

National Chairperson of Legislation Glenda Carson

The new year started with significant activity involving two major projects due for completion. For the first project, I was in a collaborative, supportive role for the national standing committee chairperson for resolutions, Rolande Chernichan, and her task to revise the League resolutions resource documents. The second project was completing the League Position Paper Review Project, which is addressed later in this report.

From a government legislation perspective, 2023 continued to see much concern and controversy regarding Bill C-7, *An Act to amend the Criminal Code (medical assistance in dying)* and was monitored from a national legislation standing committee perspective. As the standing committee chairperson for legislation, I have continued participating in the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB) medical assistance in dying subcommittee. The discussion by this diverse group is always enlightening. It supports the importance of a grassroots response to the significant concerns arising from euthanasia legislation and the slippery slope we are experiencing in Canada. Important points of discussion that have come forth include the consideration of emancipated minors as part of the legislative criteria for euthanasia. Other significant discussion points have been the inclusion of Canadians living with disabilities in the euthanasia criteria and the inadequate access to quality palliative care as an alternative to medical assistance in dying. The Canadian Disabilities Association has been a consistently strong voice regarding the concerning use of euthanasia in response to inadequate community social service and the social bias by some health professions that those living with disabilities must have a poor quality of life, thereby meeting the criteria for euthanasia. This is otherwise known as medical ableism. While Canada is considered a leading nation in broadening euthanasia legislation, palliative care remains a struggle for many Canadians to access appropriately. There is also concern that many do not understand palliative care and hospice services, thereby defaulting to medical assistance in dying to alleviate their suffering. In March 2023, in response to the ongoing concerns regarding Bill C-7, I had the privilege of writing a joint communiqué with Dorothy Johansen, national standing committee chairperson for Christian family life, regarding the significance of this legislation for vulnerable Canadians and the need for more government support for palliative care. Resources for members were also provided in the communiqué.

On the more positive side, much good legislation is occurring through our parliamentarians. This is evident through my ongoing monitoring of legislation at the federal level and my online participation as a member of the delegation to Ottawa to discuss matters about some of the League resolutions. For example, Bill C-22, an *Act to reduce poverty and support the financial security of persons with disabilities*, has created the Canada Disability Benefit. Human trafficking also took on a major focus this year through the consultations held by the national government's standing committee on the Status of Women. Members have responded to some of these topics through communiqués, letter writing, petitions and the presentation of briefs.

In response to members' requests, information on what it means for the Catholic Women's League to be a non-partisan organization and the deciphering of federal and provincial legislation accountabilities were made available through articles published in *The Canadian League's* winter and spring issues. The latter article was written by national legislation subcommittee members Life

Member Elizabeth Doyle and Betsy Fletcher and contained information vital to developing League resolutions on legislation topics.

The League Position Paper Review Project concluded with the 2023 August pre-annual meeting of members (AMM) executive meeting. This project was developed in response to the need to update the number of outdated position statements published on the national website at the start of my term. A position paper is a formal statement defining the League's position or stance on a topic or issue. It gives readers a summary of the dimensions of the topic or issue from the League's perspective and can be used both for information for members and for informing the public. Position papers may be developed in response to one or more national League resolutions as well as League positions presented through correspondence by the national president, a response by the League to a position or plan of action put forward by another organization, such as the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops and in response to current or pending national or international legislation. Because of the significant workload involved in reviewing and revising the League position papers, a two-year, two-phase project was proposed and adopted by the national executive/board in October 2021.

Phase 1 of the project involved most provincial chairpersons of legislation and resolutions reviewing the published League position papers for relevancy and the need for revision. The national standing committee chairpersons, with the leadership of National Chairperson of Resolutions Rolande Chernichan, also reflected on the need for position papers as they reviewed the resolutions that came under their committee for archiving. Criteria for critiquing the potential position paper topics were developed to guide their work. The result of the first phase of the League Position Paper Project was the adoption by the national executive of 10 recommendations for position paper topics for revision or development and six papers for archiving. In addition to the position paper research, a League policy and procedure was adopted and published in the *National Manual of Policy and Procedure* in April 2023.

During the winter and spring months of 2023, the national standing committee chairpersons for community life, Christian family life, education and health and international relations, together with honorary life and life member volunteers, drafted the position papers recommended for revision or development. These position papers were presented to the national executive at the 2023 pre-AMM executive meeting. Nine position paper topics were adopted and will be posted on the national website.

The following position papers were adopted:

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

- Water (revised)

The following position papers have been archived:

- 1986. Euthanasia and Living Wills
- 1992. Euthanasia
- 1994. Euthanasia
- 1988. Childcare
- 2004. Youth Violence and Youth Criminal Justice Act
- 2006. Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide

Acknowledgement must go to all the provincial and national standing committee chairpersons and life members in Phase 1 and Phase 2 of this project who stepped forward to take on this significant task. Also, a very special acknowledgement goes to the original authors of the position papers that have been revised and archived. Your work has supported the League over the years and was foundational to developing the current League position papers.

This is the last oral report given by a standing committee chairperson for legislation. As stated in my spring parish council memo, many councils and members are wonderful in their dedication to monitoring and responding in action to legislative matters in our country. However, many have expressed a struggle, lack of interest, or inclination to actively monitor and respond to legislation. Please do whatever you can to ignite interest in this important work of our organization. As we move forward to embrace the much-needed change in our organization, the vibrant history of the League as social justice advocates need to continue if there is to be a robust and consistent voice in our democracy for those most vulnerable and marginalized in our society, for the protection and respect for the sanctity and dignity of life, for the protection of our environment, the support and protection of our church and the freedom to practice our faith—to be indeed *Catholic and Living It!* †