

The Florida Council of Catholic Women



On March 4-6, 1920 two hundred American Catholic women prominent in social work and parish life met in Washington, D.C., under the auspices of Archbishop Joseph Schrembs, of Cleveland, to organize a National Council of Catholic Women. A delegate appointed by Bishop Michael J. Curley, of St. Augustine, represented Florida east of the Apalachicola River. In the following year two Florida organizations joined the new national council: the Catholic Woman's Club of Jacksonville and the Catholic Woman's Club of Holy Trinity Church in Ocala. Ten years later, there were numerous women's clubs, guilds, and altar societies, as well as organizations such as the Catholic Daughters of America, the Sacred Heart League, and the Confraternity of Christian Mothers--enough groups, it seemed to the then bishop of the diocese, Patrick Barry, to form a diocesan council. Accordingly, he called an organizational meeting for that purpose which was held in Tampa on January 20, 1931, and a first convention of the St. Augustine Diocesan Council of Catholic Women was held on May 6-7 of that year in Lakeland. Officers were elected, with Mrs. R.S. Clark, of Tampa, chosen as first president.

By the date of the second convention, at St. Augustine on May 8, 1932, the council boasted a membership of 33 affiliated organizations. Elected as president that year was Mrs. Julia Caroline LaFontissee ("Aunt Carrie") McCollum, of St. Patrick's Parish in Gainesville. Later in the decade, Carrie McCollum became one of two members of the Florida council to rise to the presidency of the National Council of Catholic Women, serving in that capacity from 1939 to 1941. The other Floridian to serve as national president was Mrs. Donald (Winkie) LeFils, of the Diocese of Orlando, who presided from 1979 to 1981.

On May 8, 1968 the Diocese of Miami was elevated to the rank of an archdiocese, or metropolitan see. The other Florida dioceses became suffragan sees in the new Province of Miami. On December 2, 1968, Mrs. Thomas (Marie) Palmer, of Miami, a National Director and Third Vice President of the National Council of Catholic Women, convened a meeting to establish the Miami Provincial Council. In addition to Mrs. Palmer, presidents and moderators present for this gathering were: Mrs. Wendell Gordon and Father Frederick Wass of the Miami Archdiocesan Council of Catholic Women (ADCCW); Mrs. Joel Sayers and Monsignor Martin B. Power of the Orlando Diocesan Council of Catholic Women (DCCW); and Miss Anne Tucker and Monsignor Charles Elslander of the St. Petersburg DCCW. Mrs. Julian Warren and Monsignor Patrick E. Nolan of the St. Augustine DCCW were unable to attend.

With the approval and endorsement of their bishops, the Council began to meet twice a year to discuss priorities and objectives and to establish a mutual agenda for statewide action on the important issues of the times. In January 1973, an amendment to the by-laws introduced by Mrs. Dan McCarthy



Mrs. Julia Caroline LaFontissee ("Aunt Carrie") McCollum.

(Ruth) of Miami changed the name from Miami Provincial Council to the Florida Council of Catholic Women. Growth in the state led to the creation of three more dioceses: Pensacola-Tallahassee, Palm Beach, and Venice. The President/Province Director serves a two-year term, chosen from her diocese according to a rotation schedule among the seven Councils of Catholic Women. The following women have served as President/Province Director of the Florida Council of Catholic Women, Province of Miami:

Marie Palmer (1968-1971) Archdiocese of Miami
Elizabeth Oliver (1971-1973) Diocese of St. Augustine
Frances Filewicz (1973-1975) Diocese of St. Petersburg
Winkie LeFils (1975-1977) Diocese of Orlando
Georgia Ulseth (1977-1979) Archdiocese of Miami
Gladys White (1979-1981) Diocese of St. Augustine
Pat D'Asaro (1981-1983) Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee
Jean Gwaltney (1983-1985) Diocese of St. Petersburg
June Sayers (1985-1987) Diocese of Orlando
Joyce Masso (1987-1989) Archdiocese of Miami
Dolores Hankins (1989-1991) Diocese of St. Augustine
Hermi Hadi (1991-1993) Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee
Joan Markham (1993-1995) Diocese of Palm Beach
Sister Anna Mae Frenzick (1995-1997) Diocese of Venice
Janet Moucha (1997-1999) Diocese of St. Petersburg
Ellen Bachman (1999-2001) Diocese of Orlando
Corinne Steinbauer (2001-2003) Archdiocese of Miami
Janie Southerland (2003-2005) Diocese of St. Augustine

The President/Province Director meets with her archbishop or bishop to choose a special project to be emphasized during her term of office. In addition, each council supports vocations, advocates for women and children in crisis, and enrichment and leadership training for members.

An annual activity of the FCCW is participation in "Catholic Days at the Capitol," a trip to Tallahassee during the legislative session to visit area legislators one-on-one about issues of concern. The ladies join the bishops of Florida and members of the executive, judicial, and legislative branches at the Votive Mass of the Holy Spirit, known as the Red Mass, asking the spirit of God to guide and direct public officials in their service to the people of Florida. Since the 1980's, the women have joined in partnership with *The Florida Catholic* newspaper and the Florida Catholic Conference during election years to poll congressional and state candidates for office on their positions about issues important to our faith. The responses are published statewide in the Florida Catholic newspapers and distributed in the 480 Catholic parishes before the primary and general elections.

Miami Archdiocesan Council of Catholic Women

"Teach Us the Wisdom of Love" is the formal title of the most recent Respect Life activity of the Miami Archdiocesan Council of Catholic Women. However, this event is better known as "Chastity Days," an educational seminar that is sponsored by the members of the Council in partnership with the



Mrs. Donald (Winkie) LeFils.

Youth Ministry of the Archdiocese of Miami.

This is a learning experience held for eighth grade students throughout the Miami Archdiocese, but, due to the number of students who attend, it is necessary to hold "Chastity Days" on three different days. Since its beginning, the Council has been renowned for its sponsorship of Life issues that bring Catholic values to South Florida and the Keys.

A scholarship fund has been in place for several years that awards a scholarship to send two eighth grade girls to a Catholic high school. A Catholic education provides enrichment and hope for young people that ultimately enriches us all.

St. Augustine Diocesan Council of Catholic Women

Children with challenges, some physical, some mental, are all very special gifts from God. Each spring, members of the St. Augustine Diocesan Council of Catholic Women sponsor a Fashion Show that provides funds so these wonderful children can attend the "I Am Special Camp" for a week during the summer. Many who go to this camp are given the opportunity to be models at the Spring Fashion Show. Affiliations and deaneries of the Council volunteer and prepare meals for the campers at different times throughout the summer. Council members and teenagers from youth groups spend time at the camp as buddies. Buddies help dress or push wheelchairs for the campers, and the teens go for a week or for the entire summer. The diocesan Respect Life Office and the Council women have collaborated for over twenty years so that each year parents can have a week of respite and so that the challenged children, these gifts from God, can enjoy a "Summer Experience."

St. Petersburg Diocesan Council of Catholic Women

Members of the St. Petersburg Diocesan Council of Catholic Women are devoted, dedicated, caring women who work with the homeless through women's shelters. Devotion to the difficult work of lobbying for bills advocating the rights of all persons from conception to natural death and for the rights of women and children in crisis has been a part of the history of this Council. With prayerful hearts the members of the Council have actively participated in political candidate surveys so all can be knowledgeable about Catholic teaching on issues of social justice.

The future of Catholicism relies on vocations and this is recognized by the women of this diocese through support of the Bishop's Vocation Fund. Affiliations, deaneries and individual members participate in the "Adopt-A-Seminarian" program by sending cards and gifts to, as well as by praying for, the seminarians throughout their years of study.

Orlando Diocesan Council of Catholic Women

The cornerstone that defines the Orlando Diocesan Council of Catholic Women is "Leadership Training." As an organization the Council supports financially the training of its members. Free workshops are held on the final day of their Diocesan Convention to train all incoming deanery and diocesan officers. Lake Yale is a very affordable, day-and-a-half Leadership Symposium held on a summer weekend that is filled with innovative presentations, fellowship, and prayer. But the training is not given to be clung to as one's own; the training must be passed and shared, so that all members

from the affiliation (parish) to the deanery, to the diocese, and to those who advance to national and international rings of the Council may enrich and encourage others to follow in their footsteps. The belief in mentoring is intrinsically woven into the fabric of Council work in the Orlando Council of Catholic Women.

Pensacola-Tallahassee Diocesan Council of Catholic Women

This council is a club that has no meetings; the dues are one dollar a month, twelve dollars a year. Any woman in the Pensacola-Tallahassee diocese can join this club and aid in supporting the education of our seminarians through the Council-sponsored Burse Club. Membership dues have not increased since the Burse Club was founded in 1953. Kathryn Marks Geist, at the request of Archbishop Thomas J. Toolen of Mobile, who needed and wanted to establish a minor seminary, worked diligently to develop the Burse Club. Each spring, at the Annual Convention of the Diocesan Council of Catholic Women, a check is presented to the current bishop in the amount of \$100,000 or more. In addition to dues, some of the monies collected are memorials and gift donations in memory of loved ones or to celebrate special occasions. Since the Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee was established in 1975, thirty-eight priests have been ordained whom the Burse Club has supported. Prayer is the other requirement for club membership as it is the responsibility of the laity to pray for vocations each day with the confidence that God will provide priests for the future of Florida's Panhandle.

Venice Diocesan Council of Catholic Women

Women from the Venice Diocesan Council of Catholic Women are characterized by their overwhelming generosity to those less fortunate in our society. Assisting migrant workers and adopting children from third world countries has become a priority for the Council women as individuals, as members of affiliations, and as deanery members. The strength of the Venice Council comes from a spirituality that is enhanced by a Diocesan Day of Reflection as well as by Deanery and Affiliation Days of Reflection. Involvement in Right to Life issues through active lobbying and participation in Council-sponsored events such as literacy programs and the anti-pornography "White Ribbon Campaign" improves the quality of life for all residents of the Diocese of Venice and of the entire state of Florida.

Palm Beach Diocesan Council of Catholic Women

The key to unlocking the treasures of the Palm Beach Diocesan Council of Catholic Women is the education of its membership, for education is a tangible way to empower the Catholic woman. The Council provides grants to support those who attend Enrichment Workshops. Each year there are two or three workshops that focus on spirituality, service, and leadership so that the members "know how to" be productive, knowledgeable, and competent advocates for those in our society who are unable to defend themselves. The women of the Palm Beach Council of Catholic Women also provide three scholarships per year to girls who are graduating from high school and who are planning to attend a Catholic college. By our support of education, a young Florida woman may be blessed with a vision for the future as she journeys on a course of advanced learning.