

*Inside the Legion of Mary – On Legionary Principles*

## **The Standing Instructions**

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### **The Meeting**

The first and foremost of the four basic Legion rules has to do with regular meeting attendance. The keeping of this rule is paramount for the members, since it is the cornerstone of spiritual growth – the basic purpose of Legion membership. It is primarily at the meeting that the legionary formation takes place. The weekly routine of prayer, spiritual reading and discussion, the reports and discussion of the work, allocutio, etc. combine and create a special environment conducive to the development of personal holiness, the main reason for joining the Legion. The Lord has said “where two or more are gathered, there am I in their midst” could also be said for Our Lady, remembering Pope John Paul II’s comment that “Our Lady is where her shrines are.” So legionaries find themselves in the weekly presence of the Lord and his Blessed Mother gathered around their little shrine of the Legion altar. Similar to a cenacle of prayer, the praesidium is a prayer meeting, but is also a business meeting – the business of saving souls. So working for spiritual growth, and taking care of Our Lady’s work of caring for her Son makes regular weekly attendance at the praesidium meeting the first and foremost duty of the member.

This rule includes the observing of the practice of punctuality. Since the Legion relies on *order* as the main quality of every meeting, punctuality is most important. Legion punctuality means not merely being *on time* but being a bit *ahead of time*. Nothing disturbs the order of the meeting more than habitual unpunctuality. The strict custom of beginning the meeting at the appointed time – regardless of who is not present – is the Legion’s way of emphasizing the importance of this rule. The occasional necessary late-coming is dealt with in the handbook: if arriving during the rosary, the member kneels and enters into the prayers; with the completion of the rosary he remains kneeling and silently says the missed opening prayers before taking a seat. On a rare occasion of having to leave the meeting early, one kneels and says the concluding prayers silently, as described in the handbook.

This Standing Instruction also includes the duty of giving an adequate and audible report. (I often thought that because Frank Duff, being hard of hearing, made sure the word audible became part of the Standing Instruction!) The attention the handbook gives to this is extensive and emphatic, and should be the subject of the spiritual reading and allocutio at the meeting a few times a year. Not many reports follow the requirements in the handbook; it should be the goal of all legionaries to model their reports on these requirements. Needless to

say, no matter how good a report may be, if it is not being heard by all the members it is not a complete report. Any member – not just the president – has the right to ask the reporting member to “speak up” if the report is not audible. (Allowing inaudible reports may affect information put into the minutes, causing unnecessary disorder in the following meeting when those incorrect minutes are read and need to be corrected!)

## The Catena

The second most important duty of a legionary is the daily recitation of the Catena, the Legion’s version of the Magnificat. (It is the only prayer requirement of an Active member – people are surprised that they need not say a daily rosary to be an Active member!) Every Active and Auxiliary member – perhaps fifteen million – pray this prayer every day. It takes but a few minutes, but it is so important, that if a person seeking membership refused to say it, he would not be admitted into the Legion. The word means “chain,” a chain of grace, wound by Our Lady around the world consisting of her legionaries, linked to her and to each other. Please God not one of her legionaries would want to be the weak link that breaks that chain encircling the globe with her motherly care and love.

## The Assignment

The third rule, sometimes called the “sanctifying” Standing Instruction because of its twofold nature of the Active and Contemplative, is the heart of legionary life. The Active side has three characteristics: the assigned work must be *substantial*, *active and legionary*. *Substantial* refers to time, to the minimum requirement of two hours; *active* means out-reach, some sort of contact with other individuals – work such as door-to-door visitation, new parishioners, shut-ins, etc.; and *legionary* indicates work assigned at the meeting and done according to the unique charism of the Legion. Other organizations do great work like putting roofs on people’s houses, or giving material aid to the poor, but the Legion focuses on saving the souls of the people by the Spiritual Works of Mercy.

The Contemplative side of this rule is the doing of the work in the spirit of faith, and in union with Mary. You see why it’s been called the sanctifying rule: legionaries are exhorted to think with Mary’s mind, love with Mary’s heart, and use her words in such fashion that in those worked for and in one’s fellow-members, the person of Christ is once again seen and served by Mary, his mother. Legionaries trained to see Christ in the people contacted as well as in fellow-members can’t help but develop the desired effect the Legion intends: that they become saints! If everyone lived like this, if we always saw Christ in everyone, if we always treated others as Mary would treat Christ, wouldn’t we all become saints? This is a *very* sanctifying Standing Instruction!

## **Confidentiality**

As for the fourth rule – respect for the confidential nature of many matters discussed at the meeting or learned in connection with legionary work – the people met on assignments oftentimes entrust the legionaries with sensitive information or develop a friendship with them, and that knowledge, out of respect for that trust, stays within the praesidium. The members are a family around their Mother, and we can look on this as a family keeping to itself its family secrets. It is natural to tell people about the Legion, how much we love it, its mission and its structure, its works etc., but names, intimate knowledge, conditions and circumstances are shared with no one except with the family members at the closed meeting of the praesidium. The Legion of Mary has been trusted by the Church and by the souls contacted through its history and has earned that trust primarily by keeping this fourth Standing Instruction.

These four parts of the Standing Instruction, read by rule once a month at the praesidium meeting, could be viewed by the members as a little examination of conscience. Is the attendance punctual and regular? Are the reports adequate and audible? Has the daily Catena been missed? Is the work substantial, active, legionary, and done in union with Mary? Is confidentiality kept? And most of all is the person of Christ being seen and served in the meeting, on the assignment and even in day to day life?