

The Catholic Women League of Canada 96th Annual Convention

Halifax, Nova Scotia August 14-17, 2016- by Shirley Pierce

Theme: ONE HEART, ONE VOICE, ONE MISSION

Delegates attending the Convention enjoyed a variety of activities: Historic Halifax Harbour cruise, Grand-Pre National Historic Site tour, South Shore tour, Amazing Race, Masses, spiritual exercises, resolutions dialogue, business sessions, great guest speakers, 50/50 collections, lobster dinner, gala banquet, and great entertainment. It was a good learning and spiritual time for all.

After some fun tours and the Amazing Race, delegates got down to Convention business. A resolution session gave delegates an opportunity to learn more about the purpose of resolutions and review the five resolutions that were to be presented during the convention.

WUCWO, World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations founded in 1910, was also having their convention at the same time. WUCWO has Catholic member organizations and "defends human dignity and human rights through declarations, reports and support for the Holy See Missions and coordinates the activities of Catholic women's organizations worldwide". They had a session on Sunday afternoon. Delegates attended from the United States as well as the President General Maria Giovanna Ruggieri from Italy. She offered some of these comments: "Hope and mercy meet in God's love". "Who do I become a neighbor of, not who is my neighbor", "Give voice to voiceless people." "Thanks to Canadian women for their support."

The official opening, Eucharistic celebrations and opening reception were held at St. Mary's Basilica. Provincial presidents marched in carrying their provincial flag and the National Executive followed them to begin the evening. Thirty four priests, bishops and archbishops attended the celebration of the Eucharist, the vigil Mass of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Seven hundred delegates were in attendance. A beautiful choir and hundreds singing and a meaningful spiritual service provided a beautiful experience. Most Rev. Anthony Mancini in his homily spoke of "Blest are those who hear the word of God and obey it." "Mary was the first disciple". He encouraged CWL women, engaged Catholic women of faith, to defend the values God taught us.

During the opening ceremonies the following people brought greetings: spiritual advisors Rev James Richards, Most Rev. William McGrattan, Mayor Michael Savage, Premier Stephen Mc Neil, a local MP and Knights Past deputy and National President Barbara Dowding. Afterwards, an enjoyable opening reception was held in the basement of the church.

Every session opened with a spiritual service or Mass and closed with prayer. Much work went into preparing the daily liturgy book which was separate from the Convention Program and 2015 Annual Report. Themes included Merciful like the Father; God of Mercy, People of Mercy; A Disciple's Heart; Called Forth; Mission: We are called.

The WUCWO convention continued on Monday. We heard from Sr. John Mary, a member of the Sisters of Life, gave an inspiring talk on: Women of Mercy United in One Heart, One Voice,

One Mission. Sister John works with pregnant women and their babies in Toronto. The Sisters of Life work to protect and enhance the sacredness of life. She talked about the culture of life and the culture of death and asked us, "Do you believe you can change the world through prayers and sacrifice?" During her talk she showed a very powerful movie called Marie's Story which would be an excellent tool for heightening our awareness and discussions on the worth of each person. Later in the morning, delegates and clergy were asked to share "What really changed your life profoundly?" Two priests shared their experiences: one joined the seminary at 11, was kicked out and left the church, jailed for a crime, his mother prayed for him continuously, another prisoner changed his life and brought him back to the church and priesthood; another priest was in nurses training and was present for a birth and was so profoundly impressed with how the mother had to "bear down" to bring forth the child; some ladies talked about the changes in their lives when they adopted a child or gave birth; another shared her experience when her daughter had an abortion while she was President of her local CWL council.

The Assumption of Mary was the theme of the Mass and the significance of Mary's visitation to Elizabeth was highlighted during the homily. The altar was filled with gold chalices which was a special sight. The collection was \$3650.83.

After the memorial service for deceased members, the business sessions began with introductions, minutes, correspondence, and three minute reports from provincial presidents.

The lobster supper and entertainment were a big hit on Monday evening; 250 people travelled by bus to Hubbards and the overflow had a lobster dinner and entertainment at the hotel.

Tuesday morning started with a Year of Mercy pilgrimage and Eucharistic celebration at St Mary's Basilica. People entered through the Door of Mercy. Handouts in preparations for the pilgrimage and an Examination of Conscience based on the parable of the prodigal son were powerful resource materials for reflection. Priests were available for confession as they were at certain times during the Convention. There was also a Prayer Room available for prayer and reflection.

We were treated to a great talk by a handsome Scottish priest Fr. James Mallon from Halifax whose talk centred on this theme: I am a Mission on This Earth. In his introduction we were told that this priest "is taking the country by storm". He writes books, produces DVDs. In his talk Fr. Mallon shared three observations:

- 1) Parishes must undergo a transformation from Maintenance to Mission.
- 2) National councils like CWL and the Knights must show greater flexibility. He questioned how we would be CWL members in this mission parish
- 3) CWL members will tip the balance. As women, we are the heart of the parish. He was quite inspiring and his talk will be on the national website.

A commissioning ceremony was held for the new Life members; Barb McFarlane was commissioned during the ceremony.

The business session in the afternoon had many Provincial Presidents and members of the national chairpersons give short reports of the activity highlights. The Executive Director Kim Scammell talked about some of the challenges/opportunities the staff deals with such as the volume of daily emails, the new electronic annual report system and the upcoming review of the membership system. Delegates were given an engaging update on the Catholic Women's Leadership Foundation (designed for Catholic women's leadership development) and the Near East Welfare Association (initiative commonly known as Velma's Dream) to help save Middle East Christians.

That night, all 29 from PEI gathered for a President's reception and then had a great dinner at the Keg where we were joined by members of the Military Ordinate. Everyone had a great time.

After Morning Prayer on Wednesday morning, Dr. Nuala Kenny, a physician ethicist and Dalhousie professor emeritus, gave a spirited discourse on palliative care. She talked about the characteristics of a good death, the role of palliative care in a good death, the Supreme Court's decision and Bill C-14. She challenged us to "Walk the Talk". Who needs mercy today? "I was sick and you visited me"- the acutely ill and hospitalized, the dying, the bereaved, the frail elderly. " She was a powerful speaker and often we were treated as students as she took the time to emphasize her points. I encourage you to seek out opportunities to hear this powerful speaker.

A motion was accepted to send Most Rev. McGrattan's letter to the Catholic Health Organization encouraging provinces and territories to allow their physicians "freedom of conscience".

After chairpersons gave their reports, if there was a resolution associated with their portfolio such as Health and Education, then the resolution was discussed, sometimes amendments were added and a vote was taken. The resolutions centred these topics: low skilled foreign workers and permanent resident status, updates to the Canada Food Guide, warning labels on food and drug products and inactive substances and additives, amending the Canada Health Act to identify palliative care and home care as insured healthy services. More information on the resolutions will be in an upcoming edition of the Canadian League.

In the early afternoon, our delegation of Islanders put on a splash to garner excitement to attend the National Convention next August in PEI. We dressed up as Anne of Green Gables, a lobster, Stompin Tom, farmers, fishermen, potatoes, Fathers and Mothers of Confederation; we sang and danced "We're Island, we're Island, we're from Prince Edward Island" and shared our potato necklaces with some delegates. Bishop Greco's message and Elaine Black's powerful presentation made a big impact on the delegates. Some were booking their hotels right away.

More business followed: the report of the National president, the new theme for the next two years " "Inspired by the Spirit Women respond to God's call" " Prompted and Motivated by the Spirit", the election of the new officers- President Elect, 1ST Vice President, 2nd Vice

President, Secretary Treasurer and Standing chairpersons. The new President is Margaret Ann Jacobs.

The closing Eucharistic celebration and installation of officers was at St. Mary's Basilica where 700 delegates attended and many clergy celebrated Mass. As usual, there was beautiful music and many people praying twice as they sang the hymns.

The final formal convention event was the Gala banquet where everyone in attendance had an opportunity to have fun, network, take pictures, enjoy delicious food and enjoy a real treat- one hour concert with the Men of the Deep.

On Thursday. many weary souls headed back to their homes after four days of constant activity. Some stayed for one more tour to the South Shore.

I would encourage all of you to attend the National Convention August 6-9 in Charlottetown. You will meet many wonderful people, be part of great spiritual exercises, hear wonderful speakers and learn more of how we can fulfil our mission "for God and Canada".