

“Youth, Faith and Vocational Discernment in the Legion of Mary”

Youth Membership of the Legion of Mary

“Youth must not simply be considered as an object of pastoral concern for the Church: in fact, young people are and ought to be encouraged to be active on behalf of the Church as leading characters in evangelisation and participants in the renewal of society.” (CL: 46)

In the Legion of Mary scheme, “the young must be specially sought for and catered for”, as “the young are the key to the future” (Handbook: 182). With this in mind, young people from all parts of the world are invited to join the Legion of Mary to grow in holiness through an active participation in the Church’s mission, and thus respond wholeheartedly to their baptismal vocation. For our young members, membership in the Legion of Mary affords them with a weekly community of prayer, spiritual formation and training in the apostolate. In this way, Christian virtues such as faith, charity, generosity and self-sacrifice are cultivated, enabling the young person to become more open and responsive to their particular vocation in life. I would like to share with you a few examples of how, through membership in the Legion of Mary, young people are facilitated to discover and embrace their personal vocations.

The Maynooth University praesidium which is in existence since 1973 has a current membership of 20, including people from Sydney, East Timor, Germany, USA and of course Ireland. Against a background of 12,000 students our members come to the “school of Mary, Mother of God “to pray and discern how to live holy lives. Our works which include personal contact, organising holy hours, light fever, always have the focus of engaging people in a gentle conversation and reflection on the love of God and life’s deeper meaning. In recent years a number of the members are now pursuing religious vocations, one as a Carmelite Sister at Knock, a number have joined the national seminary and one has joined the Franciscans at Killarney.

Apostolic Outreach to the Young

The Legion of Mary recognises the vital importance of apostolic outreach to the young. Throughout the world, outreach is made to young adults through person-to-person contact on streets, campuses, parks and shopping centres

where the beauty of the Catholic faith is shared with those willing to listen. Young people face many challenges in today's world and legionaries try to see and serve Christ in the young people they meet, offering a listening ear, kindness compassion and hope to the many young people who encounter great difficulties today. Our apostolic outreach to young people aims to lead them to know, love and serve Christ who loves them and has a particular plan for their lives.

Venerable Edel Quinn, whose 75th anniversary we will commemorate next year always had a great love for young people and involving them in various faith adventures. In keeping with her spirit every year the Senatus of Kenya organise a conference for secondary school students. This year 600 young people under the age of 18 attended a one day conference on the theme "Mary, the Legion of Mary and Vocations". One girl said the day was magical. It has increased my faith, inspired me to be more like Mary and to follow the example of Venerable Edel Quinn.

In Ireland, we organise conferences for young Catholic adults in different regions of the country, providing an opportunity for interesting talks on a Catholic theme, discussions, prayer, workshops and socialising. Over two hundred young people attended our two-day conference in Dublin last year, and preparations are well underway for our upcoming one in September of this year. Other apostolates include organising a faith-themed summer camp for young people, running youth groups, organising Eucharistic Adoration for children as well as hosting presentations on the Story of Fatima/ Miraculous Medal in schools. Young homeless people are offered shelter, food and practical as well as spiritual help in our three hostels for homeless people. Staying at our hostels is often a turning-point in these young people's lives, who discover for the first time through the help they receive here, God's love for them.

The Society of the Patricians is an apostolate of the Legion of Mary which aims at encouraging discussion to further understanding on various aspects of the Catholic faith. In Auckland, New Zealand, legionaries organise a monthly Patrician group specifically for young people to aid their understanding and articulation of the truths of the Faith. Monthly movie nights as well as inviting children to Mass are undertaken by our junior legionaries there. Recently in Bogota, Colombia, contact with young a young man living on the streets resulted in his returning to college to finish his studies. Our legionaries in this

country have embarked on creative efforts to evangelise the youth which include ecological walks, kite-flying competitions and Christmas card design competitions.

In Temple Bar, a popular place in Dublin, legionaries have conducted an apostolate to all and sundry for more than 20 years. A major proportion of the contacts are young adults. The work is done in a small city square with access to the river. Here there is a footbridge across the river and on the other side is the Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament Fathers. Here Confessions are ongoing during the time the legionaries are on duty and many young people who stop in response to an offer by a legionary of a medal, scapular or prayer leaflet, when told at the end of a conversation of the availability of Confession nearby, will reflect and agree to go. Some may go away and return to ask the legionary to accompany them. One such contact, a visitor from USA said "My mother is always begging me to at least go inside the door of a Church and spend a moment there and I won't do it for her". After some moments he added "If I don't go now, I guess I will never go" So he went, accompanied by the legionary. Afterwards, he was so overcome with emotion that the legionary decided to leave him alone with his thoughts.

The Legion of Mary wishes to thank Your Excellencies and the priests for your great support of the legion and we hope that you will always find the Legion of Mary very supportive in your ministry which is of such vital importance to the Church.