

**Ontario Provincial Council
The Catholic Women's League of Canada
74th Annual Meeting of Members – July 10 to 13, 2021
Oral Report**

Submitted by: Karen McDonald, Chairperson of Education and Health

When I was appointed chair of this committee, I was up for the challenge but I never imagined a pandemic that would impact the education and health of so many people.

The initial panic was understandable given the uncertainty the world faced overnight. Almost immediately, we witnessed the limits of government run health care systems with understaffing, inadequate supplies, and health care workers and caregivers pushed to exhaustion; the failure to protect the vulnerable from physical harm and isolation; the adverse effects of *virtual* education on children, parents and teachers; unemployment, housing shortages; travel bans; much-needed hugs being forbidden; and the word 'lockdown' entering our daily vocabulary.

Tragically, it led to loss of life, affected our physical and mental health and ability to socialize, placed limits on our food systems, emptied workplaces and schools, and poor air quality in the environment led to an increased risk of catching the virus.

Despite the upheaval in our world, God gave us strength. From lifestyle changes to better eating habits and being outdoors, many used the time to become healthier. People helped neighbors by shopping for groceries; prioritized time spent with family; prayed more; accessed *virtual* health care; used online banking; and travelled less which decreased pollution. Shut-ins could take part in prayer services and meetings, churches live-streamed masses and funerals, and vaccines were discovered.

Members and their families were impacted as we chatted on computer screens, visited loved one through windows, weren't always allowed in church, teas were on hold, and friendly interaction was at a minimum. Through it all, we witnessed God's blessings in members who kept their councils alive in unique ways by praying for the safety of children, teachers and those in long-term care; found creative ways to hold *12 Hours of Prayer*; participated in virtual fundraisers; sewed and donated masks, held virtual prayer services, showed *Care for Our Common Home* by planting trees and gardens and donating vegetables. In my council, phone calls were a lifeline for members, including myself, and a handwritten card received was a blessing.

During COVID, I read of the kindness of others setting up food stands for people to help themselves to freshly grown produce; neighbors checking on each another; book sharing; and Canada Post giving postcards to put a smile on a friend's face. I am grateful for my health, my job, my friends, and the worker who dialed the phone for me to chat with my girlfriend in long-term care when the pandemic struck. When I experienced acts of kindness throughout COVID-19, I 'paid it forward'. The pandemic reminded us how precious life is. I pray that we will remember the good that arose out of the darkness of the pandemic and will continue to be kind to one another!

This concludes my report.