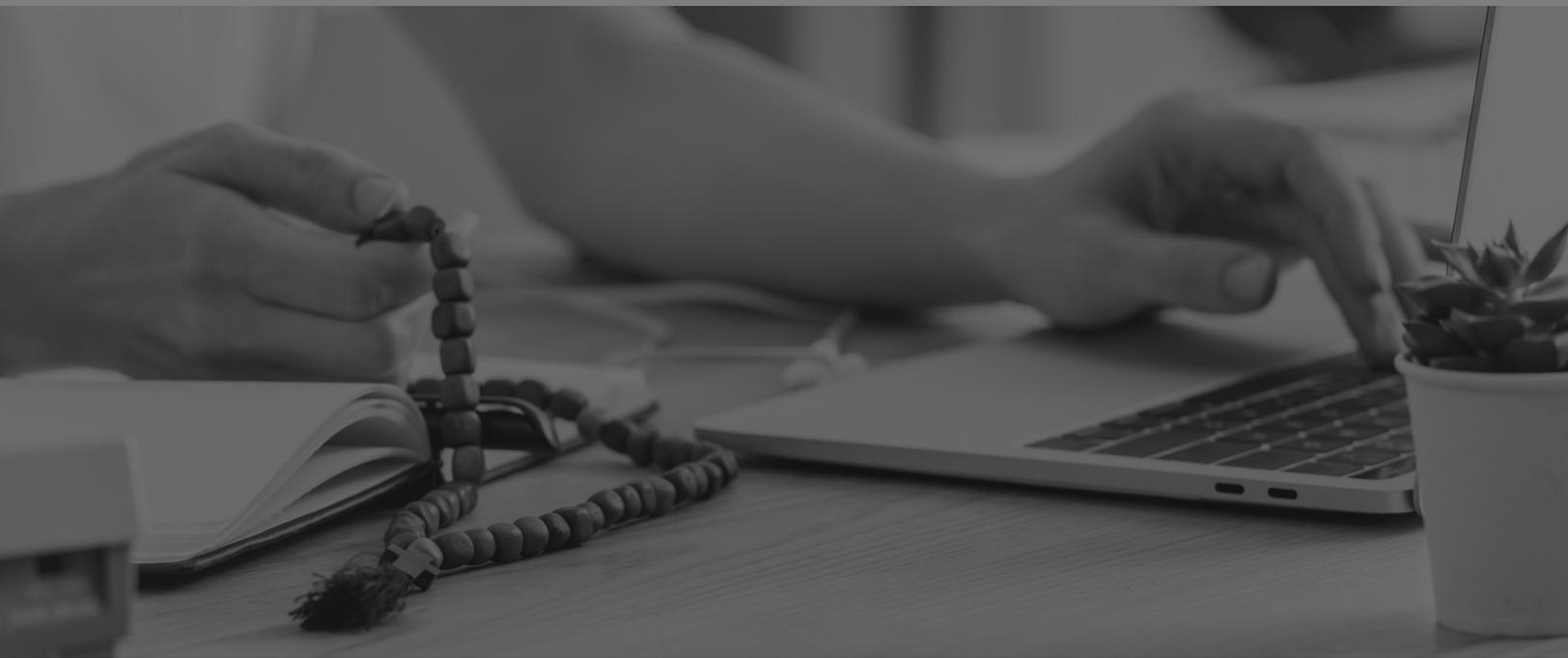




2021 Annual Report Summary

CATHOLIC
and **LIVING IT!**





National President's Message

Fran Lucas

National President and Chairperson of International Relations



THE STRENGTH AND TENACITY OF MEMBERS OF THE CATHOLIC WOMEN'S LEAGUE OF CANADA WERE PUT TO THE TEST IN 2021. WITH THE LORD BY MEMBERS' SIDES AND OUR LADY OF GOOD COUNSEL'S GUIDANCE, THE LEAGUE CAME THROUGH IT!

All provincial presidents reported on their council's journey. Presidents ranged in age from 34 to 85 years, many having served more than one term. Some presidents were also life members. Provincial councils reported parish councils with fewer than five members to as large as 285. The national organization totalled more than 63,000 members in 1,125 parish councils. Given the global pandemic, which kept members from socializing, some parish councils had zero activity. Yet for others, many activities still happened (and some very creative) to ensure a connection and presence of the League was evident.

Communications were plentiful and webinars were lifegiving as councils at all levels weathered the learning curve of using various videoconferencing platforms to gather. Many indicated a greater attendance online than at past in-person meetings. Virtual gatherings were the new reality where members prayed, celebrated the Eucharist and





held celebrations for New Year's, anniversaries, pin ceremonies, awards and birthdays. Parish councils expressed the highest satisfaction with communication received from the diocesan level, then national, then provincial, with the most clear and concise communication from the national level.

National priorities introduced, discussed or acted upon by councils were *Care for Our Common Home* (62%), Bill C-7 *An Act to amend the Criminal Code (medical assistance in dying)* (53%), and rights of the preborn (19%). All this was in response to nationally adopted resolutions. Sessions were held to assist councils in understanding the impending amendments to the *Constitution & Bylaws* and the voting process. "Conventions" became "annual meetings of members" with lower participation and in a partially virtual format.

Numerous members were part of the implementation committee's working groups for the strategic plan. Hundreds of others took part in surveys, focus groups and pilot sessions to aid their work. Many base councils reported significant support from the Military Ordinariate Provincial Council mentor assigned to them.

Parish councils indicated substantially reduced interaction with spiritual advisors because of the global pandemic but rated support of the spiritual advisor at

92%. As in the past, invitations to spiritual advisors to celebrate mass before meetings, attend special events like tree planting, and speak on prayer, scripture and Catholic social teaching took place. Spiritual advisors were kept informed through emails, telephone calls and personal visits. Ontario Provincial Council held its annual meeting with the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario, an opportunity to share upcoming resolutions and the state of the League.

The opportunity for presidents to represent their parish council at events was severely curtailed, although the eastern provincial councils appeared to have more opportunity to do so, albeit with low attendance. Where it was possible, the events included church functions, diocesan meetings and special masses.

Prince Edward Island Provincial Council held a four-hour presidents' workshop covering eight mini-sessions on the *Executive Orientation* program, euthanasia and assisted suicide, *Welcome Kit* program, navigating the national website, Catholic social teaching and more. Councils were given use of diocesan or provincial videoconferencing accounts for gatherings, group rosaries and orientations. Outdoor gatherings gave some a new twist to enable meetings to occur. More than one-half of councils reporting provided an annual summary to members of the council's activities.

Presidents were clearly proud of their parish councils for their continued strong desire for the spiritual aspect the League offers, creativity to fundraise, willingness to care for each other, core groups ensuring work was done, generosity with donations, planting of trees, giving out gratitude cards, friendship, and dedication. A number identified awareness sessions on the struggle of Indigenous women and support of National Day for Truth and Reconciliation to be well received by members.

Some provincial councils had additional financial resources due to the lack of travel opportunities, etc. Alberta Mackenzie Provincial Council donated \$16,000 to a retreat centre renovation, and in return, its chapel was dedicated to Our Lady of Good Counsel. Some provincial council executives held monthly discussions with diocesan counterparts, which was welcomed.

During the eight months that I was president-elect, I thoroughly enjoyed meeting online with provincial presidents-elect at least once a month to create the *Executive Orientation* program. The education or refresher that this exercise resulted being for all of



us was wonderful, and the camaraderie was undeniable. My work with the manuals task force also created the opportunity for learning and getting to know the individuals to a greater extent while accomplishing the goal of updating numerous manuals. The loss of a member of my parish council, Honorary Life Member Ardis Beaudry, left me with great sadness as well as for all who knew her.



“SPEAK OUT FOR THOSE WHO CANNOT SPEAK, FOR THE RIGHTS OF ALL THE DESTITUTE. SPEAK OUT, JUDGE RIGHTEOUSLY, DEFEND THE RIGHTS OF THE POOR AND NEEDY” (PROVERBS 31:8-9).



Representing Catholic Women

The national president had limited opportunities to represent the League on the national and international stage in 2021 due to the continued impact of the pandemic. While being physically present to represent the League was curtailed, the president did write several letters, including:

- A letter of concern to the prime minister of Canada regarding proposed changes to Bill C-7 *An Act to amend the Criminal Code (medical assistance in dying)*, aimed at broadening the criteria for euthanasia putting more of the vulnerable population at risk
- A letter of support and fidelity to the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops on the discovery of unmarked graves near the former residential school on Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation.
- A letter of confidence in the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation as it continued its work in support of reconciliation for Indigenous peoples in Canada.
- A letter of expressed urgency to the prime minister of Canada that the federal government disburse the \$33.8 million dollars set aside in 2019, to organize a registry in every jurisdiction to assist in the discovery of unmarked graves on or near former residential schools.
- Another letter of support of the bishops of Canada on the occasion of their apology for the suffering and harm caused by the church at former residential schools and for the establishment of a \$30 million fundraising effort to mitigate these harms.

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Members displayed reluctance to meet with elected representatives in person at all levels, but advocacy did continue through the sending of e-mails and letters on topics of concern to members. Roughly one quarter of parish councils contacted their municipal and/or provincial representatives regarding local or provincial matters, and one third of parish councils contacted their federal representatives regarding federal issues, revealing the highest degree of interest in social justice issues emanating at the national level.

Advocacy through Resolutions and Legislation

It was impossible to consider the League's work without considering the effect the pandemic had. Members were hampered in the usual manner that they conduct business, particularly with regards to resolutions. Members could not gather to discuss and research resolutions at the parish level, similarly to the year 2020. As considered debate of proposed resolutions would have been difficult in a partial virtual setting, resolutions were not accepted for consideration at diocesan, provincial or national annual meetings of members.

A meeting with the federal government was also not possible, so the 2019 resolutions adopted by national

council had yet to be presented to federal government by the end of 2021. However, not to be silenced, members were active in letter writing and made their voices heard. Issues did not go away just because of the pandemic, and some of them were exacerbated or brought to light because of the pandemic. Members were encouraged to address issues with their elected representatives.

Legislation monitored at the federal level included:

- Bill C-5 *An Act to amend the Bills of Exchange Act, the Interpretation Act and the Canada Labour Code (National Day of Truth and Reconciliation)*. Intended to add a new holiday to be observed on September 30th.



- Bill C-6 *An Act to amend the Criminal Code (conversion therapy)*. Intended to prohibit certain activities that relate to conversion therapy.
- Bill C-7 *An Act to amend the Criminal Code (medical assistance in dying)*
- Bill C-8 *An Act to amend the Citizenship Act (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's call to action number 94)*. Intended to include in the Oath or Affirmation of Citizenship a promise to respect the Indigenous and treaty rights of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples.
- Bill C-10 *An Act to amend the Broadcasting Act and to make related and consequential amendments to other Acts*. Intended to provide the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission with new powers to regulate online services and update its regulatory powers related to traditional broadcasters.
- Bill C-15 *An Act respecting the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.
- Bill C-35 *An Act to reduce poverty and to support the financial security of persons with disabilities by establishing the Canada disability benefit and making a consequential amendment to the Income Tax Act*.
- Bill C-210 *An Act to amend the Canada Revenue Agency Act (organ and tissue donors)*. Intended to authorize the Canada Revenue Agency to enter into an agreement with a province or a territory regarding the collection and disclosure of information required for establishing or maintaining an organ and tissue donor registry in the province or territory.
- Bill C-233 *An Act to amend the Criminal Code (sex-selective abortion)*. Intended to make it an offence for a medical practitioner to perform an abortion solely based on the grounds of the child's genetic sex.



- Bill C-268 *An Act to amend the Criminal Code (intimidation of health care professionals)*
- Bill S-210 *An Act to restrict young persons' online access to sexually explicit materials*

Legislative acts that focused on supporting Canadians through the challenges presented by the global pandemic were also monitored and brought to members for their information. These bills included:

- *Bill C-2 An Act to provide further support in response to COVID-19*
- *Bill C-4: An Act relating to certain measures in response to COVID-19*
- *Bill C-9 An Act to amend the Income Tax Act (Canada Emergency Rent Subsidy and Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy)*



National Standing Committee Highlights

Spiritual Development:

Embracing technology and capitalizing on the many opportunities members had for personal and spiritual development while sheltering at home during the pandemic, two Advent retreats were arranged and offered.

At the national level, focus was placed on the League's National Faith Day (September 19th) and National Day of Prayer for Canadian Home Missions (October 1st). National Faith Day is a League initiative to meet the strategic objective of increasing opportunities for spiritual development. Eighteen per cent of parish councils participated collectively and/or promoted the day to individual members.

Instituting National Day of Prayer for Canadian Home Missions was a decision of national council at the 2019 annual national convention. Eighteen per cent of parish councils also reported participating in this national day.

Organization:

Two-thirds of parish councils reported their council reflected the cultural diversity in the community, and another 18% chose to implement the *Embracing Diversity: Tools for Councils Use toolkit* that was made available in August 2021. This toolkit was made possible as part of the strategic planning process and was made at members' request.

Regrettably, a mere one quarter of parish councils reported their council reflected the age diversity in their community, indicating much more work needed to be done in inviting, embracing and celebrating many generations. Thirteen per cent of councils implemented the *Welcome Program*, another fruit of the strategic planning effort.

In terms of leadership development, two per cent of parish councils reported putting on the *Executive Orientation* workshop, which was launched in June 2021 and created to assist in forming local leaders in the League.

Finally, parish councils reported 20% of their members were actively involved and 80% were supportive but inactive, a figure that mirrors industry statistics for member associations.

Christian Family Life:

Vocations were reported as the most acted upon focus within the standing committee with 74% of parish councils praying for vocations. Following vocations, pro-life concerns represented the second most popular focus, with two-thirds of councils participating in pro-life activities in some manner.

Parish councils acted on Resolution 2019.01 *Canada to Honour its Commitment to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, which urged the federal government to provide legal protection to children before birth. Chairpersons reported educating members (51%), recognizing the day of prayer for unborn children (49%), monitoring the government's response (46%), and writing letters to the prime minister (34%).

Ministry to different segments of the population revealed varied levels of effort, levels that mirrored the League's current demographics. While 93% of parish councils supported ministry to seniors, and 53% mentioned ministry to the disabled, only four percent reported participating in ministry to youth, and two percent in ministry to separated and divorced. If the League's focus is acts of mercy toward an older demographic, then it makes sense that it would then attract primarily that same demographic into its membership.

Community Life:

With the tragic news that came from the discovery of unmarked graves near former residential schools, parish councils leapt into action. Parish chairpersons discussed Bill C-262 *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People* with members. National Human Trafficking Awareness Day (February 22nd) and the National Day of Awareness of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (May 5th) were actioned. Councils gained knowledge and awareness of the struggles facing Indigenous women by attending virtual workshops, discussing books and inviting guest speakers. National Indigenous Peoples Day (June 21st) was celebrated. The first National Day for Truth and Reconciliation (September 30th) was recognized.

Members wore orange shirts, placed orange ribbons on gates and homes, flew the Every Child Matters flag and prayed the rosary. Rosaries made up of orange beads were handed out. Members participated in the #94in94

social media call to action campaign sponsored by Circles for Reconciliation. One council planted orange marigolds around its centennial tree to commemorate the lost children of residential schools.

Some of the other topics parish councils focused on were those experiencing homelessness (including youth), human trafficking, poverty, racism, food insecurity and domestic violence. Although monetary donations were made, guest speakers, workshops and volunteerism were also reported. The Thursdays in Black campaign was highlighted in support of a world without rape and violence.

Education and Health:

Many parish councils supported the national theme *Care for Our Common Home* in some manner, the most successful initiative undertaken by this standing committee. Participation took place in the form of plastic and waste cleanup, eliminating the use of plastic bags and straws, planting a tree to commemorate the League's 100th anniversary, reducing printing of League material, hosting guest speakers on *Laudato Si'*, and celebrating World Water Day (sponsored by the United Nations).

Another of the League's more successful activities was "12 Hours of Prayer for Palliative Care". The Canadian Hospice Palliative Care Association designated May 2-8, 2021 as National Hospice Palliative Care Week. During this week, most parish councils arranged for 12 members to pray in their homes for one hour for palliative care and a few held virtual prayer gatherings. Palliative care postcards were used, members addressed palliative care through letter-writing campaigns, and a few councils informed themselves with the *Horizons of Hope: A Toolkit for Catholic Parishes on Palliative Care* produced by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Communications:

Three events stand out under the standing committee of communications. Firstly, in terms of *The Canadian League* magazine, the board published the fall issue in digital format only, a very difficult and unpopular decision that was taken because of the imminent deficits facing the League caused by the decline in membership revenue. Many members expressed how much they valued receiving a print copy, and the board expressed its hope that the revenue trend would reverse, making print publications more affordable.



Secondly, the marketing working group along with a marketing firm, continued to produce material designed to attract new members and engage existing ones. Marketing campaigns included producing videos from the interviews of four young members, taping a 30 second commercial, development and promotion of a digital engagement campaign, and developing a graphic to represent the League across Canada. Advertising dollars were spent promoting the campaigns through social media.

Finally, an emphasis on virtual communication was still key to keeping members interested and engaged as the pandemic raged on. Restrictions that prevented in-person meetings increased the comfort level with technology among the members. Many councils had the opportunity to learn how to use videoconferencing platforms to host virtual gatherings with members. It also provided the opportunity to virtually connect on various occasions, such as prayer services, rosary recitations, advent retreats and bazaars and inviting members in other provinces to join in. Emails reaching out and touching base with members during isolation were greatly appreciated. Personal interaction combined with technology was the ultimate form of communication.

Organizational Structure and Statistics

NATIONAL COUNCIL

11

Provincial Councils

34

Diocesan Councils

1,125

Parish Councils

63,572

Members

The League was saddened by the loss of 40 parish councils that chose to leave the organization but celebrated the return of three others. Most parish councils that chose to withdraw from the League (80% of them) did so without notice of their intent. The League gained 2,237 members who either were new to the League or had chosen to renew their membership, while it lost 8,257 members who decided not to renew. In addition, 1,068 members were called home, for a net reduction in membership of 10%. Factors that influenced the decline were the inability to be active in service to the community due to the pandemic, a loss of connection between members due to isolation, frustration over a proposed national per capita fee increase, and frustration over the League's increased emphasis on technology with many senior members feeling left behind.

Organizational Renewal

Recognizing the service-oriented mission of the organization demands youthful energy and action, and further recognizing a resistance of existing members to take on leadership roles to help the League achieve its mission, the national executive struck a committee in 2017 to develop a strategic plan to address these and other issues faced by the membership.

The steering committee generated 50 strategies to move the League in the direction set in the 17 objectives approved in 2017. These 50 strategies were tested at

diocesan and provincial conventions. With feedback from more than 4,000 members from conventions, the steering committee determined which strategies would have the most significant impact and should be addressed first over a five-year period of implementation.

A synopsis of the tremendous effort put forward in 2021 by volunteers to advance the League into the 21st century based on the extensive research done by members yields the following remarkable advances toward realization of the vision:

Working Group	Published Outcomes
Affirmation	<i>Welcome Program</i>
Catholic Social Teaching	Social justice calendar Resource list Care of God's Creation module Dignity and Rights of Workers module
Encourage Diversity	Demographics report Calendar of cultural events Ads, posters and postcards
Marketing	Video interviews of young members CWL map of Canada Social media posts (September-December)
Reorganization	Instructed voting on proposed structural change for executive positions continued in parish councils
Spiritual Formation	Establishment of annual National Faith Day (September 19) Prayers and spiritual programs Social aspects pamphlet Workshop on creating prayers



Other working groups that were in the progress of researching, creating and developing new tools and those that completed work which will be published once the proposed amendments are adopted:

- Actively Engage Members
- Advocacy
- Collaboration with Government
- Effective Communication
- Generational Activity
- Increase Connectedness
- League Misconceptions
- Networking with Catholic Organizations
- Parish Options/Strategic Leadership
- Smartphone Application
- Toolkits
- Training and Development

Love for the League and the deep commitment of these members who so generously offered their time and talent to embrace the future was awe-inspiring for all who witnessed their work. Volunteer efforts to the end of 2021 totaled a tremendous 13,226 hours. Had a professional firm been engaged to carry out this work instead of through the earnest devotion of the League's own members, the cost of implementing the plan would have been at least \$600,000 to date. Had staff been hired to do so, the cost would have amounted to at least \$300,000. Without the dedication of volunteers, the League would be unable to operate!

A special thank you must be extended to Sharon Ciebin, Christa Grillmair, Lisa Henry, Jacqueline Nogier and Sr. Susan Scott for agreeing to bring the strategic plan to life, along with all members and leads of the working groups.



Leadership and Recognition

Through its system of election to office and its organizational structure, The Catholic Women's League of Canada offers opportunities for leadership, personal and spiritual development with increasing levels of responsibility and at a pace chosen by the member. With 11 positions at the national level, 132 at the provincial level and 408 at the diocesan level, a total of 551 senior leadership opportunities to serve "For God and Canada" exist.

While it was difficult to gather to celebrate the fine achievements of members in 2021, some councils found creative ways to honour their members. Two members were added to the rolls of Bellelle Guerin award recipients, bringing the total to 213 members or 0.3% of the membership. An additional 71 members received a maple leaf service pin, bringing the total to 4,070 members or 6.4% of the membership.



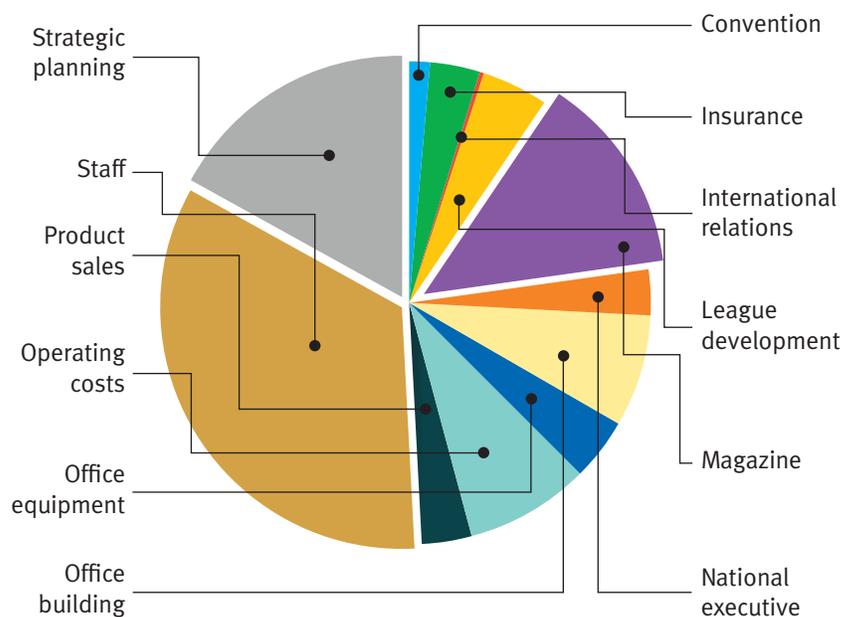
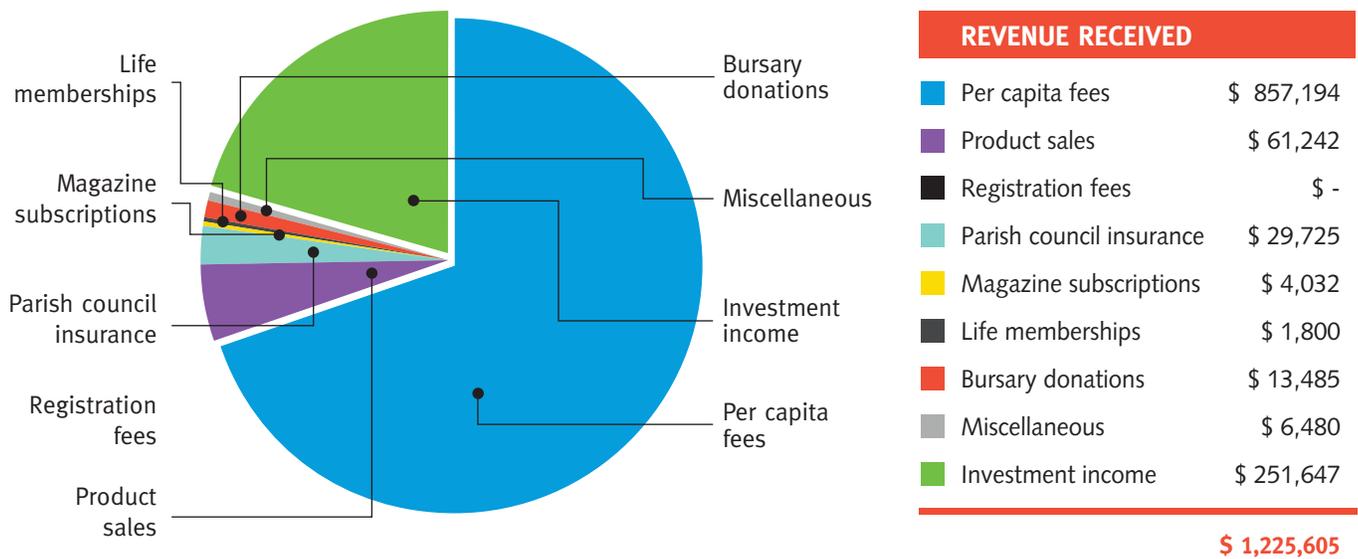
Financial Information

Recognizing the League had experienced operating deficits in five of the past six years and also that an investment of more than \$1,000,000 would be needed to revision the League so it could evolve into the organization members had been requesting for almost two decades, the national executive awaited the results of vote to increase the national per capita fee.

With an ongoing decline in membership that removed almost \$100,000 from revenue in 2021, the national

executive had to make some difficult decisions – firstly to limit spending on the implementation of the strategic plan, and secondly to produce one issue of the magazine digitally.

In person meeting costs were also eliminated due to the ongoing nature of the pandemic. These included the 2021 annual national convention in Toronto, one national executive meeting and all national committee meetings. Were it not for a record year in investment returns, the League would have incurred a deficit in 2021.



Summary

In the second year of the global COVID-19 pandemic, faith never wavered. League councils and members pushed past the factors that limited their activities and they hit their stride. They adapted to the physical meeting restrictions by offering a wide variety of virtual options for the membership from webinars on certain topics to retreats to rosaries to sisterhood gatherings to training sessions. There was no shortage of opportunities for engaged members to participate, even in events that were geographically removed from them. These were opportunities they would not otherwise have had. Members on the west coast participated in conferences organized by councils on the east coast; members located centrally participated in rosaries organized by councils on the prairies; and every imaginable situation in between. What an incredible opportunity to build the sisterhood across Canada it was!

Service continued to be integral to the League's activities, albeit in different forms. Members recognized the deep loneliness that extended isolation causes and spent their time reaching out to sister members, even more so than they had previously. Emails and telephone calls brightened the day of many a member. Admittedly, there were councils that succumbed to the isolation and loneliness, sometimes closing up for good, and sometimes simply taking a rest from activities. They were dearly missed by their sister councils and it was hoped that once the restrictions were fully lifted, the councils would return with a renewed energy and call to belong. Acts of mercy continued, in a more limited way as fundraising events and acts of service were often not a possibility, but individual acts of mercy continued nonetheless.

Social justice, a activity that requires only pen and paper or a laptop, continued as it had in the past. Members were made aware of unjust situations through communiques and webinars on various societal issues and responded with the motto "the pen is mightier than the sword". With their passionate sense of justice, members advocated for justice for the children buried on or near former residential schools, the protection of pre-born children, vulnerable



individuals facing end-of-life pressures and climate change, along with a host of other issues such as homelessness (including youth), human trafficking, poverty, racism, food insecurity and domestic violence.

Hope in the future also never wavered. The envisioned future of the League as "an inclusive and engaged community of Catholic women inspired by faith" as "a vital participant in the church, a valued partner for social justice, a respected advocate at all government levels, connected to the world" continued to be developed by the implementation committee and its working groups in cooperation with the board. In order to realize this vision, it will take every council at every level to engage with the tools that are being offered, tools that offer many different foci. Every parish council will find a tool to help them with their unique charism, they need only search for the tools most appropriate to them. The envisioned future is within reach, it need only be embraced.

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