

Inspired by the Spirit
Women Respond to God's Call
THEME PRESENTATION
by National President Margaret Ann Jacobs

The theme that I chose for the 2017-19 term was prompted and motivated by the Holy Spirit. I clearly identify with the apostles that Jesus chose to share the Gospel message – unequipped, lacking knowledge and courage. But I also firmly believe that if we open our minds and hearts to the unconditional love of God, all things are possible. God does not choose the gifted. God gifts those God calls and chooses. Our challenge is to respond to this call. As members of The Catholic Women's League of Canada we do respond to this call. And so our theme was born:

Inspired by the Spirit
Women Respond to God's Call

To develop the theme, I generated a prayer that focuses on three things: the unconditional love of God, the gifts of the Spirit, and the fruits of the Spirit. I believe each is integral to the service we offer as League members.

Opening Prayer

Spirit of the Living God
open our hearts and minds
to experience the unconditional love of God.

God made me to know, **love** and serve Him in this world and to be happy with Him in the next. Note the emphasis on **“love”**. This is the greatest gift that God gives us – His unconditional love.

Gifts most often are material things. But the greatest gift of all is the gift of self. We ourselves are the greatest gift, the perfect gift, the gift of love that we can give to another. Think about the gift of love given in marriage, the gift of love given in celibacy for religious, the gift of love given in service to country or for others. For married people, it is the revelation of their love and commitment to the other that is the Gift. Likewise for religious or those in service, it is the deepening desire to be with or for other that deepens the total giving or gifting.

1 Corinthians 4.7 tells us ...

“... Who made you superior to others? Didn't God give you everything you have? Well then, how can you boast, as if what you have were not a gift?”

When we as human beings give, we only give what we have been given. What do we have that we haven't first received from God, the Giver of all? Everything you see has been given to you, to me, to the world by God. Through the grace of God, we reverence His creation. What a marvel! We were created by God in his image

with intelligence and free will so that we could experience personal relationships. He gave the ultimate gift – the gift of himself.

We know from the gospel of John 3.16

“God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life.”

God the Father gave his Son to Mary and through her to us. The gift is not only Jesus in person, it is also the Spirit of Jesus in person. If you are in communion with Jesus (in the state of grace), God the Father and God the Son in mutual love are pouring forth their love in the Holy Spirit.

We know these things are true through faith. We must seek the Holy Spirit in prayer, the sacraments, scripture, and through reflection, meditation and contemplation.

We learn from the gospel of Luke 11.13

“If you ... know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him.”

With a partner, share a personal story. When have you experienced unconditional love?

Closing Comments:

So we need to open our hearts and minds to recognize the unconditional love of God in our lives but also in all of God’s creation. Open the gift of God’s love and extend that gift of love so freely given to us to all we encounter - including some that are not all that lovable.

**We pray:
Come Holy Spirit,
reveal yourself to me so that in giving yourself to me,
you will also show me the face of the Father and the Son and
I will know myself as a
beloved daughter of the Father and sister of the Son.
Amen.**

PART II – EMPOWERED BY THE SPIRIT WOMEN RESPOND

In our League Prayer we ask God to “Send your Holy Spirit upon us to give light to our minds and strength to our wills...” and God will. And God does. The Spirit works within us ... shows us what we are called to do and be ... nudges us ... leads us ... pulls us.

We have been gifted by our God, gifted with special gifts that are given to be used for the good of others. God calls all of us to recognize, develop and use these gifts... in our journey with our sisters and with Christ in the League.

We begin with the following premises:

Everyone has been gifted by God.
The gifts we have are not the same as the gifts others have.
All gifts are precious, none is greater than another.
All gifts fill a part of God's plan for his people.

John's gospel tells us ...

“You did not choose me; I chose you and appointed you to go and bear much fruit, the kind of fruit that endures. And so the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name.” John 15.16

We are all called, chosen by God for a particular purpose.

What is the difference between a natural talent and a spiritual gift?

Ability becomes a spiritual gift when it meets biblical criteria. One passage of the New Testament which clearly reveals spiritual giftedness tied to proper motives and a divine dynamic is 1 Peter 4.10-11

“As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace. Whoever preaches, let it be with the words of God; whoever serves, let it be with the strength that God supplies, so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong glory and dominion forever. Amen.”

There are four criteria that distinguish spiritual gifts:

1. A spiritual gift is expressed with a **servant motive**, to minister to others.
2. A spiritual gift is expressed with a **steward motive**, recognizing and managing this special ability not as one's own, but as God's.
3. A spiritual gift is expressed as **sacred worship**, giving God the awe and credit due to Him.
4. A spiritual gift is expressed as strengthened **“by the strength which God supplies”**.

Spiritual gifts are characterized by serving one another as good stewards with God's strength and by glorifying God in Jesus Christ.

You ... I ... we all have been gifted by God.

Matthew's gospel 25.14-29 tells us:

“He gave to each one according to his ability... For to every person who has something, even more will be given, and he will have more than enough; but the person who has nothing, even the little that he has will be taken away from him.”

We can learn much from this FABLE:

A group of animals decided to improve their general welfare by starting a school. The curriculum included swimming, running, climbing and flying. The duck, an excellent swimmer, was deficient in other areas, so he majored in climbing, running and flying, much to the detriment of his swimming. The rabbit, a superior runner, was forced to spend so much of his time in other classes that he soon lost much of his famed speed. The squirrel, who had been rated “A” as a climber dropped to a “C” because his instructors spent hours trying to teach him to swim and fly. And the eagle was disciplined for soaring to the treetop when he had been told to learn how to climb, even though flying was most natural to him.

So we need to accept how God has gifted us. We have a responsibility to grow in God's love, to develop the gifts God has given us and multiply our talents for the glory of God and the good of God's people.

We learn in Matthew 7.7-11

“Ask and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks the door will be opened. ...”

Jesus is telling us that “For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks the door will be opened.”

Does that literally mean that we will get everything we pray for? Not likely ... BUT ... God will always answer our prayers.

Loving God, we ask your Holy Spirit to:

**Empower us with the gifts of your Spirit
so that we may
respond to God's call
in joyful service.**

We ask the Holy Spirit to shower His gifts upon us. Remember: **Spiritual gifts are characterized by serving one another as good stewards with God's strength and by glorifying God in Jesus Christ.**

- We ask the Spirit for the **wisdom** to know what is worth believing in.
- We ask the Spirit to help us grow in **understanding** of God and one another.
- We ask the Spirit for **right judgment** or counsel so that we can make choices that are worthy of our calling as League members.
- We ask the Spirit for the **courage** to stand up for what we believe in.
- We ask for the **knowledge** we need to come to know God more and more.
- We ask the Spirit to help us become more **reverent** and prayerful so that we may come to know God more deeply.
- We ask the Spirit to help us always to stand in **wonder** of the awesome world in which we live and through that world we will come to know you, our Creator.

Closing Prayer

The effect of the Holy Spirit is to take all that God has given us – our gifts, experiences, passions and knowledge - and set them to work bringing glory to Christ in the Church and in the world.

As League members we need to develop the gifts that the Holy Spirit has entrusted to us, so that in our League work we can respond to God's call in joyful service.

PART III – THE FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT

The third stanza of our theme prayer reads:

**Inspire and bless the members of the
Catholic Women’s League
so that the fruits of your Spirit
may be evidenced in all that we say and do.**

According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, “The fruits of the Spirit are perfections that the Holy Spirit forms in us as the first fruits of eternal glory. The tradition of the Church lists 12 of them: ‘charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, chastity.’” (CCC 1832). St. Paul’s letter to the Galatians lists nine: “... the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”

Like spiritual gifts, the fruit of the Spirit is evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit in one’s life. It is important to understand the difference between these Holy Spirit manifestations. Spiritual gifts, given by the Holy Spirit are for the purpose of ministry in the body of Christ. **All Christians receive some of the gifts but no believer possesses all of them. All the fruit however are expected to be found in growing Christians.** The fruit of the Spirit is the evidence of a growing likeness to God as an individual lives in obedience to and dependence on the Holy Spirit.

Personal Story – Gifts vs Fruits

LOVE

Read 1 Corinthians 13 and reflect on its message. What does it have to do with love? If you replaced the word “love” with your name, would you be telling the truth? Are there some things that could use some work? 1 Cor. 13. 1-13

LOVE IS: the self-giving love that gives freely without asking anything in return, and does not consider the worth of its object. We need to make a habit of showing love to those around us, love that is given freely without asking anything in return and does not consider the worth of its object. **How could you show love to a fellow League sister?**

JOY IS: rooted in God and comes from Him. It is more serene and stable than worldly happiness. It is the awareness that God is one’s strength and protector, the sure knowledge that one is loved by God. **Think of the ways you are blessed to belong to the CWL.**

PEACE IS: the result of a resting in a relationship with God. It is a kind of equilibrium that comes from trusting that everything is in the hands of God and that one is whole, complete, orderly, stable and poised for a blessing. **Think of the ways you can initiate peace in your family, council, parish or community.**

PATIENCE includes forbearance, long-suffering, kindness and fidelity and refers to one who could avenge herself but does not. **Reflect on ways that you need to cultivate the fruit of patience.**

KINDNESS IS: acting for the good of people regardless of what they do. It is goodness in action, sweetness in disposition, gentleness in dealing with others, benevolence. Kindness is doing something and not expecting anything in return. Kindness is respect and helping others without waiting for someone to help one back. **Has someone in the League showed you kindness?**

GOODNESS IS: character recognized in moral excellence, in strength of essence, in virtuous conduct. **In what ways could you develop a greater sense of goodness in your personal life?**

FAITHFULNESS IS: committing oneself to something or someone. Being faithful requires personal resolve not to wander away from commitments or promises. True faith requires trust in God, is received from God, and never generated by man. **Are you faithful to your League promise?**

GENTLENESS IS: a divinely-balanced virtue that can only operate through faith. It is defined as a disposition that is even-tempered, tranquil, balanced in spirit, unpretentious, and that has passions under control. The word is best translated 'meekness,' not as an indication of weakness, but of power and strength under control. The person who possesses this quality pardons injuries, corrects faults, and rules his own spirit well. **How could you be more gentle in your League dealings?**

SELF CONTROL IS: strength, having mastery, able to control one's thoughts and actions. **Have I practiced self-control in my League activities?**

Closing comments:

There is no doubt that it is challenging sometimes to work with so many women of such varied gifts and talents. How we interact with each other is often what makes the difference in how vibrant our parish councils are and whether we can attract members. Through our actions we can build God's kingdom.

We need to reflect on what our handbill says:

- We are the voice of Catholic women united in faith, promoting Christian values in the home and in the world.
- We offer hospitality, friendship, sisterhood, support, and affirmation that empower women to reach their full potential.
- We provide faith based opportunities for spiritual growth, leadership development and many avenues for service, advocacy and social justice.
- As Catholic women, we are empowered by the Spirit to renew our commitment to the call to holiness through service to the people of God, one in heart, voice and mission as we work to strengthen family values, create sanctuaries of peace and be the Good News to all.

So in closing:

Inspired by the Spirit women respond to God's loving call empowered by the gifts of the Spirit, invited to bear fruit. We are challenged in our councils to be loving, joyful women who work patiently for people, whose kindness and goodness touch the lives of all we encounter, who are faithful to the Gospel message and live lives of humility and self-control.

Let us recite the theme prayer together:

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open our hearts and minds
to experience the unconditional love of God.**

**Empower us with the gifts of your Spirit
so that we may
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**Inspire and bless the members of the
Catholic Women's League
so that the fruits of your Spirit
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Amen.**