for a School Food Program Act</i>
C-337	<i>Textile Waste Reduction Strategy Act</i>
C-357	<i>An Act to amend the Government Employees Compensation Act</i>
C-360	<i>Wasted Food Reduction and Recovery Act</i>
S-201	<i>An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act and the Regulation Adapting the Canada Elections Act for the Purposes of a Referendum (voting age)</i>
S-210	<i>Protecting Young Persons from Exposure to Pornography Act</i>
S-211	<i>Fighting Against Forced Labour and Child Labour in Supply Chains Act</i>
S-223	<i>An Act to amend the Criminal Code and Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (trafficking in human organs)</i>
S-248	<i>An Act to amend the Criminal Code (medical assistance in dying)</i>
S-253	<i>National Framework on Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Act</i>

Organizational Structure and Statistics

National council



Organizational Renewal

Recognizing the service-oriented mission of the organization demands youthful energy and action, and further recognizing a resistance of existing members to take on leadership roles to help the League achieve its mission, the national executive struck a committee in 2017 to develop a strategic plan to address these and other issues faced by the membership.

The steering committee generated 50 strategies to move the League in the direction set in the 17 objectives approved in 2017. These 50 strategies were tested at diocesan and provincial conventions. With feedback from more than 4,000 members from conventions, the steering committee determined which strategies would have the most significant impact and should be addressed first over a five-year period of implementation.

A synopsis of the tremendous effort put forward in 2023 by volunteers to advance the League into the 21st century based on the extensive research done by members yields the following resources designed to assist councils:

- *Call to Family, Community, Participation and Subsidiarity*
- Conflict Resolution workshop
- Core Purpose and Objects PowerPoint, bookmark and placemat
- *Members' Communication Guide*
- Mentor Skills Bank
- *Rights and Responsibilities*
- *Tools to Increase Connectedness Between Members*
- *Train the Trainer Guide*

Leadership and Recognition

Through its system of election to office and its organizational structure, The Catholic Women's League of Canada offers opportunities for leadership, personal and spiritual development with increasing levels of responsibility and at a pace chosen by the member. With seven positions at the national level, 88 at the provincial level and 256 at the diocesan level, a total of 351 senior leadership opportunities to serve "For God and Canada" exist. This is down from the 551 executive leadership opportunities available before the streamlining of officers project took effect and is a reduction of required leaders by one third.

Five members were added to the rolls of Bellelle Guerin award recipients, bringing the total to 223 members or 0.4% of the membership. An additional 232 members received a maple leaf service pin, bringing the total to 4,456 members or 7.8% of the membership.



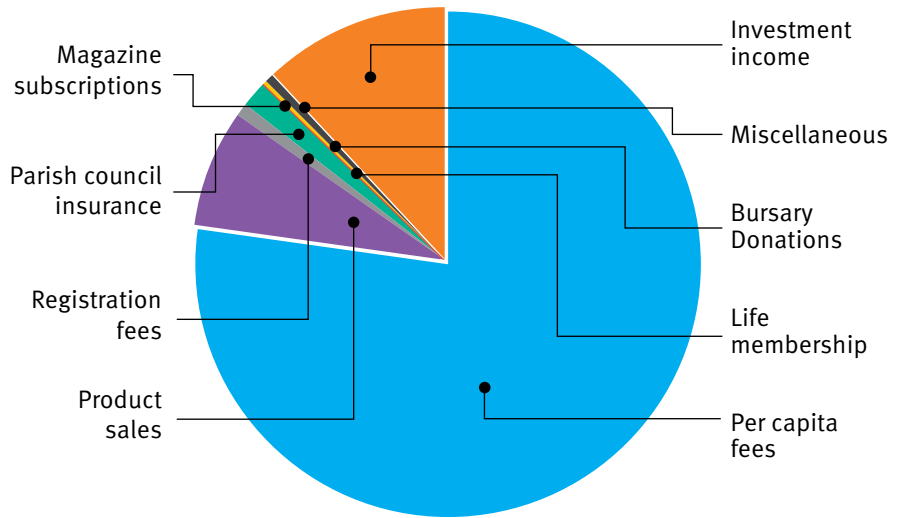
Financial Information

The League experienced operating deficits for several years and also required an investment of more than \$1,000,000 to re-vision the League so it could evolve into the organization members had been requesting for almost two decades. In 2022, with permission of the membership for a \$5.00 per member increase, the national treasury was once again able to provide three print magazines per year to members, provide funding opportunities for provincial and diocesan councils to organize workshops for their regions, and allowed all parish councils to be visited at least once during the year.

REVENUE RECEIVED

Per capita fees	\$ 1,482,628
Product sales	\$ 143,798
Registration fees	\$ 16,865
Parish council insurance	\$ 29,970
Magazine subscriptions	\$ 3,624
Life membership	\$ 3,300
Bursary donations	\$ 11,228
Miscellaneous	\$ 1,135
Investment income	\$ 224,320

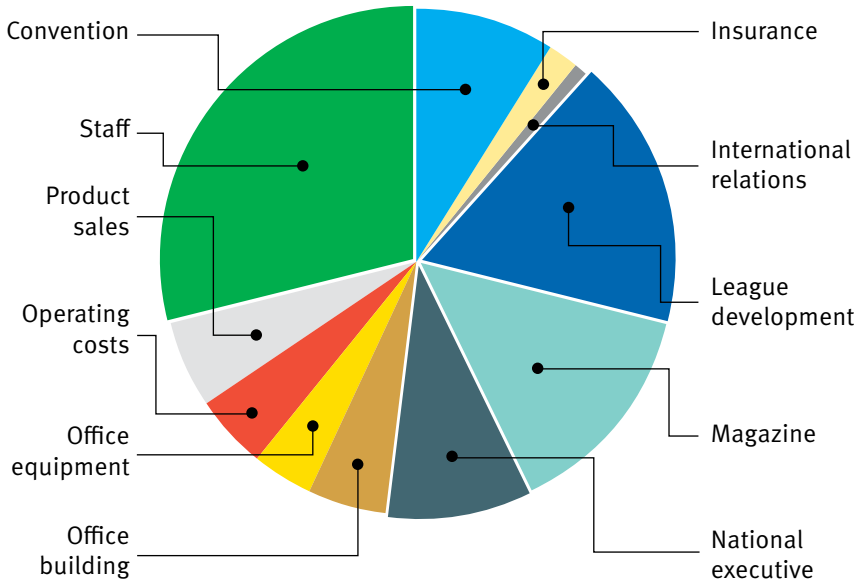
\$ 1,916,868



EXPENDITURES

Convention	\$ 142,687
Insurance	\$ 32,590
International relations	\$ 12,664
League development	\$ 271,784
Magazine	\$ 222,300
National executive	\$ 143,029
Office building	\$ 81,900
Office equipment	\$ 58,342
Operating costs	\$ 76,171
Product sales	\$ 89,708
Staff	\$ 454,278

\$ 1,585,453





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