

# FINDING “HOPE” IN LEGISLATION

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Throughout Canada’s history, women have actively sought to shape society, and have struggled for their rights as individuals and citizens. They could not vote or hold public office; they were not considered persons. The *Naturalization Act* of 1914 stated that, “a certificate of naturalization shall not be granted to any person under disability... the expression of ‘disability’ means the status of being a married woman, or a minor, a lunatic or idiot”. This was pretty harsh for women to accept and their only hope was to seek change through legislation.

Believing in their own empowerment, they looked forward with hopeful expectations to a better life and knew that they could change the status quo by forcing legislation to enhance their own lives and that of their children. Through determination and struggle their hopes and dreams were realized. They formally entered the public arena after winning the right to vote in 1918. Many Canadian historic firsts followed with the election in 1921 of Agnes Macphail to the House of Commons, the Persons Case in 1929, and the appointment Cairine Wilson to the Senate in 1930.

The struggle for a better life continued as federal legislation making various forms of discrimination illegal did not come into place until 1977, although the provinces had some codes in place. The creation of the *Canadian Human Rights Act* brought new hope because it was based on philosophical, moral and humanitarian considerations. The 1982 enactment of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* was another hopeful piece of legislation for women and minority groups as they struggled for their rightful place in society.

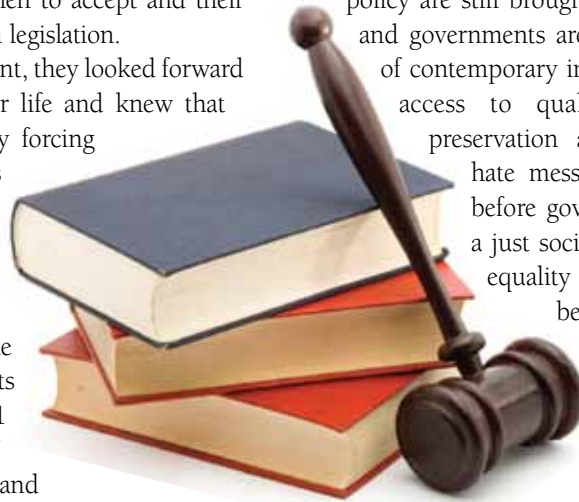
The League, after its inception in 1920, added its voice to the struggle to enhance the quality of life for all Canadians. It consistently drafted resolutions, appeared before government addressing issues of concern and, when possible, addressed any shortcomings in the legislative process that lacked clarity. The League flexed the muscle of its membership to promote meaningful change.

Of interest, at the 1947 annual national convention, the federal government asked the League “to assist with respect

to the needs of Catholic immigrants who may be among the numbers of displaced European people who are to immigrate to Canada under the government plan” and again in 1954 the League was asked to “participate actively in the Civil Defense Program”. These events are mentioned to signify the confidence that the federal government has placed in the League.

Today, as a lay Catholic women’s organization and because members see hope in legislation, concerns for good social policy are still brought to the attention of government and governments are still challenged to listen. Issues of contemporary interest such as human trafficking, access to quality healthcare, environmental preservation and appropriate prosecution of hate messages have already been brought before government in the hope of building a just society. Members cannot assume that equality and human rights legislation has been fully accomplished as it will surely continue to evolve. These are convoluted issues that require the active participation of all those affected. It is important for members to take part in this process.

In its complicated way, legislation is a source of hope for all of us in one way or another; we all benefit from good legislation. We find hope and consolation living in a country where voicing our opinion to government is not only acceptable but respected. We live in a country where peace and hope live quietly together and where the League continues to challenge the status quo for the common good. †



## WELCOME TO NEW COUNCIL

Our Lady of Lourdes Parish Council,  
Coquitlam, British Columbia.