

Military Ordinariate Provincial President Theresa Schopf

Madam president,

I am very proud to bring you this report from the Military Ordinariate Provincial Council. We are the smallest provincial council with respect to the number of members and councils but the largest geographically. There are 13 active councils in six provinces: Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Ontario, Manitoba, Alberta and British Columbia, with members also living in Quebec and Newfoundland and Labrador, within Canada, and Florida and Vietnam, outside of Canada.

Due to our small numbers, we piloted the new council structure over the past two years. We ended up with a bit of a hybrid scenario, as the roles and responsibilities were not quite confirmed when we began, but it worked very well for us. We held two webinars this year concentrating on the new structure and how to incorporate it within the council. We will continue to host these webinars as required for individual councils, and they are open to all.

For the second year in a row, the provincial convention was organized by the provincial council. It is a great team-building exercise, I must say. Base councils would usually host a convention, minimizing costs by using military quarters for accommodation and military rooms for meetings. Since COVID, it's been more of a challenge for councils to host conventions at a base due to a number of factors, so the provincial council has been the host. Over the next year, we will be revisiting different pathways/options for hosting a convention. In the meantime, it looks like the provincial council may be hosting again in Ottawa. Again, it will be a great team-building exercise since we have a few new members on the provincial council this year.

As I mentioned, we have some geographical challenges with our councils. Years ago, 25 or so, the provincial president would strive to visit every council, and there were a lot more of them then. At that time, we had access to military transportation if the schedules were flexible, but that hasn't happened in quite some time. So, I am beyond excited that we have an opportunity to visit every base council through the Unity Outreach project. We just received the presentation from national during our convention at the end of May, so we are in the process of setting up schedules for the fall. We are so excited about this amazing opportunity!

Now, I would like to take a few minutes to explain a little bit about the Military Ordinariate and the chaplaincy within the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF).

The Military Ordinariate is similar to a diocese, but it is not defined by jurisdiction but by a specific need. It has a bishop, Bishop Scott McCaig, C.C., who was appointed by His Holiness Pope Francis in 2016. Bishop McCaig may be referred to as the bishop of the Military Ordinariate or also as the military ordinary of Canada.

In the CAF, the chaplaincy is called the Royal Canadian Chaplain Service (RCChS) and is led by the chaplain general, who may or may not be Catholic. RCChS supports the moral and spiritual well-being of military personnel and their families—domestically and internationally.

Chaplains could be of another Christian religion, Jewish, Muslim or another belief. They have dual accountability to faith tradition and military authorities. As faith tradition leaders, chaplains come

under the jurisdiction of their faith/denominational groups—in our case, it's the Military Ordinariate. As commissioned officers, they are subject to the Code of Service Discipline and are responsible to their military superiors. As well they have a duty to care for all soldiers regardless of faith.

The Catholic chaplains can be priests, religious, deacons or lay pastoral associates, who are women and men. The chapels belong to the CAF, not the Military Ordinariate. They can be interdenominational—for example, in Ottawa, we share the chapel with other Christian faiths. The senior chaplain could be of any faith.

I am mentioning all of this for a couple of reasons: 1. To tell you a little more about the environment that we have within Military Ordinariate councils, which is very different than civilian parishes, and to also ask you for prayers for our Catholic chaplains in the CAF, our chapel communities, and League members. I am not sure if you are aware of *The Minister of Defence's Advisory Panel on Systemic Racism and Discrimination* published in 2022. It does not support hiring chaplains from religious groups whose values are not aligned with those of the Defence Team (Recommendation 6.1), so we, as Catholics and, I think, all Christian religions, may have a bit of a bumpy road ahead. So, I ask you to pray for the Catholic chaplains so we can remain *Catholic and Living It!* within the CAF.

This concludes my report. †