

The League in 2020

Neither time nor age (the League has been around for 100 years) nor technical issues, nor distance, nor a pandemic can keep the League from carrying out its mission “to grow in faith, and to witness to the love of God through ministry and service.”

In this unique chapter of its existence, members gathered virtually to hear the annual report of the national president, usually given at the national convention and now, through technology, the final session of the Summer Speaker Series which featured the speakers engaged for the convention that did not take place: Dr. Cory Andrew Labrecque who spoke about care of the earth and called members to “Rise, be on [their] way”; Dr. Donna Orsuto who summarized *Laudato Si'* and spoke of the role women play in caring for their common home; Sr. Nuala Kenny MD who gave a moving reflection on how women can contribute to the healing of the church and urged members to use prayerful discernment to effect transition; and an exciting look at the League of the future presented by President-Elect Fran Lucas and members of the implementation committee. To complete the week National President Anne-Marie Gorman presented a snapshot of life in the League from January 2020 to the present. She began by remembering the 2003 convention when the lights went out from the east coast to Ontario and Saskatoon diocesan members provided shelter and companionship to those stranded, a time that forged new friendships in the League. She then introduced and thanked Executive Secretary Amanda McCormick for her invaluable skills and willingness to try something new (cf. this series); the table officers who go above and beyond in service and Executive Director Kim Scammell, who is a rock and constant source of knowledge about the League. Members listening to the presentation were invited to send questions, and throughout the talk, Anne-Marie would pause to consider them (a summary of these will appear at the end).

St. Paul in his *Letter to the Romans* speaks of creation groaning in labour and we too are groaning. The context is different but the words are apropos today. In *Laudato Si'* Pope Francis speaks of the plight of creation and creatures all this before the pandemic. In January the League was blissfully unaware of what was to come and Anne-Marie's calendar was rapidly filling up with special anniversaries, travel to diocesan and provincial conventions, meetings with government, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, papal nuncio, 100th anniversary and securing speakers. She quoted Dr. Seuss, “Oh the places you go; the people you meet.” After a successful as usual national executive/board meeting in February, the virus struck and everything changed. Provincial conventions began to be cancelled (Military Ordinariate the first), the office was closed until April with limited opening in mid-May, and on June 1st one or two staff regularly in the office but no one else could even enter. Work did carry on throughout with staff working from home. As it became clearer that annual meetings could not be held, decisions had to be made. Two options: delay or postpone. Hold virtual meetings BUT that could only be done legally if there was a provision in the bylaws to do so, which there was not. Under the constitution, members must come together for an annual meeting. Since March 15th, we were in upheaval until the final decision to postpone the national convention. By early June (after legal consultation) the administration committee had a clear path and the decision with appropriate legal wording was given to the provincial presidents.

Despite being in a period of uncertainty, much has been accomplished thanks to God and Our Lady of Good Counsel. Executive members cooperate more than ever. Working groups meet regularly and the implementation committee meets weekly for two hours, all of it virtually.

The pandemic has provided blessings: Learning opportunities by webinar on values thinking, and new evangelization. World Union of Catholic Women's Organisations' virtual prayer services uniting women around the world and a dissertation on synodality and its importance in the church; and training in technology, for example, how to use webinars. The board needed a better understanding of its duties and therefore had sessions on governance. Regular League committee meetings continued via conference calls. Communication is more than regularly scheduled meetings. The national president meets with provincial presidents for virtual round tables, also in May with the national officers. She participated in three virtual celebrations, with the Military Ordinariate Provincial Council and 100th anniversary celebrations in Toronto and Montreal.

What is clear is that the power of women and their ability to act is incredible, for example, the centennial planning committee and the Montreal convention planning committee. In an interview with *The Catholic Register*, Anne-Marie characterized the League as doing as well as expected and better.

Witness the following: We do what we have always done, support each other and serve needs. We celebrate liturgically albeit often virtually. God is good all the time is recognized by members. The League has been a vibrant part of the church and country for 100 years. We are 75,000 members who faithfully serve and do not know how to quit. A beautiful visual of pictures of many League members showcased extraordinary times, resilience, hope, courage, service, pride and faith in the League. The reoccurring image of planting trees (centennial project) signified hope and care for the earth.

Questions were submitted by viewers and answered by the president or appropriate table officer.

- A question whether annual report questionnaires would be available this year was answered by Fran Lucas: Yes, a streamlined version will be coming.
- Questions on changes to the *Constitution & Bylaws* and elections were fielded by Past President Margaret Ann Jacobs: Would there be changes to allow virtual meetings electronic elections? Proposed changes were welcomed but be aware the deadline for submission is August 31st. How do you submit suggested changes? Check the *National Manual of Policy and Procedures*. Go online for information. After submission proposed changes go through a clearly outlined process culminating in an instructed vote at convention.
- As annual meetings were postponed how do you deal with members who allowed their names to stand for election but now are thinking of withdrawing? Check the *Constitution & Bylaws* (page 16) and the *National Manual of Policy and Procedures* (section 7). Election materials were sent out and there will be new communications coming. Councils and members have a responsibility to encourage members to let their names stand. Talk and affirm them. Welcoming and validating members is an ongoing process, especially important at election time.
- Speakers series was excellent, would the League make use of technology in the future? We will use it to our best advantage going forward.
- Centenary tree planting project: How many planted so far? Don't know perhaps check with provincial presidents.
- Can we still plant trees? Betty Colaneri: Yes, the deadline has been extended to 2021.

- Councils have been unable to fundraise and are therefore concerned about voluntary funds: National Chairperson of Spiritual Development Shari Guinta noted Catholic Missions In Canada is in dire need and has had to restrict funding so please continue to contribute. October 1st is the League's National Day of Prayer for Home Missions, communicate to follow. National Secretary-Treasurer Janet McLean said accumulated funds would be dispensed as usual. In addition to council contributions, she suggested individual member donations to the voluntary funds. If a tax receipt is required donate directly to the organizations, perhaps indicating League affiliation. Note that viewers of the Summer Speakers Series have been asked to consider donations to the National Bursary Fund.
- Resolutions: How would this year's proposed resolutions be dealt with? National Chairperson of Resolutions Cathy Bouchard: Please continue to work on resolutions and share the topics. Issues arising in the pandemic provide good material for future resolutions. In 2021 we hope to deal with currently submitted resolutions and any new ones that may come forward. We can always act on adopted resolutions.
- Pornography Hurts Campaign: Is it still going? National Chairperson of Communications Doreen Gowans: Yes, the campaign is still going but not month by month. Encourage use of the postcards; go to the website for cards and details of use. If members of parliament refuse them, try again; it is a member of parliament's responsibility to respond.
- Question about the Euthanasia Prevention Coalition: National Chairperson of Christian Family Life Pat Deppiesse: funds are still being collected. Members can contact people who are ill, who are isolated. Telephones still work.

With that poignant ending to questions, Anne-Marie thanked the executive members at all levels who are continuing for a third year, thanked the audience for joining the session, and closed with the League prayer.