



The Catholic Women's League of Canada Our Lady of Perpetual Help Council

13 Brower Drive Sherwood Park Alberta T8H 1Y7
780-467-5470 <info@cwlolph.ca>

PRAYER SHAWL MINISTRY HISTORY

In January 2006, Rita Atkinson from St Edmund Catholic Women's League in Edmonton made a presentation to the CWL council at Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Sherwood Park about the Prayer Shawl ministry. Rita had become aware of this ministry while at her vacation home in Christopher Lake, Saskatchewan.

Madelaine Walker, a women from Christopher Lake, had a 29 year old daughter who was diagnosed with terminal cancer. She wanted to help her daughter Nicole, as she was finding the hospital to be very chilly and had asked if there was a shawl available. Madelaine, who was a weaver, did not have any shawls on hand, and since she was caring for her daughter and her infant at the daughter's home, Madeleine could not make any with her loom at this time. So she prayed for a way to provide her daughter with a shawl.

Madelaine was able to go home to Christopher Lake for a day, and there she saw an article in the *Saskatchewan Anglican* written by a member from the Saskatoon Anglican Church. It was entitled "*Mantles of Healing: using the ancient craft of knitting to bring God's love to others.*" The article described the Shawl Ministry, which was initiated in 1998 by Janet Bristow and Victoria Gale, two graduates of the Women's Leadership Institute at Hartford Seminary in Connecticut. They gave birth to this ministry as a result of their experience in a program of applied feminist spirituality.

The ministry focuses on creating what are alternately called prayer shawls, comfort shawls, peace shawls, or mantles. The knitter begins each shawl with prayers and blessings for the one who will receive it. These intentions are continued through the whole creation of the shawl, and when it is finished, it is prayed over or blessed before being gifted to the recipient. A little card is attached with the Prayer Shawl prayer (and cleaning instructions).

Upon reading the article, Madelaine immediately went out and purchased some yarn and knitted a shawl, which provided Nicole with much comfort until her death. The shawl was displayed at the memorial service. Following her daughter's death, Madelaine found much comfort in making prayer shawls for others. Madelaine browsed the internet and found www.shawlministry.com, which led her to the women who initiated the ministry, and from there she received permission to form a chapter in her community of Christopher Lake, Saskatchewan.

Rita Atkinson brought this information back to St Edmund Catholic Women's League council in Edmonton – their council also formed a chapter – and introduced this ministry to other councils in the Archdiocese of Edmonton. Many CWL councils continue the Prayer Shawl Ministry to this day.

The website www.shawlministry.com is still active and has a lot of additional information.

*-researched and written by Connie Asp
CWL OLPH, Sherwood Park, January 2021*