

Allocutio Toronto Senatus Council, October 10, 2021
October 2021: Chapter 10 #5 The Legion In The Parish, Page 64

The contents of this chapter and number, "The Legion In The Parish," indicate the Legion's high calling in the ecclesial life of a parish. While there are several lay groups and organizations in every parish, arguably only the worldwide Legion of Mary is uniquely called by God and exceptionally equipped by its intensely ordered system and Marian dimension to be the apostolic heartbeat of the parish.

Quoting from the document entitled Council on the Laity (CL27), the Handbook encourages us to understand that because the lay faithful possess the ability to do very much towards the growth of an authentic ecclesial communion in their parishes, they should do so. (p. 62) We are accustomed to hearing and speaking the phrase "building parish communities" in which we value and appropriate the missionary dimension of the Church by zealously seeking the conversion of nonbelievers, lapsed Catholics, unevangelized Catholics, non-practicing Catholics, and Catholics who have apostasized. To achieve this, there is a need in every parish for an organized, systematic and committed approach. For a hundred years the Legion of Mary has spearheaded evangelization through its door-to-door, crowd contact, Peregrinatio Pro Christo, Exploratio Dominicalis i.e. Sunday search for souls, and apostolic works outside the parish church grounds. I acknowledge that two years of Covid-19 lockdowns have made these Legion works nearly impossible.

Historically, the Legion has taken to heart the Lord's command to go and preach the gospel to all the nations. Sadly, most of our praesidia and council reports I have listened to and read over the last eight years rarely report conversions to Christ and his Church. To begin to remedy this situation, I initiated Evangelization Workshops, which many of you attended, with the exclusive emphasis on Kerygma, that is to say, the proclamation of the saving significance of the passion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, along with conversion strategies. Dear legionaries, while there are different kinds of active works, the primary reason for our existence as the Legion of Mary remains the proclamation of Christ for the salvation of souls. When we stray from this primary objective or neglect it for the sake of lesser, albeit, valuable Legion works, we soon cease to be the Legion of Mary, retaining its name but not its reality! If this describes your praesidium, then it's time to recover your primary purpose, namely evangelization according to its kerygmatic character. Kerygma and the conversion of souls go hand-in-hand. We need not only a Sunday search for souls but an everyday search for souls!

You may choose to retain your other active works but you must find a way of taking on the higher level works of conversion, which by their nature are heroic. If you cannot take on the works of evangelization without letting go of your other works, which by their nature are not heroic, then so be it, let them go to take on the more valuable works of conversion. It is not my intention to devalue your non-evangelization active works because they are truly valuable services in God's sight. For example, while nursing home and hospital visitations to believers are not works of evangelization but rather consolation, they may open valuable opportunities for the heroic works of evangelization. To put this in perspective, there is a whole chapter

(chapter 40, 19 pages long) dedicated to the urgency and necessity of evangelization entitled "Go Preach The Gospel To The Whole Creation." Truly, the whole Legion system and therefore all Legion life is ordered toward this glorious goal.

I am sympathetic to any praesidium whose pastor or a spiritual director, for whatever reasons, refuses permission for it to carry out the works of conversion (door-to-door, crowd contact etc.). One possible way of understanding his reticence and refusal is that he, like so many pastors, has not instructed his parishioners in the urgency, methods and strategies needed for the *New Evangelization*, and consequently your parish like so many does not have a *culture of evangelization*. Is it any wonder that annually there are so few conversions to the Catholic faith in your parish, your diocese and our country? In some parishes, and perhaps more than some, there are no new converts or reverts to the faith because proclamation is not a priority; and proclamation is not a priority because the salvation of souls is not seen as necessary. In a hospital, everything is done to save the sick; on a battlefield, everything is done to save wounded soldiers; if only our Catholic people and parishes were at least equally zealous to save the spiritually dying and dead! How sad and devastatingly detrimental to their salvation. The Catholic Church has always believed that "salus animarum suprema lex," the salvation of souls is the supreme law. We must remedy our current ecclesial crisis. You will need to tell your spiritual director or pastor the strategies you have chosen to carry out the heroic works that he may know you are properly equipped, and so confidently send you forth. Whatever obstacles you might encounter with him, I encourage you to persuade him that you are able and willing to carry out the works of conversion. If you are not capable of carrying them out then get some training! Why not ask your pastor or a spiritual director to train you?

It is a chief pastoral duty of the parish priest to be the primary evangelist who seeks out the lost sheep. He, himself, should be the model of evangelization for his flock. As the chief evangelist in the parish, he needs helpers. His Legion praesidium is called to make his evangelizing efforts present on his behalf by going where he would not normally have the time and energy to go.

Membership in a praesidium provides parishioners with an outstanding opportunity to be outfitted for Christian discipleship, what this section of the handbook calls "a higher consideration." While the emphasis of Legion discipleship is on the active works of the apostolate, the legionary understands himself principally as an integral part of a Eucharistic community. As the Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life, so too it is the vital source and summit of legionary life.

Dear legionaries, strive to identify all that you are and do with your pastor, for his good and the good of your parish, as your pastor strives to identify and act with Christ the chief shepherd for the sake of your parish church. Work cooperatively with him. Show him that he can count on you and are on his side. Always pray for the sanctification, protection and fruitfulness of his priestly ministry.

In union with Mary our mother and through the power of the Holy Spirit, we legionaries are called to be the apostolic heartbeat of our parishes!