

St. Thomas à Becket Parish

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Mrs. Priscilla Noonan, "Communicating With the League"
Provincial Council of the CWL priscillanoonan@sympatico.ca

Dear Priscilla,

I am pleased to respond to the suggestion of Patricia Hannan, President, Montreal Archdiocesan Council, that I forward to you for the provincial newsletter an account of my first time at a CWL National Convention. What follows won't exhaust my impressions. It was amazing to be there. God bless you, your family and friends, and all that you do for God, for your Church, for the CWL, and for your country.

When I first accepted to serve as Spiritual Advisor for the Archdiocesan Council, I knew it would be a fruitful and rewarding assignment and hoped that I would be able to rise to the challenge. It was quite an experience for me at the National Convention; what you might call a culture shock. I had never attended any event with such a large number of women before and with only a few other men, mostly priests and a few bishops. What struck me the most, I think, was meeting such a wide variety of women: old women and young, highly educated women and graduates from the school of life, professionals and veterans of the "home front", some were quiet and reserved and others were very colorful and vivacious, women who were very gifted and others who were simpler, women who suffer and visibly carry heavy burdens and others who were the picture of health and kept their burdens well hidden, and on and on. I met a lot of interesting women and learned a lot about the League and its workings.

It was touching to meet so many women, to feel with what love they considered me as a priest, and to be refreshed by the vibrancy of their faith in God and the depth of their loyalty and affection for the Church as a whole and for their clergy in particular. I met over a dozen other spiritual advisors, mostly priests, and listened in amazement at their stories about the testimonies and accomplishments of Catholic women in Canada as active participants in the work of the CWL. Both leaders and members of the CWL have proven themselves to be very astute in dealing with the world and its ways, from politics to poverty, from social to domestic institutions, and from adults to children.

I was very impressed with the process of the National Convention, the first major event entirely run by women that I had ever seen. It was quite different from anything we men would run. It was more gracious, more genteel, more kind, more patient and inclusive. For all that, it was still efficient, at times rigorous, even tough, with the tough issues of our day. It is wonderful to see how far we can advance the best interests of other people and of society; yet remain loyal to the Church's teachings and to the Gospel.

I was often deeply moved by the intense passion with which many women addressed the various issues on the agenda, and the vibrant caring I saw in, I would say, every woman there. The convention delegates represented in a wonderful way, I felt, the interests and burdens, the ideals and needs, the minds and hearts of all the women of our Church and country. I have come away with a profound sense of what a privilege it is that I have been given to walk along the journey with the women of the CWL and to be at your service. I have a lot more to learn about the League and about how women work together and care for one another and for others. Women have an incredible capacity to care in concrete ways. May we find many more opportunities to reflect on the grace we are being given by God through participation in the life and work of the CWL, and be filled anew by the Holy Spirit with burning zeal to reach out to every single Catholic woman in Canada to give them all a fair opportunity to realize the benefits that await them upon enriching the total membership with their presence and participation.

Fr. Gilles A. Surprenant, Archdiocesan Spiritual Advisor