

The Catholic Women's League of Canada



*Handbook for
Organization Chairpersons*



Supplement to the *Executive Handbook*

History

In 1912, Catholic women of Canada were first organized in the Archdiocese of Edmonton to assist with the care and placement of the ever-increasing influx of immigrants from Europe and elsewhere. The movement gradually spread to the port cities and other major centres across Canada.

In 1920, these groups were invited to meet in Montreal to establish a national group of Catholic women. The name “Catholic Women’s League” originated in England in 1912, in response to a perceived need for Catholic lay action and was adopted by the Canadian group.

On **June 17, 1920**, The Catholic Women’s League of Canada was formally established with Miss Bellelle Guerin of Montreal elected first national president. Present at the organizational meeting were representatives from the future sub-divisions of Edmonton, Halifax, Hamilton, Montreal, Ottawa, Regina, Saint John, Sherbrooke and Toronto.

In 1921, the League affiliated with the International Union of Catholic Women, now known as the World Union of Catholic Women’s Organizations (WUCWO), an affiliation still enjoyed today. Also in 1921, **the first annual national convention** of The Catholic Women’s League of Canada was held in Toronto. The delegates at that convention produced a constitution, a set of bylaws and the beginnings of a publication – *The Canadian League*.

In 1922, the League crest and seal – the cross surmounting the maple leaves with the words “The Catholic Women’s League of Canada – For God and Canada” in the surrounding circle was designed by Mrs. Emmett Mullally.

In 1923, the League was incorporated federally.

In 1927, a national scholarship fund was established to assist Catholic female students and, for many years, this was given for graduate studies in social work. Since 1969, however, this fund has been donated to the **Coady International Institute** of St. Francis Xavier University, Antigonish, Nova Scotia, to assist foreign students from developing countries.

The year 1938 saw the organization of Business & Professional Women’s CWL Councils in major cities across Canada.

In 1947–1948, the organization of the first provincial councils of the League occurred allowing for provincial action and the lobbying of provincial governments.

In 1948, the League was mandated by the Canadian Catholic Conference of the Hierarchy (now the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCCB)) and was under the patronage of His Eminence James C. Cardinal McGuigan, DD, until his death in 1975. Since 1976, the League has been privileged to be under the special patronage of the CCCC and, in 2005, the League was officially recognized by the CCCC as a national private association of the faithful.

In 1965, the Military Vicariate Council was formed to coordinate the councils established on military bases and was given the status of a provincial council. The name was changed in 1988 to Military Ordinariate Provincial Council.

In 1969, the League's 1% commitment to the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace (CCODP) was established.

During the 1970s, leadership courses were formulated and resolutions adopted by the national council on the floor of the convention were presented, by national officers, on Parliament Hill, to members of parliament.

In 1980, Newfoundland joined the League as a provincial council.

Diocesan, provincial and national levels are financed through per capita fees paid by the members. Parish councils fundraise to finance activities and projects.

The spiritual growth of members both individually and collectively has always been a primary focus of The Catholic Women's League of Canada.

In addition to spiritual growth of members, the activities of the League, since its original purpose of aiding immigrants, have broadened and, in recent years, the emphasis has been on issues concerning **human dignity, social justice, the sanctity of life from conception to natural death, and the preservation of Christian family life.**

In 1992, the League's Mission Statement was adopted as follows:

The Catholic Women's League of Canada
is a national organization
rooted in gospel values
calling its members to holiness
through service to the people of God.