

Tena koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou katoa

It is privilege to be with you today. I am going to talk a little about the issues currently facing CWLANZ and share a little of the story of my trip to Cambodia.

We are nearing the end of our current theme, *Women welcoming change*.

CWLANZ is certainly experiencing change but I am not sure how successful we have been over the past nineteen months or so, as far as welcoming and embracing it.

At all levels of CWL, from the board to branches, we have been grappling with change which is being forced on us. Change that is difficult to welcome. At times it seems that despite our best efforts the task is overwhelming and just too hard. We must remind ourselves not to become disheartened, that although the challenges are immediate the solutions are not. The growth and survival of the League is a shared responsibility. The members need to want the league to grow and survive as a vibrant organisation for Catholic women. We must be committed to the long view.

I am really concerned for the future of CWL in a couple of dioceses. Do you want CWL to be around in the next ten or twenty years? I personally and the National Board do not have the resources to ensure this is a reality. What can we all be doing now? How can we turn this challenge into a positive? This is a conversation we need to be having.

It is also too easy to focus on the negative and lose sight of the positive changes that have been happening. In a couple of dioceses there has been an increase in membership. Publicity drives have raised the profile in others. I have instigated the regular President's Newsletters. Branches are making real efforts to broaden their reach and diversify their activities. The National Mission secretary has conducted a comprehensive survey of branches' support of Mission in the Pacific. This has given the National Board valuable information and data which will enable evidence-based decisions. Christchurch has a Facebook group. We share information, opinions, events and involve non-members. We are trying to use current methods of communication.

At our national conference in July the Board is excited to be launching *Te Puawaitanga The Blossoming*. This contains strategies and advice to rejuvenate and grow CWLANZ. We hope that you too will take up and adopt the messages of *Te Puawaitanga*. Make it a living, working document. If we all commit to working together, we can welcome change and make that change work for us.

Social justice is at the heart of our organisation. Our founder Margaret Fletcher lead the way to bring Catholic women together to speak out and act based on Catholic social teaching. Each branch makes its own contribution to their local community. These activities give us opportunities to involve other Catholic women and a platform to share League philosophy. The Charities Commission Return requires us to quantify our members' activities from knitting mittens to writing submissions to parliament select committees. The figures are amazing. We are making a difference.

On a national level, we can be proud of the way our members have spoken out and acted against the End of Life Bill and Abortion Legislation Bill. The abortion bill has passed its second reading and is expected to come before parliament for the last time within the next couple of weeks. These stories are far from over. One thing we know for sure, if either becomes law, our society will be changed forever.

Our CWLANZ moto is Faith and Service. The service bit seems easy to action but what of the faith aspect? The WUCWO General Assembly in Senegal choose as its priority for the period 2018 –

2022, WUCWO Women called to Holiness to sanctify the World for a Holistic Development.

As our society has changed over the years so too has Catholics' prayer life and personal devotions. Many women are too busy to attend the once fully booked retreat days. Branches are finding that their members are looking for companionship and social activities rather than consciously searching for ways to enrich their faith. We are all facing increased secularisation. It is a challenge for CWL to find ways to combine faith development, social action and meet the social needs of our members. Perhaps a renewed focus on faith development opportunities may attract other women to join us. We can use the internet and social media. Several members from Mid Canterbury signed up for an online scripture study of Luke's Gospel for Advent. Others joined an Australian 16 days of prayer, scripture, action and comment on Domestic and sexual violence against women. I see promoting such spiritual development activities as another way to help our members and broaden the appeal of CWL. I challenge branches to take the lead in their parishes.

Hamilton diocese welcomes all members to Rotorua for the National Conference 22 – 25 July. We are looking forward to joining with members from all over NZ.

We are very excited to have Annah Stretten as the keynote speaker. Annah Stretten is a well know entrepreneur and successful fashion designer. She is also deeply committed to social justice especially for disadvantaged women. Annah will tell us of her charity RAW, Reclaim Another Woman. This charity helps women make new lives for themselves after servicing time in prison.

We have another very busy year ahead of us with election year, international conferences and our national conference.

I want to conclude with a little prayer from this Lenten reflection booklet, *Not By Bread Alone, Daily reflections for Lent 2020. Michelle Francl – Donnay*

This is from the reflection for the second Sunday in Lent. St Matthew tells us of the Transfiguration. The apostles are trembling on the ground after a voice has spoken from heaven. Jesus comes and touches them.

“Lord, be tender with us, enfolding us in your love. Help us to be tender with each other, reaching out to those who live in fear and carrying your blessings to the ends of the earth.”

Susan Dickson

National President