

The 97th Annual CWL National Convention Report
Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island
August 5 – 9, 2017

Can anyone imagine having 938 friends? And meeting them in person? Wow! What an amazing turnout for the 97th Annual National Convention! None of us could imagine a better place to be during Canada's sesquicentennial celebration as we gathered in Charlottetown, PEI, the place where the seeds of confederation were first planted. We had a chance to immerse ourselves in the beauty of the island, celebrating the history of our country while initiating new plans for the future of the League. There was also much optimism that the League will continue to grow in boldness and thrive in purpose, in justice, in charity and in peace.

For many members, including myself, the League came alive after experiencing our first national convention. It is exciting to meet members from all across the country. This convention offered us a wonderful opportunity to be forever changed by allowing the Holy Spirit to inspire and transform us. Thirteen members from Ottawa came to PEI to take in this experience.



This year's national convention followed a similar format to those of previous years – the opening on Sunday followed by three days of meetings – yet it was a unique convention with a PEI flavour which touched our hearts, minds, and souls. For those who arrived on Saturday, there was the opportunity to enjoy an authentic PEI lobster dinner. So many of us accepted this opportunity to experience island cuisine that the organizers had to reserve two restaurants: the New Glasgow Lobster Suppers in New Glasgow and the Fisherman's Wharf Lobster Suppers in North Rustico. At either place, the experience was fun and the company was delightful!

On Sunday morning there were three tours offered: "Tour of Eastern Lighthouses and Rossignol Winery," "City of Charlottetown Tour on Double Decker Bus," and "Walking Tour with a Father/Mother of Confederation." The third tour was postponed to another day due to the heavy rainfall on Sunday. The rain was welcomed by the locals because it was needed in this part of the country but not so much by the contingent from Ottawa!

The island flavour also resonated in the entertainment. Sunday night a band of award winning artists, the Treble With Girls, provided a lively and musical evening of island Celtic and Country music which had people up dancing; it was amazing seeing all the ladies doing the conga line! On Monday night, entertainment was provided by Leo and the PEI Pops, an orchestra conducted by Leo Marchildon. Comedian Patrick Ledwell was also there to provide humorous insights into the lighter side of life.

Adding to the joy of being at the convention was the opportunity to rekindle friendships from previous conventions. There was a wonderful reception held at the Murphy's Community Center on Sunday night after the opening Mass. The place was soon filled with laughter and excited conversations as people reconnected with each other. Other opportunities to socialize and share our time together included dinner at the Convention Center on Monday night, the Provincial dinners on Tuesday night, and the Banquet on Wednesday night. As well as entertainment, there were the business affairs of the CWL to attend. It wasn't just business though, our Lord was present during all our deliberations. The opening of the convention, for example, began with a Eucharistic Celebration at St. Dunstan's Basilica on Sunday afternoon, the Feast of the Transfiguration. It

was amazing to see all the spiritual advisors, both bishops and priests, concelebrating during the Mass. We were so blessed by their presence! In his homily, Most Reverend Richard Grecco, the Bishop of Charlottetown, reminded us that the Holy Eucharist is a preview of heaven and our own resurrection so that we may know that our lives are being transfigured. After the Mass, National President Margaret Ann Jacobs declared the convention officially open and we went out to transfigure the League!

At the beginning of each morning of the convention we were uplifted with a Eucharistic Celebration or Morning Prayer. On Monday morning, Archbishop Richard Gagnon (Winnipeg) challenged us to let our hearts be open and respond to the Holy Spirit in our lives through the fruits of unity, kindness, and all that builds the kingdom of God. On Tuesday morning, on the Feast of Saint Dominic, National Spiritual Advisor Bishop William McGrattan, asked us to let the Word of God nourish us and strengthen us in love, justice, charity, and in the ways of God.

Prayers were also an important part of each day including a memorial service for deceased members, reconvening prayers, and closing prayers. A prayer service was also held in which the Lap Quilts of Love and Mercy were processed by the Provincial Presidents around the convention hall. These beautiful quilts were made by members from each of the provinces.



Nourished in the spirit, our minds were then strengthened in faith. On Monday morning, Catholic speaker and author, Ken Yazinski gave a talk on “A Catholic Identity Crisis” and a second talk on “Becoming a Living Thank You.”

On Tuesday morning, Dr. Reginal Bibby, a leading expert on social and religious trends in Canada, spoke about the direction of the Catholic Church. The good news is that, primarily due to immigration, there will be a large influx of younger people which will see the Church grow in Canada. In contrast, CWL membership is declining but Dr. Bibby showed us the potential growth is there if we are ready to “bring it.” On Wednesday morning, Dr. June Webber, Director of Coady International Institute in Antigonish, Nova Scotia talked about the Institute and was very grateful for the financial support from the CWL.

The afternoons were dedicated to business matters such as the reports of the national chairpersons and the provincial presidents. Although many on the executive were new, they all did an excellent job, as did our own Ontario Provincial President Anne Madden.

A truly unique event at this convention was the town hall on Tuesday morning. It was an exciting display of network technology and a completely new experience for the CWL. It was an interactive event in which people at the convention and all across Canada were connected through the internet. At the convention site, people were organized into 170 groups while off-site 73 groups of people gathered to participate. Through livestreaming technology, everyone was able to watch the facilitator Donna Dunn as she presented a series of six questions focusing on League strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The groups were asked to discuss the questions amongst themselves and then respond with one or two word answers. There was a lot of enthusiastic discussion in which people discovered they shared similar experiences and ideas. It was gratifying to see the results appear so quickly on the large screens at the front of the convention hall as each group entered their response. There was a sense that each group’s input really did make a difference!

The next day, the steering committee for strategic planning presented preliminary results of the town hall. The results clearly showed that the League has a lot to be proud of and has a hopeful outlook for the future. The results also showed that the League has internal issues which need to be resolved to make the League a more worthwhile experience for new members.

During the afternoon sessions on Tuesday and Wednesday, four resolutions were brought to the floor, discussed and ultimately accepted. The resolution which generated the most discussion was “Full Implementation of the Supreme Court Decision in R. v. Gladue for Indigenous Offenders” proposed by Holy Spirit Council in the Ottawa Diocese. Changes to the wording were made, then more changes, followed by reversions back to earlier wording! Finally, when it seemed that things were at an impasse, everyone agreed that this resolution was too important to hold back for another year and the original unedited wording was accepted! In this case, the members at the convention truly came together to act in the best interests of the mission heart of the League.

Some other highlights included the convention centre awash in a sea of red on Monday as attendees wore red clothing to commemorate Canada’s 150th birthday. On Tuesday, eight new life members were commissioned by National President-Elect and Organization Chairperson Anne-Marie Gorman with help from National President Margaret Ann Jacobs. The life members also received a blessing from National Spiritual Advisor Bishop William McGrattan.

All good things must come to an end. The official closing of the convention was marked by a Eucharistic Celebration at St. Dunstan’s Basilica on Wednesday afternoon. Bishop McGrattan reflected on the CWL as a community of faith inspired by the Holy Spirit and encouraged us to trust in God’s providence and be filled with hope. He sent us forth with the knowledge that it is the faith of the League that our parishes and our country need: to be food for the hungry.



After the Mass, the last chance to celebrate and say goodbye came with the Gala Banquet held in the convention center. The food was excellent. Entertainment was provided by the touring group The Dream Catchers who gave a performance infused with high energy and a creative flair. The next day, each of us headed on our own ways knowing that the events we witnessed at the 97th Annual National Convention were groundbreaking and that we were transfiguring the League.

Respectfully Submitted:

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President-Elect & Organization Chair
CWL Ottawa Diocese