

Alberta Mackenzie Provincial Council 1942-2020

Honorary Life Member Marie Cameron and Alberta Mackenzie life members

Although provincial councils began officially in 1948, already in 1942, Edmonton Archdiocesan President Irene Hawkes, had invited presidents of Calgary Diocese and Grouard Vicariate (Grouard-McLennan Archdiocese as of 1968) to initiate a provincial unit. It seemed only fitting as the League itself was begun by Edmonton's Katherine Hughes in 1912.

Along with other provincial councils, Alberta Provincial Council became a member of the national organization in 1948 and was incorporated under the *Alberta Societies Act*. When St. Paul Diocesan Council formed in 1956, it joined the provincial council; Mackenzie Diocesan Council formed in 1959 and joined the provincial council in 1964. By 1968, the provincial council—now with five diocesan councils—had reached 10,639 members and the membership remained over 10,000 for many years.

In 1942, assisting immigrant and refugee women was a priority, along with examining provincial and federal issues. While those priorities continue today, members' education has become a focus with the provincial council offering workshops such as leadership, public speaking, environment, euthanasia, palliative care, encyclicals, domestic violence, pornography, resolutions, legislation, stem cell research, mentoring and community building.

The first provincial project, "Cup of Coffee for CUSO" (Canadian University Service Overseas), raised funds to sponsor Albertans working in developing countries who reported on their experiences at provincial conventions. In 1984, under president Rose-Marie McCarthy's direction, all parish councils made banners to festoon the route travelled by Pope John Paul II during his Edmonton visit. Other projects have included assisting Alberta Catholic Welfare Association by providing homes for foster children; helping maintain a Catholic perspective in Alberta's health care system; initiating SPIRITUS (now GrACE—Grateful Advocates for Catholic Education) with Knights of Columbus and Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association to preserve Catholic schools; raising over \$100,000 for Newman Theological College; twinning southern parish councils with northern ones; "Nickels for the North" funding Mackenzie diocesan members to attend League conventions; "Pennies for the Poor" assisting Catholic education and health care needs in Burundi; organizing Catholic Girl Guides and

later Catholic Girls' Leagues; promoting parliamentary procedure classes through which several members now serve as parliamentarians; supporting Fort McMurray wildfire emergency funding; urging provincial government to ensure the seniors' advocate be independent of political interference.

Members of the executive have met on occasion with the provincial government to present briefs and discuss provincial issues and national and provincial resolutions. Currently, the president and president-elect meet annually with the five Alberta Mackenzie bishops.

The provincial council has been blessed with many dedicated spiritual advisors, with special mention of Fr. Walter Krewski. Known for his good humour and hosting lively fun-filled evenings, Fr. Krewski served 15 consecutive years, during which time he was both spiritual director and, on designation change, spiritual advisor.

In its early years, the provincial council awarded a scholarship for the highest mark in English in the province. More recently, the council makes two notable annual presentations. The Elsie Yanik Award is named for a former Mackenzie diocesan president and first recipient who embodied the criteria of active leadership in her church, council and northern communities. Elsie also received the Order of Canada and awards from the provincial government. The Fr. Walter Krewski Award is given annually to three parish councils—for the largest increase in new members, the largest increase in council membership, and for the highest percentage increase in membership.

Provincial conventions rotated among the five diocesan councils. In 1984, travel to the first ever provincial convention in Mackenzie-Fort Smith was made possible because the provincial president chartered a plane to Yellowknife for members. A champagne breakfast on the flight was the beginning of a very special convention remembered for its northern hospitality, deep spirituality and perpetual sunshine.

National conventions have been regularly held in Alberta, notably: 1948 Calgary (formation of provincial councils); 1986 Fort McMurray (furthest north ever); 1995 Edmonton (celebrating national's 75th anniversary); and 2012 Edmonton (celebrating the 100th anniversary of the League's beginnings in Alberta).

Some past provincial presidents became national presidents: Dr. Isabella Stevens, Ruth Cooney, Ardis Beaudry, Marie Cameron and Agnes Bedard. Ardis and Agnes were also North American regional vice-presidents of the World Union of Catholic Women's Organisations.

Some executive members have received honours: Life Member Doreen Lecky who designed the League flag in 1990; and Life Member Flore Shaw who received an honorary doctorate for financing and educating music students in northern Alberta.

After 78 years of dedication, Alberta Mackenzie Provincial Council and its members continue to garner recognition for their outstanding accomplishments in service, social justice and adherence to the faith. †