

The Executive Director's Annual Report
Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada
September 2020 – August 2021



The WICC tagline, “Rooted in Faith and Called to Action”, brings to mind the analogy of a large and vibrant tree, very similar to one of my favourite scriptures:

“Blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD... They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.” Jeremiah 17:8 (NIV)

WICC is the oldest ecumenical organization in Canada with a mission to empower Christians to pursue justice, peace, and reconciliation by standing together in prayer and action. We are an affiliate member of the Canadian Council of Churches and part of the World Day of Prayer International movement, as well as the International Committee of the Fellowship of the Least Coin.

DEEP ROOTS

The roots of the Women's Inter-Church Council are over 100 years old. The vision of restoring hope to women touched by injustice endures over time. Informed prayer and prayerful action are a vital part of WICC.

STRONG TRUNK – EFFICIENT OPERATIONS

Our operations are like a tree trunk – strong and resilient to enable the vital ministry to be healthy and effective. COVID-19 has required flexibility, but our trunk is stronger than before!

Move to online resources

Over the past few years, we have been working on a long-term strategic plan to eliminate printing and shipping of most World Day of Prayer (WDP) materials. This plan was accelerated this past year by COVID-19 with the following results as we function smarter to accomplish more with less expense:

- increase in the reach and impact of those materials
- reduce paper usage (save some trees) which helps the environment
- provide better economic stewardship of donations

In this time of economic hardship for many, WICC was able to give more grant funding than budgeted because of generous donors and support of these changes. Each of the grant projects makes a big difference in the lives of vulnerable women.

Communications

The WICC Board and working teams have embraced Zoom for meetings long before the pandemic since our members are located across Canada. Zoom allows for shorter, more timely meetings and has eliminated travel costs. For example, the grant review team met online for three 2+ hour meetings instead of spending two to three full days at WICC office. Another benefit was that members could include Board members from anywhere in Canada rather than the traditional gathering of those living in the Toronto area.

During restrictions of COVID-19, more people have been using Zoom and are able to join online activities and events.

Our office practices have also shifted. We've worked from home offices during long months of government "stay home" orders. Virtual staff team use their strengths to work together.

Communications has become even more important through the pandemic and our team has been working hard to send messages across all communications channels: denominational national newsmagazines; We-Connect monthly email newsletter; Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, as well as letters.

There was a 192% increase in recipients of the monthly We-Connect email newsletters this year. The average number for Percent Opened for other organizations is 20-25% so we are encouraged that the We-Connect readers are interested and engaged in the monthly content.

Partnerships

A couple of years ago, we set up a shared office arrangement with an organization called "Canadian Centre for Brief Coaching". This has worked very well, and we plan to expand shared space with other affiliated coaches to maximize the use our office location and further reduce WICC rental costs.

We are grateful for the partnership with the Canadian Centre for Brief Coaching in the launch of "Better Conversation" webinars this past year to provide helpful information and raise funds for WICC initiatives.

WICC has become an affiliate member of the Canadian Council of Churches. Our ecumenical values closely align with the Council, and it will be beneficial to "sit at the table" with other like-minded Canadian Christian organizations.

Website

The WICC website, wicc.org, remains the central place for communication and resources. The progress towards the long-term goal to eliminate printing/shipping and enable people to access all resources online was increased exponentially during COVID-19. This past year there was a 74% increase in website users and over 300% increase in page views.

Our website was updated to include a Coordinator Login section so that people could register and gain access to WDP service files. Their profile information (church, contact

info) was captured for WICC communication purposes. Update emails were sent regularly to the 656 registered Coordinators.

WDP Field Reps were available to give support for the steps to register online. This change provides a much better connection with coordinators via email with more timely messaging and reduction of cost.

The week of World Day of Prayer shows very high traffic on the website:

- 8,234 users from March 1-10, 2021 visited 57,161 pages

Creating videos of the 2020 WDP service and WDP Pray NOW resulted in a 565% increase in subscribers in 2021 with 30,979 views on the WICC YouTube Channel.

WICC's free online resource RESTORE: Ending Violence Against Women showed an exponential increase in user activity since the beginning of COVID-19. Total pageviews since this resource was launched in 2018 = 38,766.

FLEXIBLE BRANCHES, HEALTHY LEAVES AND FRUIT

Trees need branches that will bend in the wind. COVID-19 arrived like a storm that affected everyone around the globe. WICC adapted quickly to provide creative and new ways for people to gather for prayer and action.

Online Events

We had great success with new ways to gather virtually including

- online WDP service gatherings via Zoom
- Dec 6th prayer service
- online national Festival event for WDP preparation with a planning team from several regional WIC's
- WDP Pray NOW to build a prayer movement on Facebook Live and YouTube video
- Paint night with 65 participants via Zoom
- online training for WDP Coordinators
- the WDP 2021 Vanuatu service video

Online donations increased this year which gives donors an instant tax receipt by email and reduces WICC operational costs.

Hybrid Model

Going forward, we are looking at a hybrid model of providing online, paperless resources with no printing and shipping costs using better communication by email. Resources will still be available for those who want a more traditional style with free downloads ready for them to copy as needed.

The fruit of flexible programming this past year included national training/education and community building events. For most, it was the first opportunity to meet WDP Coordinators from across Canada.

International networks also meeting regularly with WDPIC representatives rather than every 5 years. It is amazing to meet women who are living in areas with issues unfolding on our TV news. It is a privilege to hear their stories firsthand and pray together.

Many enjoyed the interview with a representative from the host WDP Country using a Zoom connection from Canada to Vanuatu, on the other side of the world. One of the highlights of the year for me was experiencing these national and global connections without travel.

The fruit of this year includes participation from many new people. Board members contributed articles with timely social justice topics to the monthly We-Connect issues. I would like to thank the Board members, staff and contract works for all their creativity, hard work and faithful support this past year. It has not been an easy time to be isolated, but I value our teamwork and support.

Staff Team as of Year End

- Executive Director - Cath MacKeil
- Administrator - Nancy Weir

Contract Workers:

- Communications Specialist - Janet MacFayden
- WDP Field Reps – Cathy Tubb, Linda Ervin, Janet MacFayden
- Bookkeeper/Website Manager - Julie Ginter
- Accountant - Kathy Elias

Overall, WICC flourished during this past year with creative solutions and new opportunities for growth.

Yes, we miss being together in person due to COVID-19 restrictions and look forward to those times returning. Meanwhile, we are strengthened by this experience. Over the past five years, many areas of WICC have been restructured to ensure the sustainability of the organization, much like the theme of World Day of Prayer this year, “Built on a strong foundation”. The theme for next year is “For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord”. It is a very timely focus as we all learn how to bloom where we are planted during a time of exile, isolation, or change.

Respectfully submitted,
Catherine MacKeil (Cath), WICC Executive Director