



Ліга Українських Католицьких Жінок Австралії

Ukrainian Catholic Women's League Australia

St. Andrew's Ukrainian Catholic Parish

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**“Yes it is planted, but will it live and grow!”
Ezekeil (17.10)**

UCWLA – UKRAINIAN CATHOLIC WOMEN'S LEAGUE AUSTRALIA

The UCWLA is the official association of Catholic Lay women of the Ukrainian Catholic Church in the Eparchy of Ss Peter and Paul of Melbourne Australia for Ukrainian Catholics in Australia, New Zealand and Oceania (herein referred to “Ukrainian Catholic Church of Australia).

UCWLA is a self sustaining, non-political, non-profit charitable organisation, which at all levels and through each individual member shall be in all its activities an expression of Christian life.

UCWLA is an Eparchial Women's organisation and was established by its Founding President Olya Kolomyjec in May 2005 in order to provide for the female faithful of the Eparchy, their commitment to the mission of the church, their faith and their desire to nurture Ukrainian Catholic Culture within the Eparchy and is dedicated to providing resources that help its members to realise their own true Christian vocation and live in an authentic Christian life as contributing members to the church and society through works of social development and charitable activities.

The history of the formation of UCWLA in Australia began in May 2005 with a Forum Committee in Sydney, consisting of 6 women, Anna Parasyn, Olya Chochula, Ivanka Garan, Vera Szyjan, Mary Duma and led by Olya Kolomyjec. This committee worked with positive enthusiasm on presenting a Women's Forum as never before experienced by the parish of St. Andrew's Ukrainian Catholic Church in Lidcombe NSW.

The theme for the forum was “My Spiritual Journey – An Awakening and Renewal of My Faith.” This forum held the support of the Parish Priest Fr. Simon Ckuj and the Parish Council under the chairmanship of Mr. Jaroslav Duma OAM. It took place on Saturday 6th October 2005 after months of planning and preparation. The event was a spiritual renewal of one's faith.

A touching and learning experience for almost 100 women from all walks of life, profession, nationality, age, and denomination. An extremely powerful forum. It was the start of women's work for the future of the parish and the Eparchy in Australia, New Zealand and Oceania.

In May 2006, the Forum committee continued its work as a Steering Committee to launch and form the UCWLA. This committee of women steered by Olya Kolomyjec saw the need of a UCWLA after the presentation speech by the dynamic guest speaker Peg McEntee OAM – past National President of the CWLA (Catholic Women's League Australia Inc.), at the above Forum, outlining the work of the Ukrainian Catholic Women's League of Canada Inc. and the Catholic Women's League Australia Inc.

Hence, the seed had been planted and a new vision emerged.

An association with the CWLA Inc. (Archdiocese of Sydney) became a very warm and close relationship. A joint forum was held in July 2006 "Heart of the Family in Crisis", bringing together Ukrainian Catholic and Roman Catholic women to share thoughts and ideas of families in crisis in today's society.

The Hon. Justice Jenny Boland, Fr. Michael Szyjan and Olya Kolomyjec were the guest presenters at this forum. With sincere thanks to Mary Harold -then State President of CWLA Inc, Moya Potts -President of CWLA (Archdiocese of Sydney), Margaret Bouffler, Chris McKirdy, Marita Winters, the CWLA forum organising committee and Olya Kolomyjec, that this forum took place, embracing women of both Roman and Ukrainian Catholic Rite. Many events held over the past few years by CWLA Inc, and UCWLA joined women together in faith and friendship.

UCWLA Makes History in the Ukrainian Catholic Church in Australia!

The UCWLA (Sydney) over the past 3 years has achieved a great deal since it's inauguration on 17th December, 2006. The Inauguration of UCWLA took place with an attendance of 38 registered members. During the Divine Liturgy the women, their UCWLA banner and their badges were blessed by our Eparch, Bishop Peter Stasiuk. Witnessing the event were invited guests from CWLA Inc., Catherine McGrath (State President) and representatives from CWLA Inc.(Archdiocese of Sydney) Margaret Bouffler and Helen Cook.

Since its Inauguration membership grew from 38 to 134, which included honorary members of our past Sisterhood (Systrystvo). The UCWLA membership includes Ukrainian Catholic women ranging in ages from 18-85 years throughout Sydney, its outskirts in New South Wales, Wollongong, Queanbeyan, Newcastle, Canberra (ACT), and with a few in Adelaide and Melbourne.

There are some exciting times ahead, as we see a new branch of UCWLA now formed in our Cathedral parish in Melbourne. A steering committee formed by Maru Jarocky, Chair of the Eparchial Pastoral Council and chaired by Kasiana Burak have worked hard in formation of this branch which sees membership now at 40 and growing. We have other parishes in Adelaide, Brisbane and Perth showing interest in forming a UCWLA. However, still at embryo stage, there is a strong motivation in these parishes that UCWLA will take form. However, it will be up to the Parish Priests to encourage and work with these women in their formation of the League.

The activities of UCWLA are fun and faith filled, from forums to luncheons with guest speakers and the annual UCWLA Day, to visiting the sick and elderly and helping those in need through acts of charity and mercy, to attending paska/babka and pysanky workshops to retreats, morning teas and fundraising events. Our members are encouraged to work and live in true faith in the Ukrainian Catholic Church, therefore, bringing members closer into the folds of the church. Interest through workshops helps members to embrace and nurture their culture and tradition. There are serious as well as fun moments to capture the hearts and minds of each member in her involvement in the UCWLA.

The UCWLA Mission Statement is strong and a beacon to guide members as they travel along their journey in life as members of UCWLA. The mission statement reads:

“The Ukrainian Catholic Women’s League Australia” is committed to the mission of the church and to the nurturing of our cultural heritage. It is dedicated to providing the resources and ongoing spiritual support, education and development of its members, to realise their own vocation, and live a Christian life as contributing members of Church and society.”

The UCWLA steering committee in Sydney back in 2006, felt that there was a void of lay women taking part in our church and parish life. We saw a need for evangelisation, to deepen and enrich the religious and spiritual life of each member and to somehow preserve the Ukrainian culture and traditions which our mothers brought with them to Australia. There was a need to support programs of charitable and social action which exemplify Christian ideals of Justice and love, particularly those related to the inviolability of human life, the dignity of the human being, the sacredness of the family, to the poor and the sick. In works of mutual aid – to relieve human needs of every kind, assisting groups and communities in their field. Therefore the UCWLA fundamental aims were founded on the same aims of UCWL Canada being:

1. The Ukrainian Catholic Faith
2. Ukrainian Culture and Traditions
3. Social Development
4. Charitable activities.

These four aims are the four strong pillars on which the UCWLA stands to fulfil its objectives.

Since its Inauguration on 17th December 2006, much has transpired and been achieved.

- In June 2007 UCWLA was promulgated into the Eparchial statutes by His Grace Bishop Peter Stasiuk as an “Eparchial Lay Women’s Organisation” at the EPC (Eparchial Pastoral Council) Triennial Conference in Melbourne.

- On 4th November 2007, an election of President and an Executive Committee took place at the UCWLA - AGM. The theme for the AGM “Spread Your Wings – Continue to Evolve.” According to the UCWLA Constitution, formality in running an organisation was required and needed to engage women to take on formal responsibilities. Therefore nominations took place and women were voted into positions, taking on portfolios on the Executive committee.

An induction of this committee took place in St. Andrew’s Ukrainian Catholic Church - Lidcombe NSW, within a couple of months, with Fr. Simon Ckuj and Fr. Zdan Kolomyjec giving the women on the Executive their blessing to work in faith and love for the benefit of our Ukrainian Catholic church, its members and society. “Almighty God, you have chosen servants to do your work among your people. We thank you for the women of the UCWLA Executive whom you have called to serve you. Fill them with the Holy Spirit and give them the gifts to fulfil their duties. May they do this with the love and commitment to you and your church, be faithful disciples, and serve as examples to others: through Jesus Christ our Lord, in those whose name all ministries are exercised.”

“I declare you to be inducted to the duties as stated in the mission of the UCWLA to centre fostering the Ukrainian Catholic Faith and Culture, charitable works and social development and to encourage and guide all your members in this mission. The blessing of the Lord upon you with His grace and love for mankind always, now and forever and ever, Amen.”

Making History -The 11 members elected made up the first and new UCWLA pioneer Executive committee. These are women who saw that there needed to be a firm commitment to this organisation for it to flourish and focused on the vision of a new organisation. They remembered the work of the pioneering women; some were their mothers, who did not hesitate to form community organisations in Australia. These women were also working mothers, who rolled up their sleeves without hesitation to build and form positive relationships with women in the parish community. Hence the fruits of their labour are the churches, the embroidered altar and church linen, the embroidered banners and the church artefacts plus much more that we have today.

There was no hesitation, but motivation to cook and serve at church “Praznyks” and special occasions, to clean the church and to take part in visitations to the sick and helping the needy here in their community and abroad. It was their strong faith, their hope and love for their church and their identity as Ukrainian Catholic women, which motivated them in their work.

These women also had a vision and set themselves goals which they achieved during tough times in an alien country. It is now 60 years since their settlement in Australia and the handful of our pioneer women left, who are now in their late 80’s are proud to see their daughters and God daughters take on roles from where they had left off, giving them full support.

The enthusiastic and motivated 11 women on the new pioneer UCWLA Executive committee to lead UCWLA into the future are: Olya Kolomyjec (President and Editor of Nasha Mandrivka magazine, Social Justice and Bioethics conveynor), Olya Chochula (Vice President); Anna Parasyn (Secretary), Maria Jessup (Treasurer); Chrystyna Wowk (Recording Secretary); Olga Kovas (Events Co-ordinator); Marika Kuzyl (Assistant Events Co-ordinator); Ivanka Garan (Welfare Co-ordinator); Marika Huopainen (Assistant to conveynor of Social Justice & Bioethics), Anna Jacenko (UCWLA Archives) Vera Szyjan (Events Photographer).

Much has been achieved since the induction of these women. It was with their strong faith, commitment, vision and love for their church and their identity as Ukrainian Catholic women which motivates them in their work.

Over the past 18 months these women have worked tirelessly raising funds to help Orphans in Ukraine. In 2008, an amount of \$12,000 was raised in 10 months for this cause. Another \$6,000 was donated to the “Safe House” appeal, a project undertaken by our UCWL sister organisation UCWLC in Edmonton, Canada to rebuild and refurbish a safe house in Lviv Ukraine, for young teenage girls who had left their orphanage dwellings and had nowhere to go. In May 2009, \$2,500 was passed through Bishop Peter from UCWLA (Syd.) as a donation towards a “Catechist Retreat” for orphans and underprivileged children in the Lviv region of Ukraine and a sum of \$2,500 sent through Red Cross for the Bushfire Appeal and a donation to support the CWL Leadership Development Program in NSW

Activities and functions have been varied and many since the UCWLA inauguration.

In 2007, the building of the UCWLA Grotto of our Lady, the blessing of the Statue and Memorial plaque.

In 2007 another forum took place “God is Love – Come Follow Me”, focusing on the Icon “God is Love” written in the Lithographic style in many languages, by Mr. Leonid Denysenko.

The UCWLA magazine “Nasha Manrivka” was launched and is now in its 6th Edition and read throughout Australia, New Zealand, Canada, America, France and England.

Raising funds for orphans with a Fashion Parade.

UCWLA support the Pink and White Ribbon days.

Supporting the Holodomor committee, and attending their rally in Canberra and laying of wreaths for those who perished during the artificial famine.

Supporting WYD in holding a forum “Encountering the Living Christ” for our parish youth with guest speaker Jovina Graham, prior to WYDay and UCWLA members helping during WYDay in our parish.

Workshops in Pysanka decorating- with Dr. Bohdan Huzij

Workshops in Paska and Babka making with Sr. Anisia and Sr. Lavra – Sisters of St. Basil the Great Convent.

Lenten retreats and programs and taking an active part in Easter processions.

Supporting the CWLA (NSW) Leadership development project - Financially and with attendances.

Celebrating the International Women’s Day.

Hosting Mothers and Fathers Day morning teas for our parishioners.

Holding Mini forums and plenary sessions.

Hosting a luncheon with speaker Jennifer Burn on “Women and Children Trafficking”

Hosting a luncheon with speaker Dr. Olga Ostrowski–Motyka on “Women’s Health.”

Hosting luncheon and speakers Dr. Laurence Blows (Psychiatrist) and Christine Kulyk (Psychologist) on “Mental Health” – “Beyond Blue”

Hosting a luncheon with speakers Raad Richards CEO Carrington Aged Care Services and Mr. Michael Parasyn (Solicitor) on “Aged Care” for members and parishioners.

Packing and sending over 300 shoe boxes to orphans in Ukraine for Christmas 2008.

Attending Soyuz Ukrainok functions

Holding a family Christmas Carols in the Park for members and Parishioners.

Supporting the Bushfire appeal with a donation of \$2,500

Congratulations sent to Most Rev. Bishop Peter Stasiuk on receiving the AM.

Members attending an Iconography workshop with Prof. Roman Vasylyk

Celebrating recently our third UCWLA Day “The Way We Were” – 60 years of Ukrainian Migrant settlement in Ukraine.

Over the past three years UCWLA members visit elderly in nursing homes, the ill and frail in their homes and hospitals.

Attendances to CWL Inc. (Catholic Women’s League Australia Inc.) - National and State conferences.

UCWLA President presenting at CWLA Inc. National and State Conferences.

The UCWLA members are quiet achievers and some of the work may be unseen, but they have made an impact not only on our church community but the community as a whole.

Because women comprise more than 50% of the Ukrainian Catholic church, It was felt that women needed a voice and a place in our church. Our Ukrainian Catholic pioneering women who arrived 60 years ago, worked hard in helping build our churches and parish communities and at the same time raising their children in the Ukrainian Catholic faith. These women had distinctive roles in the church, they were the “fundraisers” and the “hand maidens” and were only supported when they were seen to be “doing the right thing.”

Today, there is a promotion of gender equality as a matter of urgency, where women are now more involved in decision making and leadership, taking on more active roles in our church and community as a whole. However, this in turn puts many demands on women’s time as today many women hold demanding positions in the workforce as well as being a wife and mother.

Emerging as a *NEW* organisation, there has been much criticism and many obstacles placed in our way. However, the focus on our vision has been undisturbed and the dedicated women have not turned to other roads, but continued with commitment on their straight path along our journey. The positive achievements of UCWLA to date, has proven that women with faith and a vision with a positive attitude can fulfil their mission.

Where do we see ourselves in the future? To move into the future as women in any organisation, we need to look at how we can strengthen our organisation and grow. We need to focus not only on the “now” but on the “future”, working with our “Mission Statement” as a beacon to guide us.

If the church and church related organisations want to survive, we need to respond to, and participate in, the many rapid changes that have affected society as a whole.

We are all living in a rapidly changing world with new situations arising in the Church and Society. We are all affected, in different ways, by these “New World Trends”. Our families are experiencing a much faster pace and we are also pulled into this whirlwind of fast pace living. Today the church and its organisations are searching for direction and looking for solutions. To try to find some solutions, a quick survey with UCWLA members was taken up in 2008 and the response was rather interesting. The consensus was that these women would like to “strengthen their faith”, “devote more time to the task of strengthening their family” and “to commit themselves to a better understanding of our Ukrainian Catholic Faith and our Ukrainian Cultural heritage.”

So what does that tell us?

Our members themselves are aware of what should be the UCWLA’s priorities and what is most important in today’s fast changing world. Today, the Ukrainian Catholic women are searching for meaning in life through their faith and traditions and other spiritual elements.

UCWLA's role in our Ukrainian Catholic church is the process of revitalisation.

Revitalisation will begin when we make organisational changes. We need to get on track. The challenge is to revitalise the role of the church in our every day lives, but to do so in a manner that does not repeat the same activities of old, out of habit and routine nor does the wheel need to be reinvented.

Programs that may have been valuable in the past are not necessarily valuable today. So, to create the organisation of the future, we need to create new programs and new initiatives, embracing younger generations. Therefore, to begin the process of revitalisation, there are four critical elements that demand our constant focus and these are: 1. Vision; 2 Goals ; 3 Planning ; 4. Attitude.

Every organisation has many choices to make for deciding which way to go. Forces in the outside world pull the organisation in different directions, each offering its own attractions, its own possible merits. Yet, no organisation can be all things to all people. There are many diverse and wonderful activities and we are so involved, so busy, so very busy doing many different things. Our minds race over the many things that we do. Out of all the activities, we might have to struggle to choose something unique, something particular to our individuality as members of UCWLA. So amidst the bustle and conflicting pressure, the UCWLA needs to focus on what is really important and where it intends to go.

The spiritual development is the very heart of UCWLA and the essence of our existence. This dimension sets us apart from all other women's organisations as our strength derives from our common bond of faith.

To work as a great organisation with a vision, we need to focus our mission to adjust to changing realities and respond to a different set of needs, to a different kind of world. We need a clear vision of what and who we are, as members of UCWLA, what we wish to achieve and how we are going to do it. Our mission statement provides us with that vision.

“Let's make a difference in the world”

For further information on :

- *UCWLA membership
- * UCWLA support of Orphans in Ukraine
- * UCWLA work with the elderly and the sick
- * UCWLA Workshops
- * How can we start a UCWLA in our Parish?
- * General questions and answers on UCWLA
- * Articles for the UCWLA magazine “Nasha mandrivka”

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