

Pembroke Diocesan Council of the Catholic Women's League of Canada
Annual General Meeting May 29, 2021 Message
Father Michael Coyne, Spiritual Advisor

The CWL National Manual of Policy and Procedure; general information section, provides a complex and multilayered definition regarding the 'character' of the CWL that I wish to begin my talk with. "The CWL is sisterhood in perpetual motion. It is sisters working together at a common table for a common good." The statement continues further but this initial concept of 'sisterhood in motion for the common good', struck me as an excellent starting point to view the current covid challenges which have exacerbated pre-existing CWL issues, and unfortunately bring a whole lot of new ones to the table as well. And although we can use whatever language we wish to introduce this troubling reality within the CWL organization, be it at a crossroads, or crisis point, I believe we begin to manage these challenges best when we remember our organizational origins. Why the CWL was founded in the first place and the principles it was founded on. These foundational truths, I believe, keep us on course but above all inspire us to continue, even in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Unfortunately, as they say numbers do not lie, and the truth is councils in the Pembroke diocese are potentially looking at closing in the future because they cannot sustain, their numbers. This of course is not only a religious organizational issue. Across the world, religious and secular organizations are experiencing an unprecedented global pandemic and while many unknowns exist what is clear is that many organizations will not survive this isolating pathogen. Responding to crisis happens one step at a time and as such the decisions made by members now will shape the CWL organization of the future.

Also, I feel it must be understood that finding innovative solutions to deal with our current social restrictions does not necessarily mean these solutions need be permanent in the CWL's future. I believe I can say with confidence that we all share the sentiment of wanting to meet again face to face without any masks. It is said that in the Chinese language the word for crisis also bears the meaning for opportunity. This I believe must be our attitude going forward if the CWL is to survive. I know these words might seem glib, but I feel the sentiment behind them carry value and should be voiced aloud. At this point, we are all well into the complexities involved in Covid, and the CWL I believe, has been developing its sea legs, so to speak, working out the complexities of socializing digitally through all the different media platforms. As such the "business" of the CWL, the day to day which all organizations have, continues to steadily adapt and overcome Covid's social restrictions. But what about those that struggle with connecting online? That is why I feel it is extremely important that these lost digital sisters within your organization always be searched for and helped in integrating into this new digital mainstream. Whether we want it or not the short-term future of the CWL is predominantly expressed online and probably will be for some time.

Thinking outside the box is a phrase that I feel really speaks to your future organization. A great example of what this practically looks like would be the Christmas CWL zoom party. I have to admit when I first was invited, to the Christmas CWL zoom party, I thought to myself how does this even work? But that's the point it doesn't work as good, as having the party in person, it never will, but it is a stop gap solution to a hopefully temporary situation.

“For God and Country” is a phrase I came across reading some literature supplied to me regarding the history of the CWL in Canada, and when I saw it, I thought to myself one might attribute this slogan to wartime, and in truth in many ways we are at war. A war against the impulse to isolate, to circle the wagons, in fear of this airborne contagion. But this ultimately I believe would be a mistake. Now more than ever it is the time to reach out to reaffirm the comradery of the sisterhood of the CWL and enlighten the world why it is a better place with this organization in it. So how does the CWL show the world that’s its truth needs to be heard, and even more that it’s special truth is one worth sharing as a member?

These are some tough questions for sure, but I am confident that you will find those answers together, and I of course will help in any way I can.

Father Michael Coyne