

Allocutio Toronto Senatus Council April 10, 2022  
The Praesidium, Chapter 14 Pages 85-86, 9.-10.

Subsections 9 and 10 of this chapter refer to the position and function of the Spiritual Director within the Praesidium.

While the Legion of Mary is a lay apostolate, it is constructed to function as an intense alliance between clergy and laity; so, for the optimal functioning of a praesidium, the necessary participation of a priest as a Spiritual Director can neither be overestimated nor overemphasized. It is not unfair to say that historically the success and progress of the Legion of Mary have been in proportion to the supportive and active participation of the clergy as its Spiritual Directors.

It is the parish priest who appoints the Spiritual Director of its parish praesidium, and often he himself the Spiritual Director. Rarely in our council and associated councils does the ordinary, that is to say, the bishop, appoint a praesidium's Spiritual Director, though it is his prerogative. It has been our lamentable experience that when pastors appoint their associate pastor as the Spiritual Director of a praesidium, they usually do so without consulting the praesidium. Perhaps they do so because often there is not more than one priest to choose from. Though the pastor has the right to appoint his associate without consultation, it would be wise and respectful for him to confer with the praesidium in preparation for his decision. In parishes where there is more than one associate pastor, and therefore, the possibility of appointing a Spiritual Director from among a number of priests, legionaries in consultation with the pastor should not hesitate to make their choice known to him but with great tact, avoiding the appearance of favouritism toward one priest so as not to offend the other priest or priests.

In our Council and councils over which we have superintendency, we have praesidia whose Spiritual Directors for various reasons consistently do not attend the meetings, resulting in little or no practical guidance. I believe the time has come for us to consider the following rarely considered Handbook provision (p. 85, no.9) as a possible remedy: "If the Spiritual Director cannot attend the meetings of the praesidium, he may appoint another priest or religious or in special circumstances a qualified legionary (who shall be named the Tribune) to act in his place." (Handbook, p.85) Surely, we can find a religious brother or sister who can act in place of the Spiritual Director with the permission of the pastor. There are disadvantages built into this, namely the parish priests, for obvious reasons, know the needs of their parish and its apostolates better than others. Nevertheless, there are religious brothers and sisters who through their participation in a parish, know well its needs. Furthermore, they could form a good working relationship with the pastor.

To a lesser degree, we should also consider exploring the possibility of appointing a qualified legionary as Tribune to act in the place of the Spiritual Director when the appointment of a priest or religious brother or sister cannot be obtained. I would consider this to be a last option. Indeed, the Handbook calls them "special circumstances" because among several possible reasons there is no direct degree of hierarchical Church authority in this solution. Though

religious brothers and sisters do not by definition belong to the clerical and hierarchical aspect of the Church, they are in some ways practically closer to it than the laity. By their special consecration, religious brothers and sisters bring with them into the Legion wonderful gifts and charisms which can be fittingly used in service of Spiritual Direction. Additionally, religious have the valuable experience of spiritual direction to draw on, either as spiritual directors or directees.

The Handbook by making a provision for qualified legionaries to act in the place of a Spiritual Director, implicitly admits that justifiable needs could arise. The appointment of a legionary as a Spiritual Director of a praesidium would need to be done with wisdom and only in the case of true necessity, and should avoid any possible resentment of the legionaries over whom he or she would be appointed. The legionary would need to be humble to avoid being puffed up with pride over such an appointment which places him over other legionaries in such a special nonnormative way.

“Decisive authority” and “suspensive veto” are key descriptors of the position of Spiritual Director found in no. 10 of chapter 14 on the praesidium. Decisive authority relates to all religious or moral questions, and the suspensive veto relates to the proceedings of the praesidium.

Given the weakened state of catechesis in the Church, it is inevitable that religious and moral questions in need of clear catechetical answers will arise in the meeting. In these cases, the praesidium defers to the authority of the priest Spiritual Director who by right acts as the custodian of all the religious and moral doctrines of the Church and therefore counsellor in their application. Because of his priestly ordination, he represents the Church and therefore exercises decisive authority in all moral matters in the exercise of his ministry which he carries with him into the life of the Legion. He needs to be faithful to the Church’s doctrines and may never substitute his personal opinions thereby contradicting those same doctrines. The exercise of his decisive authority gives clarity to the praesidium through teachable moments. Far from being occasions for the resentment of his authority, the praesidium should welcome his clarifications with docility and gratitude.

We should not be surprised that members might hold different views and make different assessments, and consequently might not be unanimous in their decisions. In these situations, the Spiritual Director should persuasively counsel a decision that he thinks is best. When his counsel is rejected by part of or all of the praesidium, and one would hope that this happens rarely, it is only then that he may need to exercise his suspensive veto. The veto is characterized as suspensive because it puts the brakes on the inadvisable decisions of the praesidium and their execution. The Handbook counsels that the Spiritual Director’s suspensive veto be used with great discretion and caution lest it has a destructive effect on the praesidium. If he uses it frequently then either the praesidium is dysfunctional or he is overbearing and heavy-handed. It should be admitted that even in the best praesidium there may arise situations in which the Spiritual Director for the good of the praesidium will need to use it.