

BRIEF

**To The House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources,
Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities
For Its Study on Intergenerational Volunteerism**

Submitted By

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1. Background

As a life-long resident of rural Saskatchewan, I have seen first-hand the value of the activities undertaken by volunteer organizations. My parents were volunteers, I have been a volunteer for over fifty years, and my adult children are following the family tradition, being involved with volunteer organizations in their own communities. I believe I qualify to comment on "intergenerational volunteerism".

I am a retired lawyer whose practice focused on real estate and mortgages as well as wills and estates. I have served on the executive of the local Ladies Curling Club, Ukrainian Dance Club, pre-school organization, served on Town Council, chaired the local Hospital Board and was Vice-Chair of the District Health Board.

2. Two Service Organizations

The two organizations with which I am most familiar have a great deal in common. I have served as Treasurer for the Catholic Women's League in my home parish, as well as President of the Prince Albert Diocesan Council and a member of the Provincial Council of the Catholic Women's League. I have also been a member of the Rosthern Lions Club for over twenty-five years, serving as local President, District Governor and Council Chair for the Multiple District consisting of Saskatchewan, North Dakota and South Dakota. Because of my participation in both organizations at senior levels, I have learned a great deal about their respective histories, contributions to their communities, organizational structures, and challenges.

The Catholic Women's League was formed in 1920 and has members in all ten provinces as well as the Yukon territory. In addition to volunteering at the parish level and raising funds for church needs, the Catholic Women's League is often the link between parishes and Social Justice initiatives in their communities. Members volunteer at Food Banks and thrift stores and hold fundraisers in support of organizations such as Development and Peace. At the start of 2022, there were 63,572 CWL members in 1,124 councils nationwide. By the end of that year,

membership was down to 60,000 in 1,094 councils. Of the 3,572-member decrease, 1,167 represented deceased members.¹

Lions Clubs were initially formed in 1917 in Chicago and became international in scope when the first Lions Club was chartered in Windsor, Ontario in 1920. In 1925 at the International Convention of Lions, Helen Keller challenged Lions Clubs to become “Knights of the Blind”. To this day, vision is a global cause for Lions.

Over the 100+ years that Lions Clubs have served Canadian communities, countless parks, hockey rinks, curling rinks, community halls, playgrounds, hospitals, schools, and golf courses have been built or financed by Lions clubs. Lions volunteer with food banks, Meals on Wheels, Santa Days, community events, and fundraisers not only for their own projects but in partnership with other charities such as school and hospital boards, and food banks, depending on local needs.

And much like the Catholic Women’s League, Lions club membership has dwindled in recent years. Current statistics show a slight dip in membership over the last calendar year, there being 31,315 members in Canada as of November 24, 2023 compared to 31,594 on this date one year ago.²

In recent years, both organizations have focused a great deal on membership growth and specifically on attracting younger members in order that the tradition of service will carry on. In the case of the Catholic Women’s League, fundamental changes in organizational structure have taken place. Rather than having a dozen “Standing Committees” at each level of the League, the number has been reduced to three: Faith, Service and Social Justice.³

Similarly, Lions Clubs International has developed programs such as “Your Club, Your Way”, and “Mission 1.5” with a goal of 1.5 million members worldwide by 2027. It has also strengthened ties with members from all over the world through social media and virtual meetings. Some virtual meetings were being held prior to 2020, but COVID-19

¹ Catholic Women’s League Annual Report pp. 106,107 (Appendix A).

² Source: insights.lionsclubs.org (Appendix B)

³ <https://www.cwl.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/627-Faith-Service-Social-Justice-Brochure.pdf>

necessitated virtual meetings at all levels of the organization. One particular difference between these two organizations is that the Lions organization has facilitated the development of “Cyber clubs” which allow members to meet exclusively online if that is their preference, while only seeing each other in person for service projects. For many members, this is an attractive option. Their goal is to serve, not to meet.

3. Advocacy

The Catholic Women’s League of Canada has traditionally held a Day on Parliament Hill every November. Of particular interest to the League are Right to Life and other social justice issues. The Lions of Canada held their first annual Lions Day on Parliament Hill in 2022. In 2023, the focus of the Lion delegates to Ottawa is on securing funding to enable buildings owned by Lions clubs to install commercial generators and water filtration systems to enhance emergency preparedness.

4. Attracting Younger Members

All service organizations, whether faith-based or otherwise, are struggling with attracting members under the age of 50. This is not only true of the Catholic Women’s League and Lions Clubs. Leaders of Optimists, Kinsmen, Rotary and other service clubs are all facing the same issues of dwindling membership and difficulty recruiting younger members. The pandemic exacerbated the problem as meetings and projects were halted long enough that many volunteers did not come back as restrictions were lifted. Many who were elderly prior to the pandemic had health issues precluding their return; some just lost interest or found other pursuits. The members remaining feel that to ensure a future for their organizations, they need to focus on recruiting younger people. The question is “How?”

5. What about family members – “Intergenerational Volunteering”?

As we gather at our monthly meetings and bemoan the lack of younger members in our organizations, while our children have watched us and may have helped out with projects while younger, their priorities are not what ours may have been at the same

age. My own grown children do not belong to the same organizations to which I belong, but they do sit on volunteer boards, donate blood when they can, even make quilts for forest fire victims. When we think about engaging future generations of volunteers, we need to tap into their sense of social justice and allow them to have input into the types of service projects an organization should be undertaking, and perhaps finding ways of planning and executing projects without a lot of meetings.

6. Paying to Volunteer

One of the biggest challenges we face in recruiting younger family members to our organizations is the notion of having to pay to volunteer. Every organization has costs related to membership, leadership development, and even liability insurance for members as they work on projects. And organizations like Lions keep their project funds separate from administration funds to ensure that all money raised from the public goes back into the community. If you cannot use money from fundraisers to pay membership dues, there is a significant burden placed on the member to cover those dues. And if that member is a young person with a mortgage and a family to take care of, that burden may be a disincentive to joining a volunteer organization no matter how noble the cause. It is not unusual for family and community members to come and volunteer with a project but decline an invitation to membership because of cost.

7. Leadership Skills and Training

An often-overlooked benefit of belonging to a volunteer organization is the opportunity to develop transferable skills. When one joins a service organization there are opportunities to learn about parliamentary procedure, planning events, how to take minutes, working in committees, budgeting, applying for permits, complying with local regulations, working in partnership with other organizations, conducting needs assessments, and learning from other clubs or councils in your organization.

Service organizations offer leadership training by way of workshops, online training modules, and conventions. Conventions are often the best option for training as the attendees can learn from one another as well as from the presenters. However,

conventions that once attracted hundred of attendees are now struggling to attract dozens. And most club members will tell you that the biggest reason people do not attend conventions is cost. That cost includes transportation, hotels, meals in transit, and registration fees. In much of rural Canada, public transportation is not an option as buses and trains simply do not exist. The only option for most service organization members in rural Canada is personal automobiles, many of which will not be electric due to the range limitations of EV's.

8. Value of Volunteers to Communities

There is no question that it is in the interests of all levels of government to support the work of reputable service organizations in communities all over Canada. If one considers the dollar value of the physical assets that have been financed and built by service organizations, it would appear fiscally prudent to find ways to keep those organizations operating.

Add in the benefits of personal and professional development, needs assessment at the local level, partnerships among local organizations, and the satisfaction of doing something good for someone else, and it is clear there is a need to support service organizations for the foreseeable future.

9. Recommendations

A. Membership Dues and Convention Fees deduction

In order to support the future growth of service organizations in Canada, one suggestion is to offer a tax credit or deduction for service organization initiation and membership dues as well as convention registration fees, to be capped at \$1,000 per year per family. This would remove the "why should I pay to volunteer" concern of prospective members, and it would allow flexibility between spouses to claim the expenses in much the same way as either partner can claim charitable donations.

Not all service club members would claim the deduction as the self-employed are probably claiming their dues under "Memberships and Subscriptions" while fixed income seniors might not need the deduction. However, it might be a worthwhile

incentive for wage-earners knowing that their receipt for dues will come in handy at tax time.

Perhaps the most difficult task in implementing such a tax credit or deduction would be defining “service” or “volunteer” organization. To that end, I would suggest that to qualify to issue receipts, an organization must be affiliated with a recognized national or international service organization and/or registered with a province as a non-profit entity.

B. Working Directly with Youth Groups

The stated aim of this committee is to examine ways the federal government could promote and encourage intergenerational volunteerism between seniors and youth. If the vision attached to that goal statement is one where seniors read stories to children at the library, coach sports or run a youth band, or conversely where young people go to visit with seniors in care homes, my submission may seem to be only indirectly related to that goal. I would argue that incentives such as a tax credit will offer the possibility of these volunteer organizations to survive long enough to continue offering those kinds of intergenerational programs and connections.

A further financial incentive such as a grant for intergenerational projects would no doubt be welcome by the organizations who engage in such projects provided the application and payment process is reasonably easy to navigate and provided the administration of the grant program does not create a whole new level of bureaucracy.

10. Conclusion

At a time when service organizations are struggling to maintain membership while maintaining the level of service to which their communities have become accustomed, there are at least a couple of ways that our federal government can support the value that these organizations add. One would be creating a tax credit or deduction for membership dues and convention registrations, while another would be financial support for projects that are targeted to bring youth and seniors together. It would be up to individual clubs or groups to do the work to engage new members with

meaningful service and leadership training opportunities, and to apply for grants as they become available.

I appreciate the opportunity to present my ideas and opinions to this Committee and look forward to the Committee report when it becomes available.

APPENDIX A

Appendix B: Membership Statistics

Membership Statistics for the Year Ended December 31, 2022

Provincial Council	Jan. 1, 2022	New	Reinstated	Didn't Renew	Paid Members	Deceased	Dec. 31, 2022
Alberta Mackenzie	7,972	269	234	792	7,683	129	7,554
B.C. & Yukon	7,308	384	367	535	7,524	107	7,417
Manitoba	1,841	24	40	221	1,684	32	1,652
Military Ordinariate	246	8	3	18	239	4	235
New Brunswick	1,461	24	26	75	1,436	46	1,390
Newfoundland and Labrador	410	-	3	69	344	5	339
Nova Scotia	2,943	21	28	261	2,731	63	2,668
Ontario	33,856	852	1,294	3,448	32,554	650	31,904
Prince Edward Island	1,581	21	18	139	1,481	31	1,450
Quebec	709	12	17	100	638	14	624
Saskatchewan	5,245	86	68	546	4,853	86	4,767
Total	63,572	1,701	2,098	6,204	61,167	1,167	60,000

Council Statistics for the Year Ended December 31, 2022

Provincial Council	Diocesan Councils	Parish Councils						Dec. 31, 2022
		Jan. 1, 2022	New	Reactivated	Amalgamated	Unpaid	Disbanded	
Alberta Mackenzie	5	141	-	3	-	3	3	138
B.C. & Yukon	6	123	-	3	-	1	1	124
Manitoba	3	46	-	-	-	-	1	45
Military Ordinariate	-	13	-	-	-	-	-	13
New Brunswick	-	37	-	-	-	-	-	37
Newfoundland and Labrador	-	16	-	-	-	-	2	14
Nova Scotia	2	60	-	2	1	-	6	57
Ontario	13	510	2	8	-	13	8	499
Prince Edward Island	-	32	-	-	-	-	2	30
Quebec	2	18	-	-	-	1	2	15
Saskatchewan	3	128	-	1	-	3	4	122
Total	34	1,124	2	17	1	21	29	1,094

APPENDIX B



Overview **Membership** Service Activities Donations Clubs

FILTER BY **RESET**

LCI | CAT

Total Membership
Drop Membership
Membership by Type

CA
Cantata

Multiple District

All

District

All

Total Membership by Month

● Total Membership ▲ Total Membership 1 Year Ago (Same Time Frame)



Membership Metrics

31,315
Total Membership
1,385
Drop Members in FY
1,519
Members Added in FY
134
Net Growth in FY
0.43%
Net Growth in FY%

Contribution Area	Membership in Fiscal Year	Membership in Previous Fiscal Year	Members Added in Fiscal Year	Drop in Fiscal Year	Gain or Loss in Fiscal Year	Three Year Total Membership Change
Cantata	31,315	31,494	1,270	1,485	134	
Total	31,315	31,594	1,519	1,385	134	

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