

Inside the Legion of Mary – On Legionary Work

Talking on the Doorstep

By Father Francis J. Peffley

Home to home visitation is the most important work of the Legion, and in these days of the “New Evangelization” it is important that legionaries know what to say when the doors to those homes open to them. The Legion’s primary objective in any of its contacts is *friendship*, getting people to like us so that they may in turn like the Catholic Church. So the first requirement of the legionary doing door to door visitation is to smile, and that smile should come from a genuine attitude of sincerity and humility. That can be difficult sometimes when we’re not up to par or not in our usual good form, or when we are not attracted to the people we encounter. It is a similar situation to that of the Little Flower who acted as if she had courage when she in fact felt she had none. So friendliness must be the impression given to those met on the assignment; the self-sacrifices made by legionaries in these situations could save more souls than the direct contact itself!

How to start? The best opening line that I have come across is **“Hi, we’re from _____ Catholic Church, visiting all the homes in the area, to make friends with everyone and to invite people to visit our church.”** That is a sincere, direct opening line. It tells them four things immediately: that the callers are Catholic, that they are visiting *all* the homes in the area and not singling out any one, that it is a friendly, neighborly visit to everyone (not a request for money!) and that the Catholic Church welcomes visitors.

The follow-up comment to this could be: **“Do you happen to come from any particular religious background?”** Putting it in this indirect way is more acceptable than the direct question, **“Do you have any religious background yourself?”** Hopefully, those visited will share something of their background, such as *Oh, I’m a practicing Catholic!* or *I’ve been a Protestant all my life*, or *I used to be Catholic*, or *Yes, I attend the Methodist, Lutheran, Episcopal Church, etc.* Friendly inquiry about their church activities or their pastor, seeking some common ground of interest, will often lay the groundwork for a future visit.

From there conversation can develop. This is the time for establishing a footing of friendship, of getting to know the people, getting them to know the legionaries; it is a time to inquire about the child playing in the background or to admire some feature of the home or property. It might be tenderly asked, **“Have there ever been any Catholics in the family?”** Regardless of the response to this question and how it needs to be answered, it is an opening to invite them to visit their neighborhood Catholic Church.

No evangelizing contact should be closed without, at some natural point in the visit, asking the gentle question always used by Frank Duff on evangelization work: **“May I ask, has the idea of becoming a Catholic ever occurred to you?”** When this question is asked with genuine interest, and with the intention of the eternal welfare of the person concerned, there is rarely a negative reaction; it can actually become a moment of grace, since the idea of being a Catholic has entered, perhaps for the first time, a closed or indifferent mind. Legionaries should not only invite people to visit a Catholic Church - they should also be conscious of extending an invitation to *join* the Catholic Church. **“Has the idea of becoming a Catholic ever occurred to you?”** should be, for every legionary as it was with our saintly founder, in the heart and on the tongue when unchurched or non-Catholics come across their apostolic path.