Catholic Women’s League Papers
1932-2002

Compiled by
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Revised and updated by Marié Coetzee
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The Unisa Library Archives received the papers of the Catholic Women’s League of Southern Africa from the National Council in Port Elizabeth, by the kind offices of Mrs Medea Evans (Hussey), who was a former national president of the League in the late seventies and eighties. After the completion of the first inventory in 1997, the Archives received a number of additions (about 3 linear metres) to the collection from several donors. The Catholic Women’s League Archives now comprises 10,1 linear metres consisting of minutes, correspondence, pamphlets, press cuttings, publications and photographs. The papers reflect the deep involvement of the Catholic Church over many decades in the development of social welfare, especially with regards to women in South Africa.

The archival material includes conference papers, correspondence and reports from Diocesan Councils and branches in Southern Africa, subject files on a variety of issues such as abortion, adoption, Board of Censors and films, divorce laws, national welfare councils (for the Aged, Deaf, Blind, Child & Family, Mental Health, Consumers etc.), Southern African Catholic Bishops’ Conference and the World Union of Catholic Women’s organisations. There are also handwritten letters from Mother Teresa of Calcutta 1972-1973, in which she expressed the hope to visit South Africa “but please without any publicity”. According to the letterhead of the Missionaries of Charity, to which Mother Teresa belonged, the order’s motto is “as long as you did it to one of these My least brethren, You did it to Me”.

The Catholic Women’s League archives is a valuable primary source for all researchers interested in gender, religious and social studies as the materials illustrate the many social and emotional problems which affect the lives of women in the twentieth century. The documents also give us an insight into the changing role of women in society. The fulltime housewife of the thirties has disappeared to make way for the career woman-cum-housewife of to-day.

HISTORY OF THE CATHOLIC WOMEN’S LEAGUE

The League was founded in England in 1897 by Margaret Fletcher. A convert to Catholicism, she was concerned that Catholic women living in these so called “modern society” would grow away from Catholic norms and teachings. The League’s objective was to train and to encourage Catholic women to take part in religious, social and civic affairs. During May 1931 the Catholic Women’s League was inaugurated in Cape Town with Mrs Donovan as the first president. At one of the first meetings the women were addressed on women’s franchise, its significance and responsibility. By 1932 the League had almost 600 members who attended group lectures, held street collections, met immigrants at the docks on arrival, distributed clothing and groceries to the poor, established a shelter for men in Woodstock and reading and recreation rooms for all races. The Johannesburg Branch started in 1932 and the Pretoria Branch in 1938. During the Second World War the Catholic Women’s League also assisted with making hospital supplies, knitted comforts for the sailors and soldiers and served many meals in SAWAS canteens.
After World War II, the League was established in many of the Catholic Dioceses in South Africa. Supported by the local Bishops, efforts led to the establishment of a National Council of Catholic Women's League, not only to unite the different Councils, but also to have the status to speak on behalf of Catholic women in South Africa on matters of national importance. The first National Conference was held in 1952 with Mrs AM Shaw as the first national president. In 1997 the National Council changed its area of operation to Southern Africa to include countries within the responsibility of the Southern African Bishops' Conference. The National Council now comprises 20 Diocesan Council members, as well as Namibia and Swaziland members.

WORK OF THE LEAGUE

The work of the National Council continues to demonstrate the concerns of the members of the Catholic Women's League. In recent years it has been part of an anti-abortion lobby. Much work is done in the field of social welfare on the professional and volunteer level and there is close cooperation between it and the national and regional welfare departments. It co-operates with other Christian organisations in projects like the Women’s World Day of Prayer, Chrisnet etc. The League was a founder-member of the Consumer Union and maintains this membership.

In 1962 the National Council became a full member of the World Union of Catholic Women’s Organisations (WUCWO), sharing the work and concerns of Catholic women internationally. This involves not only secular concerns like women and child abuse, human rights violations, genetic engineering etc., but also ensures that women are heard at an ecclesiastical level in the Vatican. General Assemblies (World Conferences) are held every four years and the South African National Council also plays an active part in the Africa region.

MEDEA EVANS
MARIÉ COETZEE

PS  This updated version of the inventory includes all new records received between 1998 – 2011.

Marie Coetzee
Nov 2011
CATHOLIC WOMEN’S LEAGUE (10.1 linear metres)

1 Constitution of the Catholic Women’s League correspondence and revised editions of constitution 1950-1991

2 Historical information about the League memoranda, correspondence, tape recording of Mrs Medea Hussey’s interview with Mrs Agnes Shaw (first national president), pamphlets, press cuttings, albums and scrap-books, photographs and notes 1932-1999

3 Minutes

3.1 Executive Committee minutes (vol 1) Nov 1952-March 1965
3.2 1-7th National Conference minutes 1954-1966
3.3 Executive Committee minutes\(^1\) (vol 2) Aug 1965-Sept 1970
3.4 Management Committee minutes and attendance register Nov 1968-Aug 1977
3.5 7-12th National Conference minutes 1966-1975
3.6 Management Committee minutes\(^2\) (vol 3) Nov 1977-March 1984
3.7 Management Committee minutes (vol 4) April 1984-March 1991
3.8 13-17th National Conference minutes (vol 5) 1977-1987
3.9 17-19th National Conference minutes\(^3\) (vol 6) 1987-1991

4 Biennial conferences \(^4\)

4.1 First conference, Johannesburg agenda, programme and president’s report 1954
4.2 Second conference, Cape Town agenda, programme and reports 1956
4.3 Third conference, Cape Town agenda, programme, report and correspondence 1958
4.4 Fourth conference, Durban agenda, programme, correspondence and working papers 1960
4.5 Fifth conference, Bloemfontein correspondence and working papers 1962
4.6 Sixth conference, Pretoria reports, correspondence, notes and hymns 1964
4.7 Seventh conference, Port Elizabeth agenda, reports and correspondence 1966
4.8 Eight conference, Johannesburg programme, reports and correspondence 1968
4.9 Ninth conference, Cape Town agenda, programme, correspondence & working papers 1970
4.10 Tenth conference, Durban agenda, programme, report and correspondence 1971
4.11 Eleventh conference, Pretoria resolutions, correspondence and working papers 1973
4.12 Twelfth conference\(^5\) 1975
4.13 Thirteenth conference (Silver Jubilee), Port Elizabeth brochures, albums and correspondence 1977

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\(^1\) See certificate of registration with the National Welfare Organisations Board, dated 30th June 1958.

\(^2\) Includes photograph of committee members.

\(^3\) Includes mini-conference, 1987.

\(^4\) See also Minutes.

\(^5\) See no 3.5.
4.14 Fourteenth conference 1980
2.15 Fifteenth conference, Cape Town correspondence and annexure 1983
4.16 Sixteenth conference, Durban agenda, programme, reports, correspondence & working papers 1985
4.17 Seventeenth conference, Port Elizabeth programme and correspondence 1987
4.18 Eighteenth conference, Pretoria 1989

5 National Council
5.1 Correspondence (general) and annexure 1956-1993
5.2 Circulars 1959-1993
5.3 Management Committee correspondence (PE) 1985-1986
5.4 National chaplain 1966-1972
5.5 News correspondent (press officer) 1955-1980
5.6 Organisational charts 1958
5.7 Past President’s Advisory Committee 1987-1991
5.8 Resolutions and decisions 1992; 1981-1985

6 Executive Committee
correspondence, report and working papers 1952-1969

7. Diocesan Council addresses 1963-1982

8 Diocesan Councils / Branches in Southern Africa
Correspondence, annexure, minutes,& reports
8.1 Aliwal North 1981-1998
8.2 Bloemfontein 1954-1998
8.3 Cape Town 1952-1999
8.4 De Aar 1964-1998
8.5 Dundee (includes Newcastle & Ladysmith) 1958-1999
8.6 Durban 1953-1999
8.7 Escourt Branch (see Dundee)
8.8 Eshowe / Empageni / Zululand 1955-2002
8.9 Indwe Branch 1958-1963
8.10 Johannesburg 1954-1999
8.11 Keimoes / Upington 1976-1999
8.12 Kimberley (includes Mafikeng) 1954-1998
8.13 Klerksdorp (includes Orkney, Potchefstroom & Stilfontein) 1968-1998
8.14 Kokstad 1956-1999
8.15 Kroonstad 1955-1999
8.16 Marianhill 1964; 1981-1988
8.17 Matatiele Branch 1963
8.18 Oudtshoorn 1953-1998
8.20 Port Elizabeth 1953-1999
8.21 Pretoria 1954-1999
8.23 Swaziland 1992-1999
8.24 Umtata 1952-1992
8.25 Umzimkulu (includes Margate) 1959-1999
8.26 Volksrust 1964-1966
8.27 Witbank 1954-1998
8.28 Windhoek 1962-1999
8.29 Zimbabwe 1973-1998

6 See no 3.8.
Subject files
9.1 Abortion versus birthright / Pro-Life correspondence and annexure, reports, pamphlets and press cuttings 1972-1988

9.2 Adoptions report, correspondence and list of committee members 1975-1976

9.3 Apostolic delegation correspondence and annexure 1966-1992

9.4 Badges for diocesan presidents correspondence and annexure 1963-1964

9.5 Board of Censors and films correspondence and press cutting 1962; 1988

9.6 Calendar and prayer cards correspondence and annexures 1964; 1967-1969

9.7 Duties of office- bearers pamphlet c 1975

9.8 Catholic Africa Women’s Federation correspondence and pamphlet 1977-1983

9.9 Catholic Servicemen’s support programme / conscription advice service correspondence, reports and pamphlets 1984-1989

9.10 Catholic Women’s League: Other countries
9.10.1 Australia correspondence and newsletters 1966-1986
9.10.2 Botswana correspondence 1982-1983
9.10.3 Canada correspondence and pamphlets 1977-1984
9.10.4 Rhodesia / Zimbabwe correspondence and annexure 1954-1983
9.10.5 United Kingdom correspondence and newsletters 1978-1986
9.10.6 Zambia correspondence conference resolutions and action taken correspondence and annexure 1981-1997

9.11 Divorce Law Amendment Bill correspondence and annexure about judicial separation 1962-1965

9.12 Ecumenical decade for churches in solidarity with women correspondence and pamphlets 1988

9.13 Finances
9.13.2 Correspondence: Treasurer 1958-1996
9.13.5 Trust fund (not accepted) 1987-1988
9.14 Fundraising
9.14.1 Authority for raising contributions as a welfare organisation 1974-1980
9.14.2 Correspondence and statements in accordance with Act 107 of 1978 1988-1989
9.17 Insurance of president’s chain of office correspondence and annexure 1980
9.18 International Year of the Child correspondence, annexure, pamphlets and poster 1979
9.19 Leadership course by Father Paul Nadal, Durban video 1984
9.20 Letters of introduction 1965-1977
9.21 Migratory labour correspondence 1963-1964
9.22 Mother Teresa newsletters, correspondence and press cuttings 1972-1973
9.24 Organisations - affiliated and other
9.24.1 Chrisnet 1997-1999
9.24.6 SA National Council for the Deaf 1993
9.24.8 SA National Council for Mental Health 1990
9.24.10 Welfare Liaison Committee 1984-1993
9.25 Papal blessing (framed) silver jubilee, Port Elizabeth 1977
9.26 Pope John Paul’s visit to Southern Africa correspondence, commemorative items and press cuttings 1988
9.27 Publicity leaflet correspondence and annexures 1963-1965
9.28  *Put Christ back into Christmas* campaign correspondence and annexures 1959-1970

9.29  Refugees correspondence and annexures 1956-2001

9.30  Regional rallies minutes, correspondence and annexures about catholic education 1960-1961


9.32  Southern African Catholic Bishops’ Conference correspondence, circulars and brochures (general) 1977-1993

9.32.1  Correspondence, circulars and brochures (general) 1977-1993

9.32.2  Commission of the Laity correspondence, annexure, reports & pamphlets 1976-1993

9.32.3  Department Home & Family Life correspondence 1978-1993

9.32.4  Department of Catholic Action minutes, correspondence and circulars 1958-

9.32.5  Inter-Diocesan pastoral consultation correspondence and reports 1979-1992

9.32.6  *Internos* (incomplete) newsletters and correspondence 1982-1989; 1992

9.32.7  Justice of Peace Commission correspondence, annexure and newsletters 1977-1993

9.32.8  Lay apostolate correspondence, annexure, workshop papers and press cuttings 1967-1987

9.32.9  Prison ministry, prison fellowship & wounded perpetrators correspondence, Faros newsletters and pamphlets 1982-1999

9.32.10  Publications
- Rev JE Brady: *Princes of his people the story of our bishops 1800-1951* c 1954
- *Apostolic letter of John Paul II on the dignity and vocation of women* 1988

9.32.11  Roman Catholic Military Ordinate correspondence and annexure, minutes, pamphlets and press cuttings 1978-1991

9.32.12  SA Council for Catholic Social Service correspondence, annexure, pamphlets, reports, conference papers and newsletters 1964-1995

9.32.13  Women’s Desk / Umbrella body for Catholic Women’s Organisations/ Women’s Network correspondence, reports, pamphlets, press cuttings and notes 1985-1991

9.32.14  Youth Department *Contact* (newsletter incomplete) 1983-1986

9.33  Southern Cross (Catholic Newspaper & Publishing Co Ltd) correspondence and annexures 1961-1979

9.34  Special projects correspondence and annexures 1979-1980

9.35  Theme papers “Apostles in action” / “You are my witnesses” notes 1982-1983

9.36  *Trefoil Magazine* correspondence and annexures 1954-1990
9.37 United Nations
statements by RSA representatives 1999

9.38 Welfare organizations (see also 9.24)
Correspondence, annexures, policies, newsletters 1956-2001

9.39 World Union of Catholic Women’s Organisations (WUCWO)
9.39.1 Correspondence; Gugu Mtombeni 1954-2000
9.39.2 Circulars (incomplete) 1963-2002
9.39.3 Conferences (Africa region) 1981-1999
9.39.5 Statutory Assemblies
   Rome: conclusions 1957
   Dar- es- Salaam (M Hussey’s papers) 1974
   Bangalore (M Hussey’s papers) 1979
   Nova Scotia 1983
   London ( E Moore’s papers) 1987
   Mexico 1991
   Australia 1996
   Italy 2001

9.40 Youth affairs
Survey of attitudes to religion; pamphlets 1985-2000