

Inside the Legion of Mary – On Legionary Membership

The Praesidium Meeting

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The Legion handbook mentions that the aim of membership is not the doing of a particular apostolic work, but is primarily focused on calling the member to a spiritual way of life. The handbook describes the Legion as the backbone of the spiritual life, the staff of the earthly pilgrimage, something that can support the members on their way to heaven, provided they let themselves be formed by its proven system. The foundation of the Legion system is its meetings, in particular the praesidium meeting, which is the cornerstone of membership.

Some may look on the obligations of performance of a weekly assignment and weekly attendance at the praesidium meeting as equal in importance, but the meeting is primary. Although both are necessary requirements for membership, the meeting is more important than the work. The meeting is where most of the formation takes place, where the spiritual, practical and psychological formation is found, where every advice and grace needed for the work is given. This is why it is the first and foremost obligation of membership. The weekly meeting for legionaries is what Sunday Mass is for Catholics, except that it is not a sin to miss a meeting!

The handbook describes the praesidium meeting as a magnifying glass that can gather the rays of the sun and focus them to a burning point. It is the Legion's intent that the members be that burning point for the rays of grace coming from the Holy Spirit to whom their Promise was made. When the members are gathered together they are like the lens which focuses all their efforts and energies in the Holy Spirit, so they can go out and catch souls on fire for the love of God and his true Church. It's true that an individual can do apostolic work in union with the Holy Spirit alone, but it is analogous to one ray of the sun compared to the many rays held in focus by their Legion membership. Another analogy the handbook gives is that the meeting is something like a barbeque grill. When coals are loosely scattered, they produce little heat but when all the coals are closely piled, they give off great heat. It's hard to cook a steak if all your coals are a foot apart!

The Benefits

As mentioned above, the first benefit of attendance at the praesidium meeting is *growth in the spiritual life*, and secondly, there is the sense of being called to the *state of Christian perfection*, with an awareness to live the *spirit* of the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience which are referred to in the Legionary Promise.

The de Montfort practice of living in union with Mary will be a great aid in this pursuit of perfection.

Thirdly, the handbook attributes to the praesidium meeting *growth in the virtue of faith*. The Concluding Prayer of the meeting is a total prayer for faith, a firm faith, a lively faith, a faith like a pillar of fire – a prayer of commission, of sending out the legionaries wrapped in a flame of faith to ignite the world with love for Christ and the Catholic Faith.

Fourth, *increase of love* for Jesus and his Mother – Jesus in other people and Jesus in the Eucharist – and Mary as Queen and Mother. And there is *growth in fearlessness and courage*, as difficult assignments come and go, and as situations test the member's patience, charity and endurance.

The handbook reminds the member of the demand for *self-sacrifice, unselfishness and generosity*, virtues which are the hallmark of harmonious and successful work in common. Legionaries find they are natural candidates for these virtues by the time and effort they give to their meetings and assignments.

Along with the spirit of sacrifice there is the deepening habit of *prayerfulness*, beginning with the Catena, then all the tessera prayers, on to the daily rosary and perhaps daily Mass and the recitation of some part of the Liturgy of the Hours. Legionaries also discover the need for prayerfulness through contact with souls on the assignment; the realization that the short visitation is not enough to console or support a needy soul moves the legionary to add them to their private list of petitions. So the Legion gradually leads us into a deeper life of prayer.

Then there is the *virtue of prudence*. On occasion, legionaries can make wrong decisions, display an overzealous pressure or act independently of their partner during the assignment, but with good reporting at the meeting there will come loving advice and seasoned methods that will train the members in the practice of prudent legionary ways. The handbook describes the meeting as a wise old mother that legionaries come back to for counsel and care, saving them from pitfalls along the way.

And because of the member's fidelity to the discipline of the Legion system there is noted a growth in the *spirit of obedience*, which reinforces the member's obedience to the Holy Father, to the teachings of the Church, and to Our Lady personally, who is mystically present at every Legion meeting.

And then comes *humility*, the foundation of all the virtues and the source of Legion joy. Legionaries are exhorted to imitate the virtues of Mary, and when they meet and work in union with her they share in her virtues, resulting in an experience of joy and well-being – unique to the Legion of Mary.

A special benefit gained by members from the praesidium is *the blessing of fraternity*, developing good Catholic friendships colored and enhanced by the unique Legion spirit. Experience has shown that the Mother of the Legion blesses her Legion children with true brothers and sisters, lifelong friends and spiritual companions to accompany them on the journey toward eternity, often resulting in special human as well as spiritual blessings along the way.

And added to all these benefits is the *spirit of apostleship*, the awakening of zeal and love for souls, given to all Catholics in the sacrament of Confirmation; the desire to respond to and fulfill the prayer that closes every praesidium meeting, that prayer asking that legionaries be given “that fullness of faith in Christ and trust in Mary in which it is given to conquer the world.”