



The Legion of Mary in some of the Eastern European countries

Religiously speaking, UKRAINE is a mixture of Orthodox Churches, Greek Catholics, Roman Catholics, Baptists and other Protestant Churches as well as sects and non Christians.

The country is split linguistically between the eastern part speaking Russian and the western part speaking Ukranian. The Legion of Mary started there officially in 1994 and in no time many groups were set up. However, only those groups which had been formed into a Curia in the near vicinity stood the test of time. This underlines the wisdom of the Legion's system namely that of having a small local council that can assume responsibility for the other groups in its charge. .

The Legion is present in all the Dioceses of Ukraine, numbering about 500 active members who work both at town and village level. Since 2004 I have been entrusted with monitoring their progress. The Legion is an incomparable asset in all branches of pastoral activity in the parish. The legionaries prepare people for the Sacraments, particularly for Confession, especially those who having been Baptized as infants decades earlier and having no subsequent contact with the Church are often too ashamed to approach a priest personally. The legionaries also help those who are living together, often for years, to agree to get married in Church. Much easier than that is to teach people how to pray, showing them how to recite and meditate the Holy Rosary and/or introducing them to private prayer and meditation. To ensure that Churches in the major towns and cities can remain open legionaries invite people to pray before the Blessed Sacrament during the day-time. They also organise such supervision and they themselves also participate in spending time in Adoration before the Blessed Sacrament. This is often a means of getting into conversation with visitors and good discussion takes place to allay any prejudice in relation to the Catholic Church. .

Quite apart from this vital contribution to the pastoral activity of any parish, let us not forget the important spiritual work Our Blessed Lady performs personally in the spiritual life of legionaries and those they meet by restoring a sense of personal human dignity. Legionaries do not work to a preconceived plan sketched out on a drawing board, they simply get on with the tasks entrusted to them, doing everything for love of Jesus and Mary. A good result has been that legionaries are learning to think for themselves, to devise means of placing their talents at the service of the Church and of taking the initiative in participating in new types of pastoral work, for example, taking the statue of Our Blessed Lady on pilgrimage to the families in the parish or undertaking street apostolate, visiting the homes of the elderly so that God may be better loved by as many as possible. .

Legionaries are also learning the meaning of self-effacing service. Instead of complaining and emigrating, legionaries are happy to stay where they are and to work in their own parish and in the country of their birth. This makes the first steps toward a re-united Church possible. The Mother of God can further the cause of unity in the Church and here the Legion can lend a hand. .

Since 1983 the European Bishops and priests of the Diocese of Karaganda, the only diocese then in existence, introduced the Legion of Mary to KAZAKHSTAN and with it introduced the idea of the lay apostolate. In the decade after Independence in 1992, the Legion bloomed in Karaganda. It was actively engaged in the pastoral work of the Cathedral Parish, helping, as elsewhere in Kazakhstan to hold together the few scattered Catholics who were left behind after the mass exodus of ethnic Poles and Germans who had emigrated to the land of their ancestors. In 1999 legionaries were



again sent to build up some groups and in 2007 two Curiae were formed of there are distances of hundreds of kilometers between them. .

The lay apostolate of the legionaries is more vital than ever, even for the priests, because only lay people have the opportunity, as well as the responsibility that goes with it, of creating links between Priest and People, encouraging them to seek God and to receive the Sacraments. .

The most recent legislation on religious matters in Kazakhstan is more restrictive. In spite of this the legionaries still regularly attend their praesidium meetings and look for new kinds of pastoral work to engage in. .

The Legion of Mary in Kazakhstan has seen developments similar to those witnessed in Ukraine and which confirm again the wisdom and the strength of the Legion's tested system - the formation of small groups of people united in a praesidium. Their apostolate allows the priest to broaden the scope of his own pastoral activities. The Legion's work is always fuelled by prayer in union with Mary who seeks only to lead us to Jesus. .

For me it was a great honour to meet the Church in Kazakhstan, with the children of martyrs, with missionaries serving in not easy circumstances. I got a new understanding of the huge mission which is there to be done: millions of open-hearted people, not practicing the faith of their fathers, but also not knowing Christ and not daring to come to him. .

I ask you to keep both Kazakhstan and Ukraine in your prayers each day. .

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