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CWL opened McCarthy up to a much wider world

League presents long-time CWL, community activist with its highest honour

GLEN ARGAN
WESTERN CATHOLIC REPORTER

Rose-Marie McCarthy lived a sheltered life until she joined the Catholic Women's League. Growing up near Edmonton's St. Alphonsus Church and attending St. Joseph's High School in the 1950s, all her friends were Catholic, and she was blissfully unaware of the social problems that existed around her.

"I had absolutely no idea what went on in the city," McCarthy said in an interview, hours before being presented with the Elsie Yanik Award June 4 for outstanding service to the league and the community.

"I didn't even know there was a prison just down the way from us."

It was only when she joined the CWL and heard speakers at its meetings talking about poverty and homelessness that she

'I thought, "For crying out loud, we can do something about this."'

Rose-Marie McCarthy

had any idea of the underside of city life.

"I was shocked," she said. "I thought, 'For crying out loud, we can do something about this.'"

So McCarthy started doing. And doing and doing. The first stop was as secretary



WCR PHOTO | GLEN ARGAN

Rose-Marie McCarthy has been honoured with the Alberta-Mackenzie Catholic Women's League's prestigious Elsie Yanik Award.

for WIN House, a shelter for abused women. "In those days, I was one of the few who could type," she said. She became a handy recruit for boards in need of a secretary.

It also led to her involvement with other organizations – WINGS (Women In Need Growing Stronger), KARA (Kids Are the Responsibility of us All), the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters and the Alberta Family Institute.

The league helped to start the Edmonton food bank and the women's overnight emergency shelter. Through that community involvement, she became friends with women who were Protestant or Jewish.

CWL CONVENTION | P3

"It was all an awakening for me and got me out of my little world."

She became more deeply involved in the CWL too, serving as provincial president from 1983 to 1985.

During her term, Pope John Paul II came to Edmonton, and McCarthy added the task of overseeing the papal banner project. CWL women made 2,000 banners to line the pope's route to the Mass at Namao.

"The papal visit – that was a highlight. It was unbelievable," she recalls.

PLEASE SEE MCCARTHY | P6

Covenant Health freed from task of killing patients

RAMON GONZALEZ
WESTERN CATHOLIC REPORTER

EDMONTON – Alberta Catholic institutions and physicians are determined not to take part in assisting their patients in dying. And it seems they will not have to.

The province has said no doctor will be forced to participate in the practice against their will.

However, as Alberta Health spokesperson Timothy Wilson put it, "Any medical professional who conscientiously objects to medical assistance in dying will be obligated to transfer care to Alberta Health Services, regardless of what facility they

work in.

"There is no exemption of any institu-

'Covenant Health will not be involved with the intentional termination of patients' lives.'

Gordon Self | vice-president of mission ethics and spirituality

tions," Wilson said in a June 1 email. Nevertheless, Covenant Health, the Catholic

institution that runs hospitals and continuing-care facilities across the province, seems to have gotten just that.

Recently, the province said patients at hospitals and continuing-care facilities run by Covenant Health will be transferred to other Alberta health care facilities if they seek physician-assisted suicide.

"We (at Covenant Health) have maintained that as an organization we expect to honour our mission and ethics and abide by our Catholic identity and not be involved with medical assistance in dying," explained Gordon Self, Covenant's vice-president of mission ethics and spirituality.

PLEASE SEE SUICIDE | P6

CWL offers spiritual connection for today's busy women

Provincial president tells convention that members seek meaning amidst busy lives

GLEN ARGAN
WESTERN CATHOLIC REPORTER

Members of the Catholic Women's League are busy focusing on advocacy and service concerns ranging from assisted suicide to sponsoring refugees.

The 9,800 CWL members in the Alberta-Mackenzie region have organized petition drives, lobbied the provincial government on behalf of Catholic schools as well as the need for a government-appointed seniors' advocate.

They have formed partnerships with Development and Peace and Catholic Missions in Canada as well as attending events put on by Covenant Health, the Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Assoc. and other groups.

"We live out the Gospel message by serving God and Canada," provincial president Cathy Bouchard of Red Deer

'Members join and stay because they want a relationship with God and their spiritual sisters.'

Cathy Bouchard | Alberta-Mackenzie CWL president

said in her report to the league's annual convention June 3-5 in Westlock. One hundred and fifty women from across Alberta and the Northwest Ter-

ritories attended.

Bouchard, however, said while league members are blessed to share their time and acts of service with each other, they are drawn to join and stay in the CWL through their desire for spiritual enrichment.

"The reality is that members join and stay because they want a relationship with God and their spiritual sisters," she told the convention.

Later, in an interview, Bouchard said that in earlier times, the CWL gave women an opportunity to get out of the house and experience a wider world.

"Today, women are now out working and out evenings with their kids and all their activities," she said. "We are so busy."

Now, what Catholic women need are opportunities "to have a connection with God through their sisters," she said.

MANY WINDOWS

"Today, there are so many windows open for women, we can't pick which one to look through," said Bouchard. Although women have much more of a voice than in previous generations, the CWL offers "a women's voice gathered."

Members learn through the league how to approach societal and political issues by writing letters and other forms of lobbying, she said.

The CWL voice is important in Alberta. "The president speaks for 9,800 women, but that's understated because we also speak for husbands and families and other people in our influence."

Membership growth remains an ongoing issue. While the CWL continues to bring in new members, those new members are not numerous enough to replace those who have died.

Bouchard said the league needs to bring in younger women as well as



WCR PHOTOS | GLEN ARGAN

CWL provincial president Cathy Bouchard of Red Deer chairs the annual convention's business meeting June 4 in Westlock.

women who are new Canadians.

Inviting women who come from a different culture is not a simple process, she said. "It's not as simple as saying, 'Come and join us.'"

There needs to be a process of inviting them through which the league comes to understand them and they are introduced to the league, she said.

Provincial convenors and the five diocesan presidents all gave reports to the convention.

Sheila Ryan-Hachey, president of the smallest diocese, Mackenzie-Fort Smith, said the three councils and their 99 members were spiritually rejuvenated by hosting last year's provincial convention in Yellowknife.

LISTEN TO INDIGENOUS WOMEN

The Mackenzie group is also looking forward to hosting listening sessions with indigenous women in their area, Ryan-Hachey said.

The convention in Westlock also passed four resolutions, the first two

of which will go to the national convention in Halifax for further consideration.

They want the league to urge the federal government to provide physical and financial assistance to those suffering from post-traumatic stress syndrome.

FORT MCMURRAY FIRE

They also urged action by governments, companies and individuals to reduce the environmental impact of disposable hygiene products, ranging from diapers to sanitary napkins.

As well, the Alberta CWL will write to federal and provincial government and opposition leaders calling on them to develop and promote widespread access to palliative care.

The Alberta league will also set up a fund to aid the victims of last month's Fort McMurray wildfire with the first \$2,000 going to St. John the Baptist Parish CWL in Fort McMurray and the remainder to the St. Paul Diocese for its relief efforts.

CMiC provides support to nearly 700 Canadian missions

WESTERN CATHOLIC REPORTER

WESTLOCK – Canadian missions are "some of the most difficult in the world," and Catholic Missions in Canada is working to support them, says the organization's outreach officer.

Patricia Gyulay told the annual provincial convention of the Catholic Women's League that many Canadian Catholics believe the only missions are in foreign countries.

"Canada is a mission country," Gyulay said June 4. "Missions are right here in our own backyard, albeit a big backyard."

Roughly 25 of Canada's 72 dioceses "are in such dire need, struggling so greatly that they are designated as mission," she said. Between 350 and 400 bishops, priests, deacons, sisters, brothers and lay leaders serve in nearly 700 missions across the country.

Gyulay said Catholic Missions in Canada's (CMiC) president, Father Philip

Kennedy, describes an advertisement he would place to recruit missionaries: "Wanted: Missionaries for Distant Parts of Canada. Must have degree in pastoral theology, building repair and snowmobile maintenance."

CMiC provides \$3.5 million a year in support to missions and missionaries in five general areas: financial and emotional needs of the missions; building and repair of churches; religious



Patricia Gyulay of Catholic Missions in Canada

education of children, youth and adults; formation of lay leaders; education of seminarians.

Missionaries, said Gyulay, must cope, not only with isolation, but also with small Catholic populations living amidst poor economic conditions and spread over huge distances.

"Our missionaries travel great distances and this is very costly."

She cited 77-year-old Sister Jeannette Comeau in northern Quebec for whom CMiC bought a snowmobile so she could travel up to 90 kms over frozen lakes in the winter to carry out her mission work.

Likewise, CMiC funds the travel and church maintenance costs for Father Sylvanus Omali, a member of Sons of Mary Mother of Mercy, who from his base in Red Earth Creek in Alberta's Grouard-McLennan Archdiocese, serves four other missions.

It's a region where employment opportunities are few, and the Aboriginal

communities are marked by inadequate housing, poor transportation, substance abuse, suicide and alcohol-related deaths, she said.

Many churches in northern dioceses are in poor repair, she said. "The northern climate is ruthless on buildings."

CRUMBLING ROOFS

In some churches, the roofs are so dilapidated that the rain leaks through during Mass. In one case, ceiling tiles fell on the congregation. Churches face crumbling foundations damaged by permafrost. The chimney in one church sunk into the permafrost, causing a fire which burned the church down.

Gyulay also noted that the parish in Fort Simpson, NWT, which was hoping for a new church when Pope John Paul II visited in 1987 still does not have a new building.

More information about CMiC is available through its website, www.cmic.info.

MCCARTHY: She gave encouragement to other women

FROM PAGE ONE

With her term as provincial president over, McCarthy did not walk into the sunset. She helped organize CWL fieldworkers in the archdiocese to mentor members of parish councils in the fine points of running a council.

McCarthy was part of a CWL group that gave workshops on different styles of spirituality. "People came up to us afterwards and said, 'I always thought that I was different. Now I know that I am, I need to celebrate it.'"

"You would see women and some

would be crying and saying, 'I thought there was something wrong with me.'"

As well, she led the way in compiling an archdiocesan CWL history book and

'She really encouraged me to take on leadership.'

Cathy Bouchard | CWL provincial president

archive. More recently, she spearheaded the production of a pictorial history of the league in the archdiocese.

Along the way, she brought other women with her.

Current provincial president Cathy Bouchard of Red Deer recalls how when she was a young mother at home with four children in Yellowknife, McCarthy encouraged her to continue her work with the league and then later helped nominate her to the archdiocesan executive.

"She really encouraged me to take on leadership," Bouchard said.

McCarthy, now 78, said all her volunteer work forced her husband Ron to take on more of the housework and to play a

large role in raising their two children.

She credits her community involvement with nurturing their children's independence. "I think it was because Mom wasn't there all the time."

BIGGEST BENEFIT

But the biggest benefit of her CWL involvement was becoming open to a wider world. She travelled to conventions across Canada and said she has likely visited every town in the Edmonton Archdiocese.

"If it hadn't been for the CWL, none of it would ever have happened."

SUICIDE: Physicians continue to press for conscience rights

FROM PAGE ONE

"Covenant Health will not be involved with the intentional termination of patients' lives.

"That's just not in keeping with our tradition. (However), we are not going to stop a person who may want access to that. We never stopped people before, but we are not going to be involved with that."

While Covenant Health will not refer patients to institutions that provide medically assisted suicide, it will connect them with the body that will coordinate the procedure.

AHS is looking at establishing a resource team that would connect people to the provider of medical assistance in dying. The team will initially provide information about medically assisted suicide and other options.

"This would be a body that we would be able to interact with, who would be distinct and separate from the actual provider of medical assistance in dying," explained Self.

Covenant Health will provide coun-



Dr. Mary Ellen Haggerty

selling as well as emotional and spiritual support to patients who express a desire to die with the help of a doctor, asking them to consider palliative and hospice care.

"Now if a patient insists on getting legal access to medical assistance in dying, we will explain that we don't do that, and if they want more information, we'll connect them to that resource team that will be available in the community," Self said.

"If the patient then wants to connect with that resource team and pursue that even further, then that resource team would sort of assume that responsibility and start moving to a more formal assessment but we wouldn't be involved with that at all."

CONSCIENCE RIGHTS

Dr. Mary Ellen Haggerty, a medical doctor who is president of Edmonton's St. Luke's Catholic Physicians' Guild, said physicians want protection for conscience rights across the country. Physician guilds across Canada are pressuring the Senate to ensure conscience rights are included in the national law.

Haggerty works in an Edmonton clinic and expects she will be approached by patients who want assistance in dying.

"Every doctor is going to be faced with this question," she said. "We all see people that feel pretty dejected about life for one reason or another."

Haggerty said it is not her job to give people access to assisted suicide.

DISCUSSION WITH PATIENTS

"The way I look at it is we can give our patients information. First we have to discuss with them why they are doing this, but we don't withhold information.

"If they want to do that then we can give them some information about where they can go but I don't think we necessarily have to make a referral," she said.

"It is not our job to see that people can get access to this. If the government wants it available then they should provide it. They shouldn't be counting on physicians to inform that access."

St. Luke's Physicians' Guild supports what the bishops have said about assisted dying, Haggerty pointed out. "We don't think (medically assisted dying) is right. We respect everybody's life as dignified, no matter what state they are in."