

A Wee Bit of History

The members of the Military Ordinariate Provincial Council of the Catholic Women's League of Canada are fundamentally like the members of any other provincial or diocesan CWL council...except that our members are located anywhere in the world where Canadian military personnel are stationed! With numbers hovering just above the 300 mark, we are a small but strong group of women, with ties that are among the closest in the League. Our story began long before 1965 with active CWL councils on several bases in Ontario, Quebec, PEI and Nova Scotia. When the Holy See established a separate diocese for the Canadian military, a request was made to the National Council of the CWL to allow councils on military bases to form their own Diocesan Council. At the National Convention in Charlottetown in 1964, the National Executive approved the application to organize a diocesan council that would have the status of a provincial council for organizational purposes.

Membership was open to all Catholic women stationed on Canada's military bases, at home and abroad. This council was known as the Military Vicariate. Kathleen McCrossin was an amazing woman whose goal was to bring all military councils together in mind and body. She was the first President of the Mil Vic and deeply dedicated to the success of this new council. The first Mil Vic Convention was held in June 1967. The early Mil Vic Presidents faced huge challenges in communication and connecting with all members. Our second President, Pat de Grave, appealed to the Chaplain General's office for assistance in getting members to Conventions. As a result, the Chaplain General announced that space would be made available on military flights for two delegates per council (plus the officers and conveners) to attend the 1970 Convention in Ottawa. This valuable resource remained available to the military CWL members until Service Air Flights were cancelled in 2000, due to changes and cutbacks in the Canadian Military. In 1979 Mid Term Meetings for the Provincial Administrative Committee became a reality and enabled the Team to get together for planning, learning, and getting to know each other. With these meetings held on military bases, costs were kept to a bare minimum. However, due to more military cutbacks we needed to embrace the future, and instead held two meetings (fall and spring) by teleconference calls. Another challenge was the lack of knowledge of CWL procedures. "Teach-ins" and workshops were organized in 1970 and continue to play an important role in today's military councils.

Many of our members have been trained as presenters for "Catch the Fire" and are enthusiastically sharing their knowledge across the country. In July 1987, the Military Vicariate became the Military Ordinariate by Pope John Paul II, in accordance with the new norms established by the Papal Statement "Spiritual Care of Military People", issued by the Vatican in 1986. Shortly afterwards, Father André Vallée PME was appointed by the Holy Father as the first Military Ordinary of Canada and ordained Bishop on Jan 28, 1988. Over the years, several special funds were initiated, including a Development Fund, financial assistance for the Southdown Lakewood facility, a donation to the PEI National Convention Fund, the Micky Scott Fund and in recent years the Mil Ord (MO) Convention Fund. Through the years, the eligibility criteria for holding office in the MO CWL have changed along with the changes in the reality of military life. Originally, as soon as a member's husband retired from the military or died,

she had to step down from office. As a result of a revision to the Military Ordinariate statutes, the CWL MO eligibility guidelines were again revised in 2012 to include other groups of people closely affiliated to the military. In recent years, the Chaplain General's office has continued to be financially supportive so the Administrative Committee could meet in person once per two year term. In 2010, due in part to smaller numbers of military chaplains, a female military Pastoral Associate, Padre Hope Winfield was named MO Provincial CWL Spiritual Advisor. With such wide distances between our councils, our communications skills have needed to become sharper than ever. And being a small group of CWL members who have the unique military lifestyle in common has allowed us to truly embrace the sisterhood aspect of our CWL lives. We all feel very blessed to be a part of the Military Ordinariate Catholic Women's League family

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