

## AUXILIARY MEMBERSHIP IN THE LEGION

By Rev. Francis Lendacky

One of the most common complaints by active members in an ailing Praesidium is that it lacks the presence or the interest of a priest Spiritual Director. Perhaps for weeks and weeks, the Praesidium goes about its business of Meetings and Assignments without the input or guidance of a Spiritual Director-without its mainspring. The spirit during the meeting seems to sputter; the spirit on assignment seems to stagger. The members look at each other through gloom-tinted glasses, and they hold on to each other as if they were in a sinking vessel. All their intent may be on joyless survival; perhaps it is fueled regularly by some high-octane self-pity.

The concern for self-survival can, in itself, be a deadly poison. Many times a Praesidium is stalked by the omen of disbandment, because the ultimate attitude is one of mere survival. The empty chair of the Spiritual Director may be blamed for the lagging spirit of the Praesidium, but there may be another not-so-obvious cause for the lagging spirit. Perhaps, the Praesidium feels a stillness of the wind beneath its wings. Perhaps, the Praesidium can not be aware of the support of its Auxiliaries, for it has failed to visit them.

When speaking about Auxiliary Membership, the Handbook, on page 95, states that the twofold auxiliary membership is to the Legion what its wings are to a bird. Many a Praesidium may well be grounded because the Auxiliary membership has been neglected--in other words, its wings are not extended in flight, but are folded and at rest. The handbook goes on to say that, in that condition, the Legion hobbles awkwardly wherever it wills and slowly along the ground, brought to a stop by the slightest obstacle. Without the presence of a Spiritual Director who would inspire and guide, and without the beating wings of an Auxiliary membership which is praying earnestly and seeking perfection sincerely, the Praesidium is a clone of the real Legion Praesidium. And the struggle for survival will easily be substituted for real Legionary Evangelization.

Many Praesidia continuously hope for the regular participation of a Spiritual Director at the meeting. Many times their hope is frustrated gradually as they hear the ever-lengthening list of priorities inserted before the parish Legion Praesidium. In that particular case, there is little they can do to fill the 'empty 'chair' of the Spiritual Director. But there is something they CAN DO to inject life into a struggling Legion Praesidium. More effort could be exerted in the CARE for the Auxiliary membership of the Praesidium. Auxiliaries are not recruited by Councils, nor do Councils visit Auxiliaries. The only connection Auxiliaries have with the Legion is through the Praesidium. The Members of Praesidia, who have recruited the Auxiliaries are the ones most responsible for the persevering membership of Auxiliaries. No other Legion group can effectively care for Auxiliaries.

Every Praesidium, therefore, ought to review in purposeful fashion its method of recruiting Auxiliary Membership and its conscientious care of its Auxiliaries.

In the future, a proper method of recruiting may be the subject of another Allocutio, but today we are concerned about the adequate care of Auxiliaries already on file in the Praesidia.

Before we question ourselves about visitation of the Auxiliaries, we ought to consider the following notions. The Active member of the Legion is the beneficiary of a Praesidium meeting every week. If that meeting is conducted, properly, then it can truly be a weekly spiritual exercise. But what kind of spiritual exercise does the Auxiliary member have to sustain his Legion spirit? Is it reasonable to expect that the Auxiliary will sustain his Legionary Spirit on his own? A visit to the Auxiliary must be the means.

In the Handbook it is observed that the Active member is the 'elder child' to the Auxiliary. There should be a sincere concern and a deliberate care shown by the active member towards the Auxiliary. Undeniably, the active membership which has recruited the auxiliary membership is responsible for the well-being and the progress of the Auxiliary toward Legionary perfection. The handbook goes on to suggest that those who visit Auxiliaries ought particularly to be adept in providing that spiritual Legionary ingredient which the Auxiliary needs. If active members are sometimes critical of the empty chair of the Spiritual Director, then the finger could be pointed with equal criticism at the Praesidium itself which neglects its auxiliaries!

So the questions may now be asked: How often are the Auxiliaries visited? If the auxiliaries are visited, are those visits evangelizing encounters of a Legionary kind, or are they merely social calls?

Without specifying the maximum or minimum number of visitations to be made, without making the visitation of Auxiliaries an exclusive work of the Praesidium, without compromising the manner of visitations, we want to emphasize the absolute necessity of visiting the Auxiliaries on a regular basis.

There are several general ideas which Active members ought to keep in mind when they visit the Auxiliaries. The most basic purpose of the visitation, though not the most important, should be to ascertain whether the Auxiliary member has persevered in the daily recitation of the Tessera prayers. The most important objective of the Visitation, however, 'is to Evangelize, the Auxiliary; that is,- to present Christ and His Church to the Auxiliary. (This is different from trying to ascertain the spiritual condition of the Auxiliary. It would be presumptuous for anyone to try to assess that in one short visit. Besides, it could be considered intrusive and aggressive, and certainly not Legion-like.)

The handbook states that the Auxiliary should be made aware of the Legion work which is being done on a world-wide basis, and not on the local scene. (No doubt, once again, here is another indication of the Legion's concern for confidentiality.)

The overall goal of the visit should be a religious one. The visit is meant to be an evangelizing contact of sharing the Faith, instilling the Hope, and increasing the Charity among Catholic, Legionary members of the Church. If all we have done is to spend time in a social chat, the contact has not been Legionary; perhaps it has not even been uplifting.

The Active members who visit Auxiliaries should be aware of two more considerations. The more we encourage the Auxiliaries in their quest for perfection through their Legionary membership, the higher the flight of those members who are recognized by the Legion as the wings of the Legion. The more extended are those wings, the more powerful in prayer, the higher the Legion will soar. Instead of having the range of a tiny sparrow, the Legion will enjoy an eagle's-eye view in serving the Church. The active members need to develop the Auxiliaries in their spiritual growth for them and for all.

Many Auxiliaries are unable to be active, because of circumstances which will never change or improve. But some auxiliaries are in circumstances which may change in time. If enough care and concern is shown to them as auxiliaries, there may come a time when they will be able to join the ranks of the Active Legionaries. Auxiliary membership may be a most fertile field of harvest for Active membership in the future. Let's not fail to care for them now!

The active members of the Legion, on being assigned to visit auxiliaries, ought to be animated by the same spirit which prompted Our Blessed Lady to go in haste to visit her cousin Elizabeth. The Eternal Spirit brought a joyful zeal and a zealous joy to hearts open to the will of God. Active Legionaries, as that 'elder child,' could occasion a special kind of joy to the Auxiliary members of the Legion of Mary!