**Priest’s Assembly Presentation (November 9)**

Overview of the Activities of the 3 levels of the League

Archbishop Smith, Archbishop Lavoie, Bishop Bitman & Reverend Fathers

My name is Mary Hunt and I have the privilege of serving as Edmonton Diocesan President of the Catholic Women’s League of Canada. I am an active member of Good Shepherd Parish in Edmonton where I have served as President of the Parish Pastoral Council and currently serve as Liturgy Chair.

Joining me today in making this presentation are two individuals that many if not all of you will know: Cathy Bouchard, Alberta Mackenzie Provincial CWL President who will talk about the League at the Provincial and National levels and Father Paul Kavanagh a past Spiritual Advisor to the Edmonton Diocesan Council who will provide you with some of his thoughts about and experiences with the CWL. We are all passionate about the League and hope to share some information with you that will ignite your interest and support. Hopefully there will some time for a question and answer session at the end.

We are most grateful for the invitation from Archbishop Richard Smith to provide you with an overview of the Catholic Women’s League as to what we do and the challenges we are facing.

It is important that you know that the CWL is a national organization of Catholic women present at the provincial, diocesan, and parish levels and that we are rooted in gospel values, calling our members to holiness through service to the people of God. That is our Mission Statement.

Currently in the Edmonton Diocese we have 4596 members in 68 councils. This number is down from past years. Many of the 68 councils in the Diocese are struggling and for some of them “they are in a crisis situation” and we share a heartfelt belief that you as **Pastors and Spiritual Advisors** have the ability and power to assist us in turning the tide and working with us to introduce the changes needed for these councils to grow and thrive.

We recognize that we are now a **“missionary church”** with priests from many other countries and cultural experiences. It is important for all of you to know what the CWL does so that **together we** can find creative ways that we can work together to best serve God and our Catholic faith community. We know that you are very busy and do not have the time to attend all of our meetings and events but we also believe that there are other proactive ways that you can help us such as including the CWL once a month in the Prayers of Intercession at your Masses or by encouraging women in your Parish to attend a CWL meeting to discover what we are about.

**We are asking that you not just passively allow us to exist in your parishes but actively support us in our Mission**. Your prayers are very much appreciated but more is needed. We have councils who have 150 plus members who are struggling to find women to take on leadership positions. Our small rural councils are in imminent danger of closing and Edmonton Diocesan Council has been tasked by the Provincial Council to develop a “Small Councils Strategy” to address the challenges being faced not only in our Diocese but throughout the Province and throughout Canada.

We canvassed our councils and have identified Priorities & Objectives for Diocese which are in your handouts.

We are with you today to provide you with some compelling reasons why the CWL should receive your attention and active support.

* **Legislation and Resolutions** (short list provided in your handout)At our Diocesan Convention last April, Archbishop Smith reminded us that even the Canadian Conference of Bishops does not have the ear of government the way the CWL does. For more than 70 years the CWL have annually met with the Prime Minister and other Cabinet Ministers to discuss the Resolutions that were passed at our Annual National Convention and we are proud to say that many of our resolutions have been enacted into Legislation such as the ban on flavoured tobaccos.
* **Social Action Activities** such as the support of Refugee Families, participation in the March for Life and petitioning the Provincial Government to appoint an independent Senior’s Advocate modelled after the Farmer’s Advocate and the Ombudsman.
* **Palliative & Hospice Care**. During the year of Divine Mercy this area was focused on by the CWL. The Olds Hospice Society was the dream of five of our CWL members who made their dream a reality. Their rural community is grateful for the ability to care for their loved ones close to home.
* St. Stephen’s Council in Villeneuve….council members and their families were a driving force in building ***West Country Hearth*** a Senior’s Residence that has become the heart of their community.
* **St. Benedict’s Chapel**: Our ladies financially support one month of operation each year of this ever growing in popularity place of worship in the heart of downtown Edmonton.
* **Refugee Bag Program** is alive and well at St. Charles Church in Edmonton. This program provides toiletries, towels, bus tickets and various other items to newly arrived persons needing assistance. The need for this program continues to grow.
* **Prayer/Healing Shawl Ministry**: Hundreds of shawls were gifted to First Nations people at the closing ceremony of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as a tangible symbol of our love and concern. Shawls are crafted and given out throughout the Diocese by our ladies to cheer & comfort the sick and the elderly and to encircle with love new born babies.
* **Participation in Liturgical Ministries**: You will find our ladies serving where they are needed: Eucharistic Ministers, Sacristans, in Music Ministry, as Lectors, as Hospitality Ministers, as RCI sponsors etc.
* **Faith Fun & Fitness Walk/Run**: We donate, prepare and serve hot dogs to participants in this important fund raising activity for Newman College and St. Joseph’s Seminary.
* Raising money to purchase **cuddle cots for hospitals**…the cuddle cots allow the families of infants who have passed away the opportunity to hold/cuddle their precious little family member and say good bye.
* **Spiritual Retreats/Pilgrimages/Book Clubs…are held throughout the Diocese** to encourage Catholic women to learn more about themselves
* **Soup & Buns Kitchens to feed the poor and homeless** Our members donate food, prepare and serve meals at places like the Jasper Place Health & Wellness Centre and the Marian Centre.
* **Doreen Melton Scholarship:** we have a proud history of annually awarding this scholarship to a Seminarian selected by the Faculty at St. Joseph’s Seminary
* **Adopt-a-Seminarian Program**: For many years, CWL councils have “adopted” a Seminarian to pray for, care for and grow in friendship with. They are given invitations to events, remembered with monetary gifts and handmade gifts such as quilts and blankets…these young men in formation are dearly loved and supported by our membership.
* Scholarships & Bursaries are also awarded in individual councils
* **Carmelite Nuns Monastery in Devon**: this prayer order has a special place in the hearts of our members and in the future we hope to find ways to strengthen the support we provide them.
* Pro-Life
* Canadian Missions
* Development & Peace
* **Wild West Catholic Youth Conference** held in Red Deer in October, 2016 More than $12,000.00 was donated by our councils in support of this initiative
* **Catholic Social Services**: We provide financial donations & enthusiastic volunteers.
* **Mother Hubbard’s Cupboard**- Sacred Heart in Edson shares operations responsibility with churches from other denominations for a thrift store. The profits are used to sponsor breakfast and hot lunch programs for elementary school children in the area.
* **St Vincent DePaul**: Our members donated $10,000.00 that was used for the purchase of a delivery van which you may see from time to time on the streets of Edmonton.
* In one rural community the council purchased a DATS van to bring people to their medical appointments as there is no taxi service available to them.
* **The Catholic Girl’s League** is supported by the CWL and nurtures an awareness and love of their Catholic faith in the young girls who belong.
* In response to the document Laudato Si profoundly gifted to us by Pope Francis, many of our councils have or are in the process of switching to biodegradable products that are earth friendly. We have been instrumental in building ***Mary Gardens*** at many churches in the Diocese.
* Yes, our members do cater to funeral luncheons as a ministry to grieving families in their parishes and yes, we do make great egg salad sandwiches and yes we do put on bake sales….**but please remember that we do so much more!!!!! Mother Theresa encouraged us to do small things with great love and we are doing just that…**

In addition to grandmothers and stay at home Moms, our membership includes Women Religious and many professions including serving as School Board Trustees, Members of the Legislative Assembly, City Councilors, the Judiciary, physicians, lawyers, teachers, nurses, authors, business professionals, …the list goes on… never underestimate the collective skillsets represented by our membership.

We are very proud of the achievements of some of our members including:

**Joan Carr:** selected as the 2016 National Catholic School Superintendent of the Year

**Catherine Mardon:** 2016 Lieutenant Governor of Alberta’s Circle on Mental Health & Addictions True Grit Award Recipient

**Mary Pat O’Neil**: 2016 City of St. Albert Volunteer of the Year

**Mary Molloy:** 2014 Kevin Carr Christian Leadership Award Recipient

**Fran Lucas:** Is a St. Joseph’s Basilica Council member who currently serves on the National Executive as 1st Vice President and Education & Health Standing Committee Chair. In four years, she will likely become National President of the League.

**Katherine Hughes** who in 1912 founded the first Catholic Women’s League Council in Canada here in Edmonton in response to the urgent need for assistance to immigrant women and young women from rural areas moving to Edmonton for schooling or to look for work.

In the handouts you have been provided you will find:

* Our Mission Statement
* The Objects of the League
* The League Prayer
* The Vision Statement of our new National President, Margaret-Ann Jacobs
* A list of some of the resolutions that have been passed at our National Conventions
* An invitation to our Diocesan Midwinter Meeting and Diocesan Convention
* For your convenience, we have provided website information for Edmonton Diocesan Council, the Alberta/Mackenzie Provincial Council and the National Council.

I would like to share with you an excerpt from a brief given by Fr. Gilles A. Surprenant, Archdiocesan Spiritual Advisor for the Archdiocesan Council of the CWL in Montreal in 2009.

*“Parish Councils of the CWL are happy to have a Pastor who understands, appreciates, and stands in solidarity with the CWL…when the League and Clergy collaborate, it is a very blessed, fruitful and mutually beneficial rapport that acts as an example and ferment for good in the Parish and the Diocese. The Pastor supports the Council Executive at the service of League members and all Catholic women in their call to be holy and reach out in charity, peace, and hope to all women in the neighborhood serves the whole of society. CWL members become more active parishioners and contribute richly to the vitality and fruitfulness of the faith community and enhance the Parish’s effectiveness.”*

**Remarks from Cathy Bouchard**

Why belong?

• The CWL is the voice of Catholic women expressing their values and promoting dignity and justice for all.

• The CWL is a gift of faith, friendship and support, offering leadership development and affirmation.

• The CWL gives members the opportunity to serve God and Canada. Through standing committees, members can feel the pulse of what is happening in church and society.

• The CWL invites all Catholic women to share their gifts and make a difference.

If I…

• Want to develop a deeper spiritual life

• Believe in the power of prayer

• Strive to set a Christian example in my home and workplace

• Believe in the sanctity of life

• Believe women play an important role in church and society

• Seek to uphold the dignity of all human beings

• Believe in the value of Catholic education and affordable health services

• Understand the importance of religious freedom, social justice, peace and harmony.

Then I belong in the CWL!

Where do I fit?

• I belong to a grassroots parish-based organization that is part of the largest national organization of Catholic women in Canada.

• My membership offers me opportunities to become involved on the regional, diocesan, provincial, national and even international scene.

• The CWL has been around since the 1920’s and has met annually with all levels of government since the 1970’s so I know my voice will be heard.

• Whether as mothers in families, as a vital presence in the work force and the institutions of society, or in the particular vocation of following our Lord… women have an indispensable role… This feels right for me

Members say…

“ to belong means to walk in friendship and faith”

“ We are a family and the ‘heart’ of our faith community.”

“ a dynamic, wholesome, healthy, and supportive sisterhood”

“ The CWL has taught me self confidence and enhanced my leadership skills.”

“ the beauty of the League… a place for women of all ages and heritages”

Come and journey…

cwl.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/WhyamIaMember\_updated\_2013.pdf

(Review Organizational Chart and focus on the work at different levels)

**Work Nationally -**

Coordinate efforts across the country - bigger picture

Speak for close to 100,000 women and their families and those who count on them for a voice

Meet with Federal government voice the concerns of the Catholic Women’s League across Canada and present national resolutions

Partnerships with:

Coady Institute - national voluntary fund

Since 1959, the world-renowned Coady International Institute at StFX University has had more than 6,000 graduates and partners working in 130 countries. The CWL of Canada has been providing scholarship support since 1961 so women around the world can attend the Coady Institute’s leadership development programs.  These scholarships Empower women leaders from developing countries for more than half a century

World Union of Catholic Women’s Organizations (WUCWO)

was founded in 1910 and now represents 100 Catholic women’s organizations worldwide and celebrates a century of service by women for the Church and society.  The Catholic Women’s League is one of its members.

‘WUCWO’S aim is to promote the presence, participation and co-responsibility of Catholic women in society and the Church, in order to enable them to fulfil their mission of evangelization and to work for human development’.

‘WUCWO has consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (New York), the Human Rights Council (Geneva), the FAO (Rome), participatory status at the Council of Europe (Strasbourg) and is an official partner of UNESCO (Paris).’

Development and Peace 1% Program

Since 1969, the CWL has supported thousands of women in the Global South through the 1% program. This program encourages all CWL members to contribute 1% of all personal and luxury items, as well as 1% of funds raised by CWL councils, to projects that aim to empower women and improve their standard of living. Together, we are Strong Women Building Stronger Communities

**Catholic Women’s Leadership Foundation**

An initiative begun with a collaboration of the Sisters of Service and the National Catholic Women’s League.  Goal: The Catholic Women’s Leadership Foundation funds programs designed to develop in women foundational skills in leadership, management, media, and communication. Women will have the confidence they need to assume a leadership role wherever they are called – in the Church, business, not-for-profits, private or public sector – while understanding and living their Catholic faith.

National Initiative: 12 hours of prayer for Palliative Care

Following letters and efforts to stop the Physician Assisted Dying ruling by the federal government, the CWL responded with a proactive approach: 12 hours of prayer for Palliative Care May 4th - encouraged 12 hours of prayer to be happening continually across Canada - privately or in Church, rosary or mass, personal prayer, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Also - action to promote and support palliative care including working at a hospice and signing petitions to the federal and provincial governments regarding the importance of Hospice Palliative Care

Theme to guide and focus the League nationally for the 2 years of the National President - this coming year “Inspired by the Spirit; responding to God’s Call”

Create initiatives

Encourage and develop leadership

**Work Provincially**

Coordinate efforts across the province

- Meet with provincial government and present provincial resolutions

- Letters of objection regarding the Guidelines of the Alberta Government, Department of Education and support for the work of the Alberta Catholic School Trustees Association

- Letters requesting support for Hospice and Palliative Care, Physician and Institution Conscience Rights, an independent Senior’s Advocate to speak without the pressure of partisan politics

Share information between diocesan councils and the national council

Encourage and develop leadership (in many areas) at diocesan levels

Speak for councils who don’t have the ability to speak for themselves

Speak for close to 10,000 women and their families and those who count on them for a voice

Future - The national council does see that we need to change. Membership numbers are down. The proportion of younger members is down. One of the ways we are trying to engage younger members is through greater use of social media.  We need to talk to members in their parish council.  What are their needs and goals? Where do they see the League in 10 years?

When members and our spiritual advisors attend a convention at a Diocesan, provincial or national level, they see that the impact and concerns of CWL is much bigger than the council they work at

At all levels we agree that we cannot succeed as the Catholic Women’s League without the support of our priests.

Catholic Women’s Leadership Foundation

Our Vision:

A just, merciful, and compassionate world nurtured by the genius of women.

It was St. Pope John Paul II who first spoke of the “genius of women” in his [Letter to Women](http://bit.ly/2bhjtvi) published in 1995.  He wrote, “The Church desires for her part to contribute to upholding the dignity, role and rights of women …  by speaking directly to the heart and mind of every woman”.

St. Pope John Paul II challenged everyone to “reflect carefully on what it means to speak of the ‘genius of women’, not only in order to be able to see in this phrase a specific part of God’s plan which needs to be accepted and appreciated, but also in order to let this genius be more fully expressed in the life of society as a whole, as well as in the life of the Church”.

The Catholic Women’s Leadership Foundation desires to provide the tools which will encourage this genius to be more fully expressed and lived every day in society.

Our Mission:

To fund leadership education that inspires Catholic women to be transformational and influential leaders where they live and work.

Statistics and evidence demonstrate a tremendous need for groups to empower and encourage women in leadership roles – not just in the Church but in society as a whole. Today, [women comprise 8.5 per cent of the highest-paid positions](http://www.cbc.ca/news/business/women-now-hold-8-5-of-canada-s-top-jobs-1.3001744) in Canada’s top 100 listed companies. Similarly, a study conducted by the HR Council of Nonprofit and Voluntary Organizations of Canada showed a disproportionate number of men in senior management posts in the nonprofit sector, while women occupied the majority of administrative and support-staff positions. This study revealed that women only held 40 per cent of executive positions in the nonprofit sector.

There is more that can be done.

The Catholic Women’s Leadership Foundation will encourage Catholic women to develop their leadership skills and provide a network of women to support the acceptance of women in important leadership roles.

Our Objectives:

* To develop women’s leadership capacity-building programs that are of the highest quality and that are consistent with Catholic values by establishing and maintaining partnerships with key educational institutions.
* To identify promising women leaders who will benefit from leadership education that builds on their lived experiences.
* To secure financial and human resources in support of Catholic women’s leadership education and activities.
* To establish and maintain a national network of support for Catholic women leaders.
* To develop and implement a communication plan to raise awareness about the importance of women’s leadership.

**Remarks of support from Father Paul Kavanagh** unfortunately were not recorded

**Conclusion:**

Archbishop Smith thank you again for today’s opportunity to share at this gathering.

May today be the impetus to furthering our collaboration so that together we may attract more Catholic women of all ages and especially the younger generations to membership in the League and personal holiness and happiness, for the glory of God, the growth of the Church and the League, and for the good of Canada.