

Through the Decades

A Brief Reflection on League History

1920-29: The Building of a Nationwide Organization

A grant of \$3,000 was given by the Knights of Columbus to allow Mrs. R. H. Kneil to travel across Canada organizing subdivisions. The crest design was approved and is still in use today. Four Objects became the League rallying cry: to further Catholic education; to form committees to study immigration issues, racial harmony, the betterment of Catholic social action, and stimulate women's work; to secure adequate representation in organizations; and to seek affiliation with international bodies of women. Our Lady of Good Counsel was selected as the League's patroness.

1930-39: The Great Depression and Drought

A relief movement was instituted which became known as the Regina Fund; it provided badly needed food and clothing for drought sufferers. Archbishop J.C. McGuigan of Regina said, 'If it had never done anything but this one great work of mercy, the League has amply justified its existence'. By 1932, more than one and one-half million dollars had been raised for charity. Organizationally, business women's and junior sub-divisions were created for the particular needs of the working woman and the younger, single member.

1940-49: The War Years

A gift of \$25,000 was given to the federal government in support of the war effort, the equivalent of \$385,000 today. A war services convenorship was established. Immigration was given a focus as the placement and supervision of British children was arranged by the federal government. The League became involved heavily with the view that Catholic children should be placed in Catholic homes wherever possible. Tangible assistance was almost immeasurable—socks, helmets, scarves, bandages, ditty bags, books, magazines, religious articles, and letters bore witness to League patriotism. Organizationally, the League received formal approval and mandate from the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops and provincial councils were established.

1950-59: Post War Reconstruction

The impact of World War II changed the role of women irrevocably. The issue of salacious literature was a major concern and a brief was presented to the Senate committee to curb its sale and distribution. Then National President Ellen Drake spoke on the CBC on behalf of members, expressing their concern about the effects the freedom of the press was having on the moral standards of Canadian citizens. She predicted the advent of drug addiction among young people as one result of a long-range plan to undermine the morality of the country. The League was invited to the coronation of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, with two seats being reserved for the League in Westminster Abbey—a sign of the esteem with which the League was held.

1960-69: The Development Movement

In 1961, the League made its first donation to the Coady International Institute, a relationship that still exists today. A World Refugee Fund provided monies for parish councils interested in sponsoring a refugee family coming to Canada. Monies were provided for a hostel and school in Italy, for a day nursery in Hong Kong and for a mobile medical unit in India. \$100,000 was pledged to the Vanier Institute of the Family to help support the preservation of families and family values. The Military Ordinariate Provincial Council was formed. In 1969, the League responded to the prime minister's plea to establish a fund that would contribute 1% of gross domestic product by adopting the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace as a permanent voluntary fund.

1970-79: The Evolution of Social Justice

The League was being recognized by the federal government as a major women's organization in Canada. Resolutions were sent to government regularly and, in 1974, a delegation of League members met with federal cabinet ministers for the first time, a landmark event and a tradition that has continued to this day. The first meetings were with the ministers of labour, justice and national revenue and League representatives included then National President Molly Boucher and future presidents Mary Matthews and Betty Aitken. A national pro-life fund was established to afford ongoing assistance to national pro-life groups working to preserve the sanctity of life.

1980-89: Families under Strain

On a national scale, the League expressed grave concern about the growing prevalence of marriage and family breakdown through the commissioning of a three-year in-depth study on the Quality of Marriage. The results of the study were shared with the federal government as it was proposing substantive changes to the Divorce Act. Internationally, members reached out beyond Canada's borders in support of the Grandmothers of Argentina, who were desperately searching for their "disappeared" grandchildren in the politically unstable country. Then National President Jean Mahoney visited Argentina and joined in the weekly protest march held in Buenos Aires.

1990-1999: Dignity for Women

Members were invited to study *Mulieris Dignitatem* (On the Dignity and Vocation of Women of the Marian Year). Resolutions had a decidedly particular focus on women and women's issues such as support for single and pregnant women, protection for women from discriminatory immigration policies, funding for breast and cervical cancer research, prevention of spousal abuse, tax credits for stay-at-home parents and oppression of women in other cultures. National President Claire Heron and future president Joan Chessier traveled to Beijing for the NGO Forum on Women where the League was represented among many groups working for human rights, sustainable development and the environment, a gathering of greater number of women than ever before in the 20th century.

2000-2009: The Church in Canada

The Great Jubilee was celebrated in 2000 with jubilation and gratitude. In keeping with biblical tradition, letters were written to government asking that it cancel the debt of all developing nations. Contributions to the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace topped the million-dollar mark. A voluntary fund was established to assist with missions in Canada as well. World Youth Day descended on Toronto in 2002, bringing Catholic youth from all over the globe for a celebration of the faith. Members offered prayers and volunteer and monetary support to help make the event a success.