

20 Suggestions for the Organization of a New Legion of Mary Praesidium

1. After acquiring permission of the pastor to start, tell him we'll do the organizing and bring all the materials, etc. Tell him we need two things: people and works. Ask if he'll personally invite 15-20 people to an information meeting and perhaps put a notice in the bulletin and make an announcement at Mass. Works to suggest could be visiting a nursing home, hospital or prison, new families, registered families to promote special functions or devotions, families that don't come to Church regularly, shut-ins, the bereaved, etc. The ideal work to suggest is door-to-door visitation to reach the unchurched and alienated Catholics.
2. Determine a place to meet: parish meeting room, conference room, etc. Mention the need for a "family setting" – long table with chairs -- not an auditorium setting or a lounge.
3. Set a date for the first meeting. Usually weekday evenings are best. Be sure Father can be present and bring works to assign. He should be told about his function at the meeting: leading the prayers, doing the reading, giving the allocutio, etc. at the first meeting.
4. Run this information meeting as closely as possible to a regular meeting, with the Rosary (explain the Legion way of saying it), Legion prayers, handbook reading and discussion, allocutio etc. The organizers should give "living" reports of the work they do in their own praesidia as examples for the guests. When it comes to something that you wouldn't have at the first meeting (like minutes, treasurer's report, etc.) you could briefly describe them. The secret bag can be mentioned, but we usually play down the need for money at the organizational meeting. It is important not to explain too much at the first meeting. It is not necessary to read the standing instructions at the first meeting. You could read them at the third or fourth meeting (but always on the first meeting of each month). However, to read and explain the Standing Instruction in a positive way with time for questions or discussion before the end of the meeting could be very beneficial..
5. The best way to get members is to have the pastor, priest, deacon, etc., hand pick them. People that they think would be good should be personally invited by the priests, deacon, or seminarian. It should be mentioned that often the most unlikely people become faithful legionaries and those with "leadership" qualities should not be primarily sought for that reason alone. If the pastor is not inclined to handpick his members, a recruiting drive can be suggested, when a short talk is given at the Masses and names taken of those interested. But this is done usually after a praesidium is begun and membership remains low. The pastor's personal interest is of primary importance and his invitation usually results in a solid group to start with. The recruiting drive could be a last resort.
6. The day and time of the first meeting should be put in the parish bulletin, along with a short description of the Legion, and an invitation for parishioners to attend.

7. It would be good to have the parishioners who come to the first meeting take an assignment. This will be a good incentive for them to come back next week to report. Visiting a nursing home or shut-ins is a good start, but more challenging assignments can be offered for those who want them.

8. If possible, the experienced organizers should take the new recruits on their first assignment, to show how the Legion does its work. If not possible, make sure the new members are assigned in pairs, since all Legion work is normally done in pairs. To maintain order during the meeting, details as to the day and time of their assignment should be decided after the meeting.

9. The deacon, seminarian, or religious sister could work with new legionaries the first few weeks to train them. For example, they could take one legionary with them for a shut-in visit; work with another at the nursing home; or take another on door-to-door. And they would also give a report on this work if done with a legionary and assigned by the praesidium.

10. Door-to-door visitation is the Legion's most important work, so each praesidium should try to start visiting door-to-door with at least one team (presupposing the pastor's permission) as well as doing the other works. Some lay people are fearful of this work, so we could start them on something easier, like religious education, nursing home, etc. Experience has shown that gradually they'll get the courage to go door-to-door, do street contact, visit a prison, or staff a bookbarrow.

11. After the third or fourth meeting, or after a nucleus of people has been regular in attending, the praesidium should choose a title of Our Lady for their praesidium, like Immaculate Heart of Mary, Spouse of the Holy Spirit, Our Lady of Fatima, etc., or some title from the Litany. Make sure there is no other praesidium in your council that has the same name.

12. Keep your eyes open for people who look like they would make good officers. They should, if possible, be willing to give a little extra time to the Legion, be devoted to Our Lady, be easy to relate to, and above all have common sense.

13. Officers are usually chosen by the organizers of the praesidium, after consultation with the Spiritual Director. They are not elected by the praesidium, but are decided upon by the Spiritual Director and the organizers (or Curia officers) and then asked if they would like to take the office on a "temporary basis" until they make the Legion promise. Tell them to read the section in the handbook about their particular office.

14. It is necessary to get the praesidium officially affiliated to the local governing legion council. This is effected when the officers who are appointed attend the meetings of the governing council, usually their local Curia or Comitium. The same reasons for excuse from the praesidium meetings apply to the officer attending the council meeting.

15. The Legion rule is that officers attend their council meeting monthly. However, circumstances like long distances have to be considered. If the praesidium is within an hour of the Curia, Comitium or Senatus, it would be vital to have the praesidium officers attend the Council meetings, because they are the Council.

16. The deacon, since he's a cleric, or a religious sister is considered a Spiritual Director of a praesidium, while a seminarian could be president or Tribune (lay Spiritual Director, approved by the pastor to take the priest's place at the meeting). If there is no Spiritual Director at the meeting, the president leads all the prayers, Rosary, spiritual reading, and gives the allocutio in addition to conducting the meeting. (Note: the allocutio should be delivered in the President's own words, and should not be merely the reading of an article or book.)

17. The president assigns the work and arranges the teams at the meetings. The work should be given to him in advance by the Spiritual Director, who would have received approval of the work from the pastor.

18. Three or four members are enough to start a praesidium, but a group of 8-15 is best, with a mix of male and female of all ages, starting at 18 years of age for a senior praesidium and 8 through 17 for younger groups.

19. The local Curia, Comitium or Senatus will supply you with Legion Handbooks, Tessere, Vexillum, altar cloth and other supplies. The parish could supply the statue (Miraculous Medal model, about 2 feet tall), candle holders, candles, vases and flowers, other literature and medals to give out on assignments. In some places the higher council also supplies these, and the secret bag collection is used to pay for them. Maria Legionis subscription blanks should be available for all who attend these first meetings.

20. The name and phone number of the president of the higher council should be given (as well as the organizer's) to the Spiritual Director and the president so advice and help will be available to the praesidium when the organizers have stopped attending the meetings.