

Background for Catholic Women's League Leaders for a Presentation to Spiritual Advisors

This background document is for your review to assist in meeting with spiritual advisors either one-on-one with a parish council spiritual advisor or in a larger group.

Significant Issues of Engaging Spiritual Advisors

Problem: The non-engagement of parish priests as spiritual advisors.

Priests often:

- are too busy
- are unsure what is expected of them
- are unenthusiastic
- do not offer support or encourage membership in the League to the parish

What has worked: *relationships*

Just as members realize that personal connection with someone brings them into the League, so too with spiritual advisors. The spiritual advisor is more supportive when the president creates a personal relationship. The spiritual advisor plays an important role in the local council (support, encouraging others to join, etc.).

Author Elizabeth Tomlin wrote in her book, *Joyful Momentum: Growing and Sustaining Vibrant Women's Groups*, "Women's ministry needs pastoral care, especially to stay close to the sacraments. Forge a relationship with your pastor by getting to know him, seeking his input, and being mindful of his many responsibilities in the parish."

Suggestions:

- Parish council president and chairperson of faith should meet personally with the spiritual advisor.
- Invite the spiritual advisor to assist in the growth of the League in the parish. Let the spiritual advisor know there is a correlation between a spiritual advisor's support and the growth of the League.
- Introduce the new Catholic Women's League focus:
 - faith, service and social justice
 - new (2018) Mission Statement: The Catholic Women's League of Canada calls its members to grow in faith, and to witness to the love of God through ministry and service.
- Talk about what the spiritual advisor role is and is not.
- New council leaders should share their vision and ask for the spiritual advisor's support.
- Share how the League is more than a women's group, prayer group or fundraising group for the parish.
- Ask if the spiritual advisor has a focus of interest where the council could be of assistance.

- Ask the spiritual advisor's advice on where they see the needs in the parish.
- Ask the spiritual advisor about their time available to offer to the parish council. Engage them as much as possible.
- It is important to put the spiritual advisor on the agenda of each meeting. Ask the spiritual advisor to do something specific, such as give a
 - greeting at the beginning of the meeting, sharing their goals for the League
 - short presentation at the beginning or at a time best for the spiritual advisor within the meeting. When asking the spiritual advisor to come to a meeting, suggest a topic to discuss, such as:
 - issues "close to home"
 - Synod on Synodality
 - latest encyclicals
 - prayer
 - liturgical seasons (Advent or Lent)
 - their experience or a short presentation about their vocation journey (international priests)
 - written message to be read at the meeting
- **Invite** the spiritual advisor to conventions. Tell him/her how proud you would be to have him/her there with you, especially if there is something special to celebrate, such as an award, a large council or a new council. Offer financial assistance to the spiritual advisor to come to the meeting. (Just as it is important for a council to prioritize the finances for going to meetings at different levels, it is just as important to prioritize the finances to encourage and invite the spiritual advisor to attend).
- Identify strong, dynamic spiritual advisors. Ask them to write an article for the provincial/diocesan newsletter or parish bulletin or ask them for a short video.
- If there is a distinct personality clash between the president and the spiritual advisor, find someone else on the council to liaise with the spiritual advisor.
- If the pastor is unwilling or unable to lead the council as the spiritual advisor ask if there is someone else he might suggest for the role. Lay (female) spiritual advisors, religious or deacons can fill the role.
- When councils can suggest or request a spiritual advisor, ask for someone who "wants to be there" and who wants to be involved.
- Treat the spiritual advisor with respect.

At the diocesan or provincial level:

- Ask for the opportunity to present to seminarians and new priests coming to Canada or at priests' meeting days.
- Bring an energetic and supportive spiritual advisor as part of the presentation.
- Ask the bishop to send each parish priest a letter of support for the Catholic Women's League. Some priests are unsure what to do without the encouragement of their bishop.
- Ask to be invited to the annual meeting of Catholic bishops in the province and include the provincial vice-president.
- Share the *2021 Annual Report Summary* to demonstrate the accomplishments of the

League.

- Give each person attending a welcome kit for spiritual advisors with information about the League, a spiritual advisor brochure, etc.

From Parish Spiritual Advisor Fr. Francis Hengen's Perspective

- When a priest is appointed to a parish that has a CWL parish council, he is, in fact, spiritual advisor for that council by his appointment as pastor/administrator.
- Do not apologize for the constitution and what it says regarding the spiritual advisor. The League has the approval of the bishops of Canada. The local diocesan bishop, with the diocesan president, appoint a diocesan spiritual advisor, and the bishop, by appointing a priest to a parish, also appoints him as parish spiritual advisor. Bishops should understand this and let the pastors know that fulfilling the role of spiritual advisor is not an option. If the pastor does not want to fulfill the role, then it may well be for the council's good to choose someone else. The parish council should install any new pastor as its spiritual advisor at the earliest opportunity.
- Spiritual advisors need to be held accountable for their presence, especially if the council has covered their costs to attend conventions. The business sessions are where they hear about the League's concerns and what members are working on.
- If the strategic plan is to become a reality, then this issue regarding spiritual advisors must be dealt with. The dynamic women working on the plan cannot let reluctant advisors dim their dynamism and enthusiasm. They need to let the advisors know what they expect of them—attend meetings, share in discussions, give a talk, preside at League ceremonies, attend conventions when possible and take part in League activities.
- Stand with the pastor/spiritual advisor and encourage him to be the best advisor he can be for the good of the council and for his own good.

From B.C. & Yukon Provincial Spiritual Advisor Fr. David John's Perspective

Be aware of how we speak about and honour our spiritual advisor's time and input. Do we think of the spiritual advisor bringing a few minutes of input or bringing the League to spiritual maturity?

- I hope that the spiritual input at League meetings will envelop members, not just into some vague holiness, but more fully into the spiritual life of the parish and the wider church. If this were the case, then being a member would mean that one would feel more connected with Sunday mass, the other sacraments and the whole way we pray as a Catholic Christian community. Unless the spiritual advisor sees the need of the members and can fulfill it, then there really is no connection between the spiritual at each meeting and anything else that happens in the League or the local parish, unless the spiritual advisor decides to draw up a longer-term plan for each.
- Spiritual over an extended period—what we get is a little shot of holiness at each meeting without any long-term direction. The way to foster the spiritual well-being of each member is to enable them to see their rightful place in the liturgical life of the church. The quote I always go back to is from the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy II*, "... full, conscious and active participation in liturgical celebrations called for by the very nature of the liturgy.

[Which] is their right and duty by reason of their baptism.” When a parish council recognizes the importance of “full, conscious and active participation in liturgical celebrations” and is willing to take on this “duty by reason of their baptism,” then I think the spiritual at meetings will be much easier because it will be connected to, and be part of, the rest of the spiritual life of the church. Currently, I wonder if this link is missing if, each month, a randomly chosen topic is selected.

Specific Instructions to CWL Presidents

- Enthuse presidents about the capacity they and their council have to reach out and surround their priest, deacon or religious with faith-filled love. This “gift” the League holds in its treasury and offers to share with its spiritual advisors can so often be seen in the depth of faith of members who give so much of their lives to the League, so perhaps it might be fruitful to remember to highlight these things as well. What needs to be presented to presidents is not a checklist of things to remember but more a description of their relationship with their spiritual advisors that is inspiring and thought-provoking.
- Finally, please don’t celebrate my birthday or anniversary of ordination—rather, celebrate the mass!

From Saskatchewan Provincial Spiritual Advisor Fr. Peter Nnanga’s Perspective

The question has always been, “How do members get the priest involved in their League programs and events?”

Three ways priests get involved in League activities/programs:

- A. By way of personal interest:** a priest can make himself so easily and readily available to the League in his parish out of his desire and wish to see *a more united and community-minded parish community*. He will do the same for the Knights of Columbus or youth group if such groups are in his parish.
- B. By way of invitation by the League:** Some priests will not participate in most League activities or programs unless they are formally and officially invited and given a role to play or something to do. Include them and get them involved.
- C. By official appointment:** For example, a priest appointed as a diocesan or provincial spiritual advisor will find himself involved in League activities or programs at his parish if there is an established council already. If one does not yet exist, he will be more interested in establishing a council in his parish.

League activities to involve your priest in:

- Eucharistic adoration before League meetings
- Celebrate mass before League meetings
- Ask him to give a brief (5-10 minutes) talk on a given topic
- Invite him to take part in lunch or a tea break during the gathering
- Let him know what activity is being done in the parish, even if he is not participating. Keep good and open lines of communication with the priest.
- Celebrate his birthday and priestly anniversary. For instance, book mass for him and send him prayers and goodwill messages or cards.

- Celebrate or mark your birthdays and wedding/marriage anniversaries and include the priest in the celebration.

The parish is a family—the pastor is the father of this parish family; the parish is a community—the pastor is the head of this community; therefore, the pastor should be interested in the total well-being and functionality of his parish family and community. The CWL parish council must find ways to get its pastor involved in its activities. As for me, I am personally interested in seeing that my parish is more family-oriented and community-minded, and I find working with the League to be one of the best ways to achieve that.

Disclaimer: Responses by the priests have been edited.