

# 67th ANNUAL MEMBERS' MEETING

## St. Catharines Diocesan Council Reports

### April 8, 2025

## **PRESIDENT**

Hi Excellency, Bishop Bergie, Father Richard Kowalchuk, Clergy, CWL National VP, Betty Colaneri, CWL Ontario President, Colleen Martin, Diocesan Council, Sisters in the League,

The question posed to each of the members of the Diocesan Executive is the following: Explain how your Diocesan Executive position elevated you to be a pilgrim of hope and confirmed your belief that “hope does not disappoint”, Romans 5:5. Here is my response.

To me, there are two main components of this task. The first is “pilgrim”--what is a pilgrim and how is a pilgrim different from a tourist or a traveler? A tourist typically travels without interaction with the locals. A traveler converses with locals and “seeks a thoughtful experience and deeper connection with a place.” A pilgrim, on the other hand, “is on a sacred journey in which God is encountered through places, people, and situations”.

Being a participant on several pilgrimages, both near and far, I’ve learned that it is a common conception that people need to travel great distances to have those experiences with God. That is not true. As a matter of fact, the experience of a pilgrim can be reduced to the presence of God in every interaction with one another. The pilgrim is blessed with hope and the Grace of the Holy Spirit.

As President of the Diocesan CWL, I have been particularly blessed in two ways: first with an exceptional Diocesan Executive; the ladies at this head table have exceeded any expectations I might have had. The second way I have been blessed is by having the opportunity to work with the steering committee for the unhoused and mental illness. Given the time, I could gush about each volunteer endlessly. Each person has been an absolute joy to work with. Their vision and execution have been par excellence.

The second component is hope. We all remember the Greek myth of Pandora and the box she opened that let all the evil into the world. Only hope remained. Biblical hope,

however, is more than wishful thinking. Biblical hope is uniting with God, as pilgrims, on our journey in this life to everlasting life. Biblical hope is what guides our decisions as we set our sights on the future.

One of my favourite poets is Rabindranath Tagore. He wrote: "The one who plants trees, knowing that he or she will never sit in their shade, has at least started to understand the meaning of life." That is hope and hope does not disappoint.

On that note, as Diocesan President, I would like to acknowledge and thank fellow Diocesan Presidents who are here today. --who have been pilgrims of hope in their leadership position--who have carved their and our path in line with the Lord's; may it be God's will that I follow faithfully in their footsteps: please stand: Mary Nan, Kathleen Masse, Betty Colaneri, Connie Parry, Wilma Vanderzwaag, Sharon Dixon, Shelley Tamas, Frances Murdaca, and Lisa Fillingham. Thank you for your vision and hope.

To conclude, to all of you, when you have a quiet moment or two, reflect on whether your interactions with others is as a tourist, traveler, or pilgrim. And leave your mark on this earth as God intended.

This concludes my report, Deedee Alexandre

## **PAST PRESIDENT**

Dear Sisters in the League

As past president, I see the CWL differently than when I was a new member. I never saw the past president role as representing hope or being hopeful but by thinking about this report, my eyes have been opened.

Hope is always present but the hope changes as you change personally and within the CWL.

Hope – Is to always to continue to learn and grow.

Hope – is seeking help with elections to attain a full executive with promise and eagerness.

Hope – is watching president's wanting to let go of their role and embrace being past presidents.

Hope – is watching past presidents retire and see them enjoying a different chapter of

their CWL life.

Hope – is listening to the executive promote works of the league to see new members fulfill roles.

Hope – is understanding that every past president sees their roles differently and adapts it to their parish or diocesan.

Hope – is forgiving yourself for all the mistakes you made.

Hope – is forgiving those who do not embrace your help when offered. Hope – is knowing members count on you for help and guidance.

Hope – is being able to step back and enjoy your life outside the CWL.

Hope – is the brightness at the beginning of each day never knowing what you may have to offer but being willing to give it when asked.

Hope – is all the friendships you cultivate year after year with CWL members and continue to appreciate the Blessings they have to offer.

Hope – is knowing that on bad days within your council or diocese the Holy Spirit will uplift and continually guide you.

Hope – is knowing our next National President will be a strong leader and guide us in our faith and in our love of the league

Hope – is what Our Lord gives us and that is a Blessing.

This concludes my report, Lisa Fillingham

## **SOCIAL JUSTICE REPORT**

Dear Sisters in the League

When I was first presented with this question, I looked up the definition of hope – A person or thing on which one may base some hope, and a feeling that what is wanted will happen. And then I had to decide what I thought a pilgrim of hope was.

It took me a while to decide what I thought about it all, and it started with this gift that our President Deedee had given each of us

on diocesan council. This little case with some goodies in it. Another thought for me is how our secretary Denise, and my provincial counterpart Hilarion, must put up with the fact that I am technically challenged. When I've made mistakes or sent them multiple copies of the same thing and then apologized their replies are "Oh Kate, I do those things too, you have a good day" or "No worries, Blessings". I have two best friends, made through CWL, that call or text me, "Hey how are you, are you doing ok". All these things make me feel good that someone is thinking of me, but I didn't take the time to see the true meaning of them. It has become so easy to gloss over these little things happening to us daily because we are so focused on all the chaos and evil happening in the world today. The news and social media inundate us with fires, floods, homelessness, human trafficking, mass shootings, unstable governments, seemingly more wars and threats of war than ever before. We are consumed by it. I am a hairdresser at a retirement facility, and I talk to people all day, and 99 percent is about what is going on in the world. And they are scared. They are afraid for their children and grandchildren. And quite often I'm asked, "Where is our God". My answer "Well I think he's trying to tell us something and we're not listening".

But it wasn't until I had to think about this question that our president gave us, that the light bulb finally came on in my head. I realized, He's here. He's always been here. He's in this little gift that says I thought of you today and I just want you to know I appreciate you. He's in those e-mail responses telling me, we can be patient and kind with your computer challenges, and He's in those phone and text calls telling me I'm loved. And who brought God to me. Pilgrims of hope.

I've now vowed to myself to spend quiet time every night to reflect on how many times pilgrims of hope have shown me Christ's presence in my life that day, so that the more I focus on Christ, the more the chaos and evil will take a backseat. And the next time I'm asked "Where is God" I will answer, "Oh I saw him today. He was that resident that brought me a treat at work, He held the door for me, He cleaned snow from my car. And then I'm going to ask them, "Where did you see God today?".

I know you are all pilgrims of hope without realizing it. But now we

have to up our game and kick some butt. We need to answer our pope's call and say "Here I am Lord, send me". Send me to be one of your many pilgrims of hope so that we can show people that not only is Christ alive and present here on earth, but that He's stronger than ever, and He is going to prevail!

This concludes my report, Kate Montague

## **SERVICE**

Dear Sisters in the League

I don't believe I have shared this before. My last name, spelled differently but pronounced the same way in French translates in English to "pilgrim".

When I first heard the phrase "Pilgrims of Hope", it took on a personal meaning for me. In preparing this report, I looked back at information I received from different sources over the past few months.

I begin with our CWL Diocesan Council. Our focus on housing insecurity and mental health led us to meet with area politicians. All accepted our invitation to dialogue with Us.

During our talks, they were assured of our support. We plan to actively pursue initiatives to make a real difference, providing hope for many.

On a wider level, the Ontario Provincial Council of the CWL sponsored an online presentation entitled "Finding Hope in the Fight Against Human Trafficking". In one part, we were given first-hand information about it. In the end, they emphasized that the work of some of our sisters has the beautiful outcome of giving people hope for a better future.

An example on a Canada-wide level is the one provided by Development and Peace's Share Lent campaign this year. It is concentrating on reducing the insurmountable debt that some countries in the Global South carry. It is aptly named

“Turn Debt into Hope”. Based on successful campaigns in the past, we can truly hope for a successful outcome this year.

Finally, I give the example of The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops who has produced a toolkit for parishes on palliative care. It’s title? “Horizons of Hope”. Hope, a welcomed emotion at such a difficult time.

In closing, I have taken these words from the Archbishop of Regina, Donald Bolen. I think that they apply to us as members of the CWL. I quote, “Christian hope leads to gratitude, but it also leads to resilience, courage, and action... May our hope inspire lives of commitment, generosity and trust as we spend ourselves in the service of others.

This concludes my report, Sue Pellerin

## **FAITH**

Dear Sisters in the League

Colleen Martin posed the question today when she talked about membership and leadership in the League- “Afraid?” and then emphasized the answer - “ Heck, NO !”

Madame Chair, you have asked us to reflect on how our work with the CWL in our respective copacties has elevated our sense of being pilgrims of hope. So I respectfully pose my own question - Hope? “ Heck YES !”

The reason for this confidence and conviction lies in the heart and dedication of the women of faith that have come before us and who are currently with us- especially our local presidents and Faith Chairs. We are a community of faith ! In all that we do , we serve with word and deed Leading.

So, with hearts full of gratitude, let us first and foremost give thanks to God, for all good things flow from Him. As we embark on our Jubilee

journey as “Pilgrims of Hope,” we are reminded of our identity as pilgrims who serve both God and country with unwavering dedication.

Reflecting on our achievements this past year, I cannot help but marvel at the tremendous hard work and countless hours each of you has devoted to ensuring that your CWL councils are vibrant with the Spirit, infused with a hopeful faith, and driven by a joyful purpose. Your commitment is truly Inspiring!

It has been my distinct honor to chair the Diocesan Faith Committee. I extend my deepest gratitude to Deedee and the Table Officers for their invaluable support and guidance. Learning the expectations and mandates of this role has been a journey, and I could not have done it without your encouragement. Collaborating to plan both our Advent and Lenten Retreats has been a joy, particularly with the gifted Domenic Inneo as our facilitator. Many of you have shared that these retreats were not just events but transformative experiences that empowered your faith journeys. Thank you for your enthusiastic participation.

We can't help but notice that the Spirit is alive and thriving in the St. Catharines Diocese as we respond to God's call to grow as a faith community! I also want to express my heartfelt thanks for your unwavering service as we answer the call to support our most vulnerable brothers and sisters, especially those facing mental health challenges and those living in unhoused.

Together, our actions wield the incredible power of prayer and almsgiving, bringing hope to those in our communities who desperately need to feel like they are seen, known, and cared for.

To each local President and Council, thank you for your tireless dedication to fostering faith through various meaningful activities, such as prayer services, rosary devotions, spiritual bouquets, Masses, and the sharing of God's Word. Every single initiative you plan serves to deepen our members' faith.. As sisters in the League, let us continue to boldly represent women committed to promoting the teachings of our Catholic faith. Your involvement in this essential mission is invaluable!

Through our Lady's intercession and the words of the League prayer—“send your Holy Spirit upon us to give light to our minds and strength to our wills that we may know and fulfill your great law of

charity”—let us strive to emulate Mary’s profound role in the life of the Church. May we seek her counsel to help us to do God’s Will as He guides our every action. Let us respond with a whole-hearted fiat that is wrapped in joy because we know that “hope does not disappoint! “

So I conclude with the question I began with - HOPE? Let us answer over and over - HECK YES!”

This concludes my report, Theresa Murphy

## **TREASURER**

Dear Sisters in the League

We have been encouraged, in this Jubilee Year, to embark on pilgrimages - both physically and spiritually, to deepen our faith and seek God’s grace.

Those who have travelled to the Holy Land, Lourdes, or Fatima, St. Anne de Beaupre, St. Joseph’s Oratory, Canadian Martyrs’ Shrine, Our Lady of Fatima Shrine in Lewiston, Our Lady of the Rosary Shrine and our National Shrine of St. Therese of Lisieux, both right in our own backyard, along the many beautiful cathedrals, basilicas and churches come away touched with a deeper connection, understanding and appreciation of their faith.

The same can be said when we embark on spiritual pilgrimages - a journey of inner reflection and spiritual growth. We can do this in many ways - meditation, prayer, reading sacred scripture. We can also raise awareness of social issues and support causes and organizations close to our hearts and faith. Although many of these spiritual pilgrimages are done quietly and privately, some are done very visibly and boldly. A tangible example of this is the fundraising that our councils have done in order to donate, support and draw attention to various causes.

In 2024, \$71,525.00 was raised and donated to various charities, parishes, communities, schools, shelters, food banks, just to name a few. We know that numbers don’t tell the whole story. With every act of charity (whether monetary or service to others) came the mindfulness and reflection on why that particular recipient was chosen and how that act of charity transforms the giver as well as those who receive it.

This concludes my report, Dina Marchionda



# **DIOCESAN LIFE MEMBER**

Dear Sisters in the League

At the present time we have 9 Life Members in our Diocese.

Over the years we have all been asked what do you really do as a Life Member?

Other than being available to our CWL sisters as mentors, we take on duties as requested by any level of the CWL. That is exactly what our Life Members have been doing.

The next National President is Life Member, Betty Colaneri, makes us very proud. Wilma Vanderzwaag is on the Provincial Council as their Administrative Assistant. At the present time we have 3 Life Members as Presidents of their Parish Council. I know that the remaining 4 Life Members are active in their Parish Councils as per the many talks we have had over the past few years.

This concludes my report, Janice Deslauriers,