The Catholic Women's League of Canada

Handbook for Chairpersons of Faith, Service and Social Justice

Revised 2022

The Catholic Women's League of Canada
C-702 Scotland Avenue
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3M 1X5

Telephone: (204) 927-2310
Email: **info@cwl.ca**
Website: **cwl.ca**

Product Code 614

Contents

Introduction **1**

National Chairpersons **1**

Responsibilities of National Chairpersons *1*

Provincial and Diocesan Chairpersons **2**

Responsibilities of Provincial / Diocesan Chairpersons *2*

Local Council Priorities **2**

Role of the Chairpersons **3**

Faith Standing Committee *4*

Service Standing Committee *5*

Social Justice Standing Committee *6*

Resources and References **7**

League Objects

The objects of the League shall be to unite Catholic women of Canada

1. to achieve individual and collective spiritual development
2. to promote the teachings of the Catholic church
3. to exemplify the Christian ideal in home and family life
4. to protect the sanctity of life
5. to enhance the role of women in church and society
6. to recognize the human dignity of all people everywhere
7. to uphold and defend Christian education and values in the modern world
8. to contribute to the understanding and growth of religious freedom, social justice, peace and harmony

Mission Statement

The Catholic Women's League of Canada calls its members to grow in faith, and to witness to the love of God through ministry and service.

Introduction

The three pillars of faith, service and social justice reflect the core values of the Catholic Women's League through which members seek to live out the Mission Statement of being called to "grow in faith, and to witness to the love of God through ministry and service." Therefore, all council interests and activities will be related in some way to one of these standing committees.

The strength of the League is that although it is a national organization, each parish council is unique and is uniquely able to address the needs of its own members and community. Their interests and needs will reflect their local situation. Although all councils organize their work around the same three pillars, the activities they choose will therefore be unique to their circumstance.

National Chairpersons

Upon her election, each national president generates a national theme; the national executive/board uses that theme to develop a national focus or area of concern that reflects both the theme and the Mission Statement. This focus is an invitation from the board to all councils across Canada to engage in the same issue, thereby holding the potential for all members to work together to centre their efforts around it or to possibly effect change on it.

The three national chairpersons of faith, service and social justice work collaboratively to develop materials that can be used throughout the League to impact the focus. Parish councils are encouraged to integrate this work into the activities that they have decided to work on locally or to add it to their list of priorities for the year.

Responsibilities of National Chairpersons

- With the national board, determine a national umbrella focus.
- Develop materials to support councils working on the national focus.
- Distribute and promote information related to the national umbrella focus to their provincial/diocesan counterparts.
- Keep abreast of current topics that fall under their pillar.
- Educate and communicate with members at other levels about the issues.
- Initiate member action where a current issue contradicts the League's mission or where otherwise called for.
- Lobby federal government, national organizations, etc., as directed by resolutions.
- Advise chairpersons at other levels as required.
- Appoint subcommittees as necessary.

Provincial and Diocesan Chairpersons

Each year or term, the provincial or diocesan executive may choose an initiative or activity that they invite their members to work on to address a specific provincial/diocesan topic or area of concern. Diocesan and parish councils are then invited to participate in the initiative or activity to effect a broad, consequential response to the topic or area of concern.

Responsibilities of Provincial / Diocesan Chairpersons

- With the provincial/diocesan executive, develop an initiative or activity (optional).
- Develop materials to support councils working on any provincial/diocesan initiatives or activities.
- Distribute and promote information related to provincial/diocesan initiatives or activities to their diocesan/parish counterparts.
- Work together to make the national theme visible in the province/diocese; consider ways of facilitating the furtherance of any national focus.
- Determine if there are initiatives or activities in the province/diocese where a national focus might have an impact, and if so, how they could be tied together.
- Keep abreast of current provincial/diocesan topics that fall under their pillar.
- Educate and communicate with members at other levels about the topics.
- Initiate member action where a current issue contradicts the League's mission or where otherwise called for.
- Follow the resolutions process, initiate resolutions on relevant topics or advise the chairpersons at the appropriate levels of the concern (see *Resolutions Handbook*).
- Lobby provincial/local governments, or other organizations, as directed by resolutions.
- Advise chairpersons at other levels as required.

Local Council Priorities

Since every member is committed to the Mission Statement and the work of the council is the work of all members, all members should participate in deciding on and prioritizing which topics and activities the council will address in a particular year or term. Once agreed to, the work of the council is the work of all members of the council.

Often, a council's activities remain relatively unchanged from year to year, but the issues they support through their prayers, gifts of time and efforts, financial resources, and so on, may be very different over time. Each new year, or at least each new term, should bring with it the opportunity to re-examine what the council is doing and where its energies and resources are going. Ideally,

the council works on one or more issues or activities that arise from their members' particular interests and that speak to its unique "charism".* Over time, these can change and councils that re-examine their essential work regularly avoid becoming stagnant.

Councils prioritizing which activities to adopt in a year or term are encouraged to choose as many or as few as can be realistically met, acknowledging that every topic/activity may have merit but considering the limitations of their council. Topics and activities may change or evolve during the course of a year, as unexpected concerns arise. Councils are encouraged to consider the national focus and any provincial/diocesan initiatives or activities as potential priorities.

As the council considers its charism and the members' interests, the chairpersons are the members who help to *guide* the council in its discernment of which topics and activities to pursue. They may do research, facilitate discussion or invite speakers to help members with their decisions, but as much as possible, the whole council should be engaged in choosing.

*In this sense, "charism" refers to a council's special gift or grace from the Holy Spirit for the common good, or for the service of others, that helps the council to live out its mission within the church. For example, although a council may do many things, its special charism may be welcoming refugees and newcomers, or praying together, or hosting parish events, etc.

Role of the Chairpersons

Once a council determines the topics and activities that its interests and particular charism lead it to for the year, the next step will be for the three chairpersons to develop a coordinated approach to addressing these. Rather than working separately to address personal interests that fall under their pillar, the chairpersons find ways of collaborating to accomplish the council work more effectively. This likely begins with the three chairpersons meeting to consider how to bring the gifts of each committee together to support the topics and activities chosen by the council. Every committee has its own purpose and expertise, but they are all connected.

> For example, this could mean developing spiritual programs that reflect the topic/activity, seeking out and engaging in opportunities for service related to the topic and advocating to the appropriate level of the government regarding the topic. Other examples include attending an ecumenical prayer and information event related to the topic, working with other churches in the community to address the topic and attending a municipal council meeting to request better resources related to the topic.

Working collaboratively, the three chairpersons strive to develop a program for the year that will allow members to engage in all three pillars (faith, service and social justice) at one or more times throughout the year. Every chairperson may not present something at every meeting, but over the course of the year, the core values of the League will be reflected to the members through the monthly offerings as some aspect of the topic/activity discerned by the council is highlighted by at least one chairperson each month.

As well, individual chairpersons always have the opportunity to bring other information related to their pillar to the council; the model of the League has always been and will continue to be flexible.

> For example, a chairperson would certainly wish to bring forward information on a new synod, a community's homeless initiative, the opportunity to participate in a provincial/national survey on palliative care, etc.

Councils can and should adjust when unexpected events occur and opportunities arise; a strength of the League is responding with immediacy, and the chairpersons should provide leadership in such situations, but always acting with the engagement of other members.

Service and action of the League largely rest at the parish council level, with the support of the other levels of the League.

Faith Standing Committee

According to the *Constitution & Bylaws*, chairpersons of faith shall evangelize, promote spiritual growth and encourage members to

a. pray, individually and communally
b. uphold the sanctity of life
c. study Catholic teachings
d. stress the importance of the role of women in the church
e. foster vocations
f. advance ecumenical and interfaith endeavours

Some ways in which local councils may help members deepen their faith through the League:

- Introduce members to a variety of forms of prayer, organize retreats, host evenings of reflection, develop spiritual programs, etc.
- Uphold sanctity of life through prayer, and service and social justice initiatives that the council is focusing on.
- Study Catholic teachings, especially those related to service and social justice initiatives that the council is focusing on.
- Develop awareness of the role of laity in the church.
- Support and encourage participation in Catholic religious education programs for children, lay ministries, sacramental preparation programs, Rite of Christian Initiation programs, etc.
- Support Catholic education, where available.

- Support vocations (singlehood, marriage, priesthood, women religious, formation programs, youth ministries).
- Encourage engagement in ecumenical and interfaith endeavours (Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, World Day of Prayer).
- Organize/support a variety of faith services in parish (Way of the Cross, Advent retreat evening, living rosary, choir, etc.).
- Study and implement the action plans of related adopted resolutions.
- Consider initiating a resolution on a topic of interest to the council (see *Resolutions Handbook*).

Service Standing Committee

According to the *Constitution & Bylaws*, chairpersons of service shall encourage members to

a. promote activities in service to members, the parish and the community

b. advocate for and support services that include but are not limited to homelessness, human trafficking, poverty, bullying and racism

c. educate members about charitable needs, especially mission assistance at home and abroad

Some ways in which local councils may engage in service:

- Host events in support of parish (communion breakfasts, clergy appreciation lunches, senior evenings, funeral receptions).
- Support/host/participate in events in service of the community (serving at food banks or soup kitchens, collecting winter clothing for shelters, visiting shut-ins, etc.).
- Support national or international initiatives by, for example, sponsoring a person through an organization such as Chalice, participating in events held by groups such as Development and Peace, etc.
- Develop/support services to help in the areas of homelessness, human trafficking, poverty, bullying, racism, etc.
- Educate members about charitable needs in local, national and international communities through guest speakers.
- Organize fundraisers for council initiatives.
- Study and implement the action plans of related adopted resolutions.
- Consider initiating a resolution on a topic of interest to the council (see *Resolutions Handbook*).

Social Justice Standing Committee

According to the *Constitution & Bylaws*, chairpersons of social justice, guided by Catholic social teaching, shall encourage members to

a. uphold the life and dignity of the human person

b. advocate for the poor and the vulnerable and their inclusion in society

c. advocate for the dignity of work and equal rights of workers

d. care for God's creation

e. educate members and keep them informed of relevant social justice issues

f. initiate resolutions on relevant issues

Some ways in which local councils may deepen their commitment to social justice:

- Encourage participation in activities that uphold the life and dignity of the human person.
- Advocate for the complete inclusion in society and the church of the poor, vulnerable and marginalized.
- Advocate for the development of support services in the community.
- Promote stewardship for God's creation.
- Initiate/participate in letter-writing campaigns to politicians on adopted League resolutions.
- Request to be placed on the email/mailing lists of local, provincial and federal government representatives.
- Advocate for the dignity of work and the rights of workers.
- Recognize and uphold the principle that with rights come responsibilities.
- Encourage members to promote peace in parishes, communities, nationally and globally.
- Educate members about relevant social justice issues through guest speaker presentations.
- Study and implement the action plans of related adopted resolutions.
- Consider initiating a resolution on a topic of interest to the council (see *Resolutions Handbook*).
- Monitor legislation of social justice topics at various levels to keep abreast of ongoing changes in legislation.

Resources and References

The Canadian League **magazine**—copies of individual articles are available from national office.

Communiqués from the national executive/board are regularly posted on the League website (cwl.ca).

Ongoing resolutions are posted on the League website and are also available upon request from national office. Resolutions adopted at the national annual meeting of members/convention are published in the fall issue of *The Canadian League* magazine.

The following resources are available from national office:

- *Constitution & Bylaws*
- *National Manual of Policy and Procedure*
- *Personal Letter-Writing Guide*
- *Resolutions Handbook*

Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops

2500 Don Reid Dr.
Ottawa, ON K1H 2J2

Toll-free Telephone: (800) 769-1147
Websites: cccb.ca

Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace

National Secretariat
400-80 Hayden Street
Toronto, ON M4Y 3G2

Toll-free Telephone: (888) 234-8533
Email: info@devp.org

Canadian Health Alliance of Canada

96 Empress Ave
Ottawa, ON K1R 7G3

Telephone: (613) 567-1200
Website: chac.ca

Coady International Institute

St. Francis Xavier University
Box 5000
Antigonish, NS B2G 2W5

Toll-free Telephone (866) 820-7835
Website: coady.stfx.ca

Local, provincial, federal government representatives