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Chapter 18 Order of the Praesidium Meeting #5 p. 108

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Some Considerations On The Choice of Spiritual Readings*

*Considerations apply equally to praesidia and councils.

"The rosary is immediately followed by spiritual reading, to be given by the spiritual Director (or in his absence by the President.) Page 108, The Handbook

While the choice of text for the spiritual readings is free, and the Handbook itself does not explicitly prescribe any book or text over another, the Handbook's role as the sole prescriptive document of the Legion of Mary indicates its priority over all other texts because it expresses in written form the Legion of Mary's apostolate as an intensely ordered system with its objectives and how we are to work toward them ordered to the glory of God, the building of the kingdom of God, and the sanctification of ourselves as members. As the Scriptures are to the life of the Church, so the Handbook is to the life of the Legion of Mary. Saint Jerome maintains that ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ; similarly, ignorance of the Handbook is tantamount to ignorance of the Legion system. We understand the Legion system in proportion to our comprehension of the Handbook. Undoubtedly it takes at least several meditative and analytical readings of the passages of the Handbook for one to truly penetrate, grasp and appreciate the grandeur of the Legion system and apostolate. So, to properly work the Legion system, we need to study and apply well the Handbook, our inspiring, guiding and founding document.

It is our practice in the Toronto Senatus Council and its attached Councils for the Spiritual Director to choose the spiritual reading. While there is no explicit directive in the Handbook that he alone should choose the spiritual text, we can assume that he does simply because he is tasked in the praesidium meeting with reading the text aloud (in his absence the President does so). How should a Spiritual Director choose spiritual readings from the Handbook for a praesidium? One way is to select passages for a systematic reading of the Handbook by which a praesidium makes its way through it reading texts consecutively, from chapter to chapter, from start to finish. While this may be logical and orderly, it may not effectively meet, for example, the immediate requirements of a new praesidium which needs to be acquainted with the more seminal passages of the Handbook necessary for the immediate formation of its members and functioning of their praesidium.

Another approach is for the Spiritual Director to pick passages that bear upon the particular needs of his praesidium. While all praesidia have requirements in common just as all human bodies have the same need for nutrition, hydration, exercise, and

sleep, nevertheless the health and stage of development of a praesidium is unique, and so its readings should be chosen for immediate and appropriate applications to its particular needs. For example, a recently formed praesidium would benefit from understanding the Order of the Praesidium Meeting, chapter 18. While the whole Legion Handbook is Marian through and through, perhaps the more explicitly and intensely Marian chapters and subsections could be chosen to be read serially (week after week) to inculcate, inspire and re-inspire the praesidium members with a deeper understanding of Our Lady's role in the life of the legionaries, the praesidium and the apostolate. Is there a weakness or deficiency in the praesidium? Then select a section that would address that weakness or deficiency. Does the praesidium need to take a next step in the legion apostolate? Turn then to the portion or portions of the Handbook which provide strategies for that next step. Does morale need to be maintained or strengthened? Then choose passages which are full of confidence, hope and exhortation. As there is an urgent need for the Church to engage in person-to-person evangelization, today as ever, then read from chapter 40, "Go Preach the Gospel to the Whole Creation, a chapter full of evangelical urgency, practical wisdom and instruction.

As Spiritual Director, my method for the choice of Handbook readings has been to prayerfully discern the needs of the Senatus Council, both immediate and long-term, and make choices of passages to be read in a consecutive, coherent, and thematic manner, by dividing a chapter into its already numbered subsections, and then reading them month after monthly meeting in the order they appear in the Handbook.

I attempt to address the needs of our Council in a systematic way, while at the same time maintaining a flexibility that allows me to address newly discerned needs and situations. A Spiritual Director does well to request from and listen to the suggestions of the members. While it can never be a mistake to simply take the spiritual reading from any part of the Handbook, I discourage a willy-nilly, haphazard and random way of choosing texts. Our choices need to be thoughtfully and prayerfully discerned because we depend on the Holy Spirit through Mary's assistance to form our members and not purely our whims and personal preferences.

I counsel our Spiritual Directors that in the absence of any discernibly urgent need in their praesidium for the choice of a particular Handbook passage or set of passages then default to a more systematic approach that allows the praesidium or council to make its necessary study of the Handbook. Even the sometimes immediate and urgent need for the reading of a particular Handbook passage or passages can be customized into a systematic manner, week after week, passage after passage.

Another useful practice is for the Spiritual Director to base his allocutio on the spiritual reading of the Handbook following the recitation of the rosary, while the reading is still fresh in the minds of the legionaries. This practically supports the directive that the allocutio should take the shape of a commentary on the Handbook. (chapter 18, #11 page 114, The Allocutio, the Handbook)

I acknowledge that the choice of spirituals reading remains free and that our praesidia do appoint texts other than from the Handbook, nevertheless, my strong sense is that the time is ripe to double our efforts to hear and receive the words of our Legion Handbook anew into our minds and hearts not in a perfunctory manner but as the words of an inspired, ever new living word so to speak, that we should welcome it as a privileged time when the Holy Spirit uniquely acts upon us for the instruction, formation and exhortation of our Legion souls.