



Soroptimist Across Canada

Eastern and Western Canada Regions – Winter/Spring 2024



Soroptimists in both Eastern and Western Canada Regions recognize that we live, work and play on the traditional ancestral lands of many First Nations across our country. We acknowledge the tumultuous history endured by the First Nations, Metis and Inuit peoples, and we commit to moving forward with mutual trust, respect, reciprocity, and collaboration in the spirit of reconciliation.

Submitted by WCR Governor Suzanne Heron

The SI Convention in Dublin gave Canadian Soroptimists a rich chance to rub elbows and hatch plans. Since then we have been making them come true. This is the third Soroptimist Across Canada newsletter, and isn't it great to share our Canadian brilliance?

In this issue you will read about our second venture, an online Parallel Event at the NGO CSW. It's an opportunity to showcase Canadian values and Canadian Soroptimist programs that alleviate poverty for women.

Now it's time to kick off another project: celebrating the empowerment of women by Soroptimists in Canada for 100 years, in 2026! To tell the stories that connect the achievements of the last century with current needs, and that inspire future Soroptimists.

Stories . . . of SI Vancouver's 100 years of social housing for women and families. Of SI Toronto mentoring dozens of women in the 1930's and 40's, and now mentoring refugee women. Of SI North & West Vancouver launching the petitions which culminated 20 years later in the passing of the Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act, bringing the Nordic model of dealing with prostitution to Canada. Of the Friendship Tulip Garden donated to SI Peterborough by Dutch Soroptimists after WWII, which inspired their herb garden at the women's shelter - much like the garden that SI Abbotsford-Mission tends with the women at Glory House.

Many clubs have rich stores of photos, newspaper articles, minutes. Let's interview our knowledge-keepers and create a digital archive of voice, print and visual stories. Let's produce a vibrant cultural history of the women in Canada who have empowered, educated and enabled women and girls to advance their economic independence and gender equality. Let's get some funding to tell the stories of the farsighted women who launched and nurtured Soroptimist in Canada, and the huge impact of empowering thousands of women and girls. If you are interested in this project, let myself or Governor Gertrud know!

And keep the ideas coming for Canadian Soroptimists to work and serve together!



International Women's Day



[Text from https://www.internationalwomensday.com/](https://www.internationalwomensday.com/)

What does it mean to truly inspire inclusion?

To **inspire inclusion** means to celebrate diversity and empowerment on International Women's Day 2024 and beyond.

International Women's Day (IWD) is a global celebration of the social, economic, cultural, and political achievements of women. Each year, this day serves as a powerful reminder of the progress made towards gender equality and highlights the work that still needs to be done.

In 2024, the campaign theme **Inspire Inclusion** emphasizes the importance of diversity and empowerment in all aspects of society.

This year's campaign theme underscores the crucial role of inclusion in achieving gender equality. It calls for action to break down barriers, challenge stereotypes, and create environments where all women are valued and respected. **Inspire Inclusion** encourages everyone to recognize the unique perspectives and contributions of women from all walks of life, including those from marginalized communities.

One of the key pillars of **Inspire Inclusion** is the promotion of diversity in leadership and decision-making positions. Women, especially those belonging to underrepresented groups, continue to face barriers when seeking leadership roles. By championing inclusion, organizations and communities can harness the full potential of diverse perspectives, leading to better decision-making and innovation.

Education and awareness play vital roles in fostering inclusion and empowering women. Through initiatives such as mentorship programs, educational workshops, and advocacy campaigns, individuals and organizations can create opportunities for women to thrive. By providing support and resources, women can be empowered to overcome obstacles and achieve their full potential.

Graphic borrowed from SI South East Asia Pacific.

SIA will host an International Women's Day Tea Party. [Info here.](#)



JOIN US IN OUR MISSION AND BE A PART OF THE SISTERHOOD THAT UPLIFTS, INSPIRES, AND EMPOWERS WOMEN ACROSS THE GLOBE!





THE POWER OF PLANNED GIVING

LEAVE A LEGACY THAT EXTENDS BEYOND YOUR LIFETIME!

A remarkable way to make a difference whether through a charitable gift or a bequest in your will.

Support individual education grants as well as career and training projects benefiting hundreds of women and girls annually.

An intentional and lasting expression of your values and beliefs.

By choosing to support Soroptimist Foundation of Canada through PLANNED GIVING you ensure your legacy lives on, leaving your mark for generations to come.

Legacy and charitable gifts are the basis of our future planning. With them, we are more able to predict our future and strengthen our ability to invest in the dreams of women and girls.

Did you know, for example, that over the last five years, the growth of our capital has been substantially supported by bequests from fellow Soroptimists like you who knew the importance of securing the future of the Foundation and its programs?

Please consider naming Soroptimist Foundation of Canada as a beneficiary in your will. People like you who want to make a difference will make an impact long into the future.

To learn how to gain a tax deduction and other ways to give smarter, talk to your personal legal and financial professionals, then contact the Foundation.

Questions? Learn more about us at soroptimistfoundation.ca

We are ready to accept your gift.
Email treasurer@soroptimistfoundation.ca



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People Ask Why

Poem by Annie Merrell, SI Kawartha Lakes

People Ask Me Why I Am Part of Soroptimist

When I enter the room, I feel the warmth,
not of a fire burning or the heat of the sun
But of the women behind those faces brimming with smiles and eager to share.
I glance from face to face and feel their support and encouragement there,
given as needed, the smiles, laughter and caring waves
are waiting to be tapped into.
This is the place for me.

Friendships are made, kept and treasured,
new friends continually passing through the doors
All seeking that warmth and unity that this small group can bring
Working together, sharing, giving and supporting.
This is the place for me.

A sisterhood formed in this room, anniversaries, illness, loss of a loved one,
grandchildren, marriages, and birthdays,
all rejoicing, grieving, all these times shared.
This is the place for me.

A group of women, doing our best at what we do best,
giving back and improving lives.
Our achievements, and dedication are reflected
in the faces of these women in this room.
Our skills honed, shaped and shared together in this room, each different,
All striving for the same end result.
Wanting to make things better, women that lead by example by working together.
This is the place for me.

These are the hidden gems of the Kawarthas, growing, expanding,
willing to share their expertise with those who truly wish to become a part
of our growing organization, who truly give back in the best way possible.
Working as a team.
Yes, this is where I want to be.



Incoming Governor ECR—Cheryl Ball

Submitted by Cheryl Ball, SI Thunder Bay

As Governor-Elect for Eastern Canada Region, I have been asked to briefly tell you a bit about myself including something fun. I am up to the challenge after all I am not known for being brief nor fun!

How did I become a Soroptimist – simply put, I was asked by a friend who was a Soroptimist. I attended my first meeting in January 2000 and joined that night. I was in “heaven”. I loved the Soroptimist mission of helping women and girls. The thought of dinner out with women and an interesting speaker most months warmed my heart. Shortly after I joined, I encouraged two friends from my Jaycette days to join as well. I chaired a number of projects for SI Thunder Bay and prior to being Governor-Elect, I was past President of SI Thunder Bay.

During my 35 years career with the Canada Revenue Agency, I held various positions – Inquiries officer, Tax Collector (no one likes Tax Collectors), Assistant Director of Human Resources and finally a Competency Consultant. I retired in December 2010.

I am a wife and mother of three sons, three daughters-in-law, three grandchildren and the only sister to three brothers.

Thoughts on my governorship – Soroptimist membership is an issue. We all know that there are fewer people volunteering these days than in the past. The BIG question is how do we attract and retain new members?. This past fall, at our ECR leadership event, we had a workshop on “why women join volunteer organizations and why they stay”. One of the overwhelming responses was the friendships that the women made. As Governor, I would like to build on those friendships by creating friendship bridges. Friendship bridges are similar to physical bridges which connect two places, friendship bridges connect two or more people. It takes time, effort and planning to build a friendship bridge. With strong friendship bridges we can create stronger clubs and reach out to our communities to recruit and retain new members.



Incoming Governor WCR—Chari Grant

Submitted by Chari Grant, SI Tri Cities

In early 1999, current Western Canada Region Governor-Elect, Chari Grant, saw a story in the community news section of the Vancouver Sun. It featured a photo of a woman named Bea Kelly who, the article explained, was trying to charter a new Soroptimist Club in the Tri Cities (Coquitlam, Port Coquitlam and Port Moody).

Chari was a stay-at-home mom with home-based business and a toddler daughter, and she was looking for some adult company. She had never heard of the Soroptimists, but their mission of improving the lives of women and girls really appealed to her, and the fact that there were no silly hats or capes was also a plus.



Chari attended an information meeting soon after, and before she knew what hit her, she was not only a charter member of the club, but also a director on the board! Nearly twenty-five years later, Chari is immensely grateful to Bea Kelly for working so hard to get SI of the TriCities chartered. Being a member of this organization has been life-changing and has given Chari so many experiences she never imagined. She has met life-long friends from all over the world, and looks forward to forging new friendships in her upcoming role as Governor.

Chari has also witnessed first-hand the impact that Soroptimist programs like the Live Your Dream Awards have had on so many women. She was pleased to meet one of her club's former winners at the awards event put on by SI Surrey-Delta this past fall. Angelina was there with her son, who was in kindergarten when she won her award, and has now graduated college. And Angelina herself has had a successful career working in social services. She was there supporting a friend who she had encouraged to apply for the award. This was the second time she had done so, with the first being Federation winner Dawn Johnson!



Outside of Soroptimist, Chari enjoys gardening, cooking, and travelling with her husband. She is looking forward to her daughter graduating from law school, and her son completing his BSc in computer science.

Soroptimist at the United Nations

Submitted by Estatira Shirkhodae, SI Toronto



Last March, I had the marvelous opportunity to attend CSW67 (Commission on Status of Women) as a Soroptimist delegate, with the support of the ECR UN travel fund and sponsorship from Conestoga College. As I stepped into the UN headquarters, I felt a profound sense of empowerment mixed with excitement and awe of being in a space where critical decisions are made to address women's issues on an international scale. It was a moment of validation, acknowledging the importance of Soroptimist advocacy work to amplify the voice of women and those left behind.

Why is CSW no ordinary event? Over the past 70 years, it has **led discussions** on inequalities and discriminations women and girls face, **generated public attention** on social taboos and broken stereotypes, and **driven action** to advance the rights of women and girls everywhere. CSW is instrumental in promoting women's rights, documenting the reality of women's lives throughout the world, and shaping global standards on gender equality and the empowerment of women.

Representatives of UN Member States, civil society organizations & and UN entities meet at UN Headquarters in New York for 2 weeks in March to discuss the progress, set policies, identify challenges, and set global standards. Every year a **priority theme** is determined by the UN member states and discussions are centered around it.

The 2023 priority theme was **Innovation and technological change**, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. The impact of technology on creating new opportunities to improve the lives of women and girls around the world is undeniable. However, technology is also creating unprecedented threats to their well-being.



Two types of events covered both the priority and review themes; **side events** were held on UN premises by Permanent Missions, intergovernmental organizations, and United Nations entities. **Parallel events** were organized by NGOs in coordination with the NGO Committee on the Status of Women (NGO CSW/NY) outside the UN HQ. Given the amount of activity that was happening at CSW and my limited time, I identified 3 themes and focused my time on sessions addressing them. While attending Refugee Women's Education, Women in STEM, Women; Green Economy and Sustainability, I networked with ILO (labour) and GQUAL (gender equality), OECD (economic co-operation & development) directors, and Canadian delegates highlighting Soroptimist work in

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Canada and globally. Here are the sessions that focused on Education, Digital Divide, and Violence Against Women.

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and Higher Education: A Space for Gender Equality discussed the use of information and communication technologies in universities and colleges as a way to advance, promote, and protect gender equality, while addressing related issues of gender-based violence, women's empowerment and greater access of women to higher education. *Addressing The Gender Pay Gap In The Digital Economy* focused on women's underrepresentation in the tech industries, and information and communication technologies sector (ICT). There are still invisible barriers, including gender stereotypes, sticky floors, and glass ceilings that discourage women from pursuing education and careers in STEM fields. The event amplified interest in innovative and practical solutions and in promising global initiatives to reduce the gender pay gap with attention to the digital economy.

Survivor-centred Justice for Gender-Based Violence in Complex Situations underscored the pressing challenges women and girls face in seeking justice for gender-based violence (GBV) amidst escalating humanitarian, development, peace, and climate crises. Seventy percent of women experience GBV in humanitarian or crisis contexts. The session highlighted approaches and practices to advance a comprehensive survivor-centered justice response in complex situations.

The audience responded with applause when I posed the question of how Iranian women and girls who experienced physical and sexual violence during the **Woman Life Freedom** movement can seek justice when there is no independent justice system in Iran, when the international community is taking no tangible action to stop systematic rapes in prisons and detention centers and gas poisoning of schoolgirls.

UN CSW visit is undoubtedly the best Soroptimist experience any member can imagine!

Parallel Event – organized by ECR & WCR

Submitted by WCR Governor Suzanne Heron

The sixty-eighth session of the Commission on the Status of Women will take place from March 11 - 22, 2024. It was at CSW in 1995 that Hillary Clinton famously said, "Women's rights are human rights." That's when the "Beijing Declaration and Platform" was adopted by 189 countries. It's considered *the* key global policy document on gender equality and was a turning point in the global agenda.

Every year Soroptimists descend on the UN in New York City to lobby and assist country representatives in the growing need to resist pushback on already-agreed-upon rights for women.

In parallel with CSW, the NGO CSW - the Non Governmental Organization Committee on the Status of Women - organizes "Parallel Events," both in NYC and online. Many NGOs provide sessions on the main theme of the year's CSW (which this year is poverty), or on the "review theme" (reviewing progress on a recent theme). SI's website will carry information about the Parallel Events organized

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by Soroptimists - **which this year includes one from Eastern & Western Canada!**

Our event, held online on Wednesday, **March 20, 9:30 a.m. Pacific / 12:30 p.m. Eastern**, is “Roads to Overcoming Poverty: Canadian Stories” and features personal stories of women new to Canada. We demonstrate:

- How the Soroptimist model of access to education enabled them to find a new pathway forward from poverty and move toward economic independence.
- The importance of the Canadian values of diversity, equality, inclusion and belonging, to accelerating economic freedom
- The gaps still present along the road out of poverty for women in Canada.

Our moderator is Bonita Zarrillo, Soroptimist member and MP for Port Moody-Coquitlam, Anmore & Belcarra. Our panelists are:

- Maryam Ostadi, an Iranian refugee, winner of the Live Your Dream Award and now a Soroptimist;
- Temi Faith, who immigrated here from Nigeria for her children and discovered she could also fulfill *her* future through the Live Your Dream Award;
- Khayanga Wasike, who came to Canada for her education and has exported the Dream It, Be It program to girls in Kenya, breaking their cycles of poverty
- Arielle Kayabaga, MP for London West, who came from war-torn Burundi as a child and overcame many challenges to become the first Black MP from London.

Anyone can register to attend the amazing array of online Parallel Events. It’s a hugely informative and inspiring experience. [Register here.](#)

Parallel Event—organized by SIA

From the SIA website

Soroptimist International of the Americas (SIA) has a long history of improving the economic circumstances of women and girls through access to education. Educating women and girls is the key to ending poverty and achieving gender equality. Our volunteers through North America, South America, and the Pacific Rim have been doing just that through our Dream Programs and other projects in their communities. Learn about the power of education to achieve gender equality and end poverty and how Soroptimists put their own spin on it.

Presenter: President Bobbi Enderlin

Panelists:

Julie Kaye, SI/Metro Sacramento

Terri Craig, SI/Raleigh and Central East Coast Region Live Your Dream Award Chair

Laurel Lanham, Club President and Marilee Stefenhagen, Club Secretary of SI/Norwalk/Santa Fe Springs (winner of the Best in Federation Club Award for Impact)

Mar 19, 2024 5:00 pm Pacific, 8:00 pm Eastern—[register here](#)—you will need your member number.

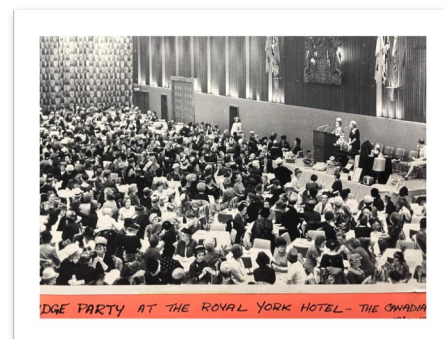
Club Profile—SI Toronto

Submitter by Jean Skillman, SI Toronto

In April 2024, Soroptimist International of Toronto turns 90.

The Club is proud of its heritage which is detailed in the histories written by Sheila Hambleton for the first 50 years to 1984 and the next 25 years to 2009.

A few historical notes : Toronto used to be represented by three clubs : Toronto, Scarborough and North York. That was in the heyday of service clubs, where the fundraisers would attract hundreds of women. The bridge fundraiser which was held in the ballroom of the Royal York Hotel would attract 700 to 800 women who paid to pay bridge, to bid on auction items, and to socialize, all for a good cause. This event was done annually.



Many women who were members of Soroptimist were “firsts” in their fields. Elsie MacGill, an early member of the Toronto club, was the first woman in Canada to study engineering at the University of Toronto; her mother Helen was the first female judge in British Columbia. Elsie then went on to become the first woman in North America to earn a graduate degree in aeronautical engineering, and later designed an aircraft, the Maple Leaf Trainer. Laura Legge, a long time Toronto Soroptimist, became the first woman to head the Law Society of Upper Canada in 1983. Dr Helen Manchester, the youngest charter member at 27 of the Toronto club, was also the first dentist appointed to Women’s College Hospital, as an oral surgeon. She rose quickly in Soroptimist, culminating her Soroptimist career with convening the 1967 Federation Convention in Toronto. Gladys Neale, a long time Toronto Soroptimist member, was the first woman to be elected chairman of the 95% male Canadian Educational Book Publishers Institute. She was secretary of MacMillan’s of Canada, a Canadian publisher. Dr Mary Laurence headed the University of Toronto’s program in gerontology, which began in the fall of 1959, following a gift of \$25,000 from Soroptimist International of the Americas. Margaret Chambers who became a Soroptimist in 1952, was a mathematician who eventually became Assistant Treasurer, Investments and Pension Fund of the Cooperators Insurance Company. She drove a car from the age of 14 to 96.

Historically as well, the Toronto club mentored and gave some financial assistance to women entering careers, taking on 25 or so women each year. There was a committee that oversaw the work and reported on it to the club. At present, Toronto has been working with 3 women who are immigrants, and helping them to navigate the difficult challenges of becoming established in a career in Canada, having left a career in another nation. The link between the past and the present is ever-present.

Naomi Grigg is another link from past to present. Naomi Grigg, born in Powell River, British Columbia, taught statistics at the University of British Columbia, then moved to heading the Research Division of the British Columbia Hospital Insurance Plan, and on to Ottawa to the Federal Department of National Health and Welfare, working on the costs of health services regarding a cost sharing

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between the Federal and Provincial Health Plans. She became a Soroptimist in 1970 where she was known to be an active member, accepting responsibilities generously, and being a generous, thoughtful and kind friend. She was a private person but had a great sense of humour. She loved travel with friends. She became ill in 1980 and died in 1981, leaving her house to the Soroptimist club in Toronto, with no restrictions on the use of the proceeds. The club set up a committee to explore what to do with the funds and decided on a gerontology scholarship. The first scholarship was awarded in 1984 and the last in 2014. The funds are held in a trust and the interest comes to Soroptimist International of Toronto. The fund income now is used to fund the Live Your Dream Awards annually.

Helen Marion Walker, a long-time member of Soroptimist International of Toronto, died in 1998 leaving a generous legacy to each of seven Toronto Charities, Soroptimist, and Women's College Hospital. Soroptimist donated more than half of their portion to Women's College Hospital on the condition that the hospital match this gift and set up an endowment fund focusing on assistance to post graduate students conducting research in an area of women's health. The award of \$10,000 annually will be administered by the Women's College Hospital Foundation. The funding for the period of the scholarship is September 1 to August 31. The inaugural year was 2004-2006 and two scholarships were awarded that year.

Helen's bequest was over \$100,000. Half was given to A Cappella Residences for Girls, and half to the Women's College Hospital Foundation.

Nineteen awards have been given out since 2005. In 2022 the winner was Rhonelle Bruder whose work examined healthcare providers' knowledge about, attitudes towards, and practices related to women who have been sex trafficked in Canada. This award continues to enrich the experience of graduate students and of the club, as we are treated each year to a talk from the winner.

With our program funding at least partially secure, the Club still has projects that require fundraising. In 2023, the club embarked on a gala, the first in many years since the multicultural fair and teas. Over 250 people gathered to dine, bid on an auction, see a fashion show, and dance. We celebrated the Festival of Lights, bringing knowledge of the culture of south India to Toronto and raising over \$10,000 for club projects supporting women and girls. The major driver of the Diwali night was Bubby Mohan.



Having gone during Covid years of 2019 to 2021 with no face to face, we learned Zoom. That has meant a revision to the bylaws to bring the bylaws into conformance with our practises.

The Toronto Club is a diverse group of women, reflecting the diversity of the City of Toronto: our members have backgrounds from all over the world: India, Sri Lanka, Turkey, Kenya, Barbados, Ontario, and speak a number of languages. Our professions are as varied as our backgrounds : nursing, real estate, medicine, sustainability, IT, teaching, finance, education, administration, and dog training.

The club members have embraced the Live Your Dream program, assessing 41 applications in 2023 to fund 4 candidates. They have embraced Dream It Be It, facilitating a conference to mentor teens in their search for careers. They embrace the harder truths about human trafficking with a seminar series, and a growing network of women who work in this area.

Our challenges need to be addressed : how to attract members and keep them, how to reconcile the economic realities for women today as members and as recipients of Soroptimist awards, how to effectively fundraise, how to market Soroptimist in our local communities. Toronto approaches these challenges by changing with the times, by connecting to our friendship links and listening to their experiences, by celebrating our own achievements and the significant contributions of our members.

Many thanks to our president, Estatira Shirkhodae, who has served two terms as president. Many Thanks to Bubby Mohan for invigorating fundraising. Many thanks to Anshita Pandey for learning the role of treasurer. Many thanks to Joanne Plaxton for embracing Dream It Be It and being a resource to fundraising, in particular, for navigating the arcane and complicated world of lottery management. Many Thanks to Francisca Cole for her seamless rollout of Live Your Dream. Many Thanks to Muriel Alphonso for her wise mentoring of all of us. Many Thanks To Wachera Mwangi, who is learning the role of secretary and who brings a fresh connection to our Kisimu project. Many thanks to Rahele Barkhodari, who has dared to write role descriptions that challenge members to be their best. Many thanks to Nancy Brown and Luci Rizzo who ran a silent auction that produced 100%. Many thanks to Sana Zehra, whose love of history will reflect as she works on the history display for the gala 90th. Many thanks to our intern volunteers, Mia and Geerisha, whose work with the spring conference is professional and appreciated. Many Thanks to Alex Buchanan who comes in as a new member prepared to take on executive roles and to bring her extensive executive skills to the club. Many thanks to MeiMei & Nancy , who as new members have plunged in with their skills. Many thanks to our partners who work with us to provide educational support to our recipients of awards.



I am grateful to all those who believe, and who commit, who do what they can and usually much more. With you, together, we are the best of women.

Did You Know?

Submitted by Carell Wingrave, SI Canada West Online

There is a repository for Soroptimist International of Western Canada club records in the Manitoba Archives, Women's History section. This was set up many decades ago by SI Winnipeg when it was deemed that the history of ourselves was important to preserve. Winnipeg was chosen when Soroptimist Foundation of Canada met there and was central for all. SI Winnipeg is no longer but it is not necessary that it be since it is still a good idea to have records stored all in one place as a valuable resource for anyone researching women's organizations and/or Soroptimist in Canada. In the early 2000s some clubs thought it would be good to store their records in their home community archives but I don't have any information on how that was handled.

As with many well-intentioned ideas, items were sent to the Winnipeg Archive for many years. Over time the practice has fallen off the rails.

Recently, I came upon a box of records that were obviously intended for the Archives but I no longer had the regulations on how to submit. I wrote to the Archives and have received the information we require and I encourage all clubs to gather up their "stuff" and send it in.

I hope you agree that keeping a record of our collective activities and achievements is of great importance.

The Guidelines for Submission are too much information for this newsletter so I will bring a handout to the Western Canada Region Conference. In the meantime, start gathering.

Editor's note: Carrell's research is on behalf of WCR, so hopefully someone in ECR knows whether those archives are also stored in Winnipeg. If so, I'm sure Carrell will be happy to share the guidelines with ECR. — Colleen

Spring Conference 2024



ECR—April 26-28, Toronto. You have your Call to Conference.

WCR—May 2-5, Kelowna. Expect the Call on Feb 29.



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(SI Tri Cities)

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