

Marian Spirituality: The Experience of Legionaries in the Philippines

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Abstract - *This paper discusses the experiences and challenges of the Legion of Mary (LOM) in the Philippines using descriptive qualitative research in the form of oral interview and text survey methods among the selected Legionaries. LOM is a Catholic lay apostolic association which promotes the devotion to Mother Mary and supports the Church. The Legion was previously documented as one of the biggest lay apostolic organization in the Philippines. It helps the Church in many of its apostolic works such as evangelization, catechism, and works of mercy for the spiritually and materially poor. However, propagation of the church's work is weakened due to the decreasing number of members. There are proposals to strengthen the membership and pastoral works of the Legion of Mary. Hence, this research paper hopes to determine the experiences of the available or existing Legionaries residing in the different parts of the Philippines. The data showed positive experiences among the Legionaries while the challenges lie on the recruitment of members as well as on the demands of the apostolate. Due to these findings, it is highly recommended to have better pastoral care and devotion promotion involving the greater number of youth in the Church.*

Keywords –*Legionaries, Legion of Mary, Marian Spirituality, Philippines, Religious Education*

INTRODUCTION

Spirituality deals with the way a person lives a spirit-filled life. Underhill stated that spiritual life is a completely authentic life, built exclusively for the sake of humanity [1]. This way of living leads to loving God, other creations and oneself. It should uphold the dignity of one another and serve the least, the last and the lost members of the Church. This can be done effectively by acknowledging the gifts of the Holy Spirit and thus use it for the people [2]. Besides, living a life in the spirit deals with evangelization. Harvey identified this as the *kerygma* [3]. It is the proclamation of God's Word or the "Good News." Isaiah 61:1 states that "to bring glad tidings to the poor and the oppressed" to enlighten those who are in the darkness of sins or the dangers of death. Thus, these things composed the corporal and spiritual works of mercy [4]. These works of mercy must be truly lived out by the people who see themselves living a life filled with the spirit.

Marian spirituality is a way of the Christian life with the Blessed Mother as the role model and intercessor. It is where the Legion of Mary belongs. LOM draws its inspiration in modelling the life of Mary. According to the Catholic Bishop's Conference in the Philippines on Laity, LOM's mission is to

glorify God and to develop holiness through prayers, pastoral action, and cooperation in the Church. The lay apostolic group started in Dublin, Ireland in 1921. The Legion of Mary is considered as the largest lay Catholic apostolic organization. Few studies have been attributed especially in the local setting. There is documentation abroad about the Handbook being used worldwide by the members. This Legionary Handbook was originally made by Frank Duff, who was a servant of God and the founder of the movement. He got his inspirations from the True Devotion to Mary as taught by St. Louis Marie de Montfort, a Marian saint [5].

Pecayo [6] states in her research that the first meeting of the legionaries was held at the Myra House, Francis Street in Dublin, Ireland on September 7, 1921. Since then, the Legion is at the disposal of the bishops and priests for use in the Church's mission. LOM spread throughout Europe and other continents including Asia. On July 21, 1940, the association was introduced in the Philippines and soon grew throughout the archipelago.

Legion of Mary has its structure to make sure that the organization will flourish. The Legion handbook identifies the two-fold purpose of the association. There are for the glorification of God through Mary

and the spiritual development or holiness of the members. The apostolic works include the corporal works of mercy - feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, sheltering the homeless, visiting the imprisoned, caring for the sick, comforting the lonely and burying the dead [4]. While the spiritual works of mercy include instructing the ignorant, counselling the doubtful, admonishing the sinner, bearing wrongs patiently, forgiving offenses, comforting the afflicted, and praying for the living and the dead [4]. In addition to these works of Mercy, the legion also incorporated other apostolate which adheres to the ten commandments, beatitudes, and active participation in the sacramental life of the Church. This sacramental life includes fervent attendance in the Eucharist and confessions. It also includes doing private devotions to the holy angels, saints, Mama Mary through rosary recitation, sacred scripture and meditation on the lives of the saints, especially on their virtues and heroic acts.

The Legion of Mary has its pastoral ministry, the majority of works undertaken by the legionaries are balanced prayer program and apostolic care. This includes home/ hospital/, jails/ institutional visitations. There are also catechetical instructions in the community. Parish assistance like marriage validation, sacrament propagation, block rosary is also done by its members. There are also sharing of Catholic literature and religious articles, consoling the bereaved and collaboration in other parish activities.

When it comes to initial entry to the group, the new members are invited to observe the weekly meetings of the association which are done on weekends. It lasts for more than an hour depending on the members' reporting of assigned tasks or good deeds to be done. Before these, the members are in communal prayer reciting the whole Tesserá. It is a complete set of legion prayers prayed by its members. Prayer life is vital in the association as well as in every member's life. Tesserá is central to LOM's prayer life. It begins with the sign of the cross, then the invocation to the Holy Spirit. After which is preceded by the rosary recitation and the Magnificat of Mary. This will be ended with the concluding prayers addressed to the intercession of the archangels and saints in heaven. The other prayers are taken from the bible particularly in the book of Isaiah and the gospels.

Hence, the spirituality of the Legion of Mary revolves in the apostolic mission of the association. It includes holistic participation in works of mercy and evangelization. However, prayer life must always be

present to strengthen their spiritual life. These actions are done for the inner conversion and sanctification of the members. By doing these things, the members try to glorify God in their ways.

In this world of chaos and shadows, there is a need to practice deeper faith to become holy. Thus, persons become equipped to minister to one another, especially to the lost, the least and the last. That is, to become effective in the Church as servants of God.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The research aims to determine the experience of Legionaries in the Philippines specifically in the Luzon area. The experience to be drawn out pertains to the best practices and challenges experienced by the members. Added to the situation is the status of the membership of the said lay movement, whether they are increasing or declining in numbers. After the analysis of legionary experience, the researchers will recommend better solutions to sustain the membership of the lay movement. Hopefully, this will implicate further Marian studies and improve the association's pastoral works.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study utilized descriptive qualitative research. In this method, the researchers used a variety of survey-text or oral interviews to determine the experience of the available active or auxiliary members residing in the different parts of Luzon such as Quezon, Cavite, and Las Pinas. The respondents, mostly females are in their 30-60 age brackets.

The two servants are working in the public and private schools, some in a major hospital in Alabang, and the other has businesses to manage in Quezon province. Confidentiality was given as stated in the text to secure the privacy of the respondents. Aside from the initial interview to gather information, the researcher also used data mining through a literature review of the articles from Quezon City and Northern Philippines regarding the status of membership as well as the activities of the LOM.

Literature Review

The Legion of Mary has very limited literature due to the lack of documentation among its unit. However, the researchers tried to gather several data from the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines on Laity and several research papers. This will focus more on the LOM units in Luzon.

During the war in the 1940s, the Legion of Mary was established. It rapidly became widespread through the basic units or presidia [7]. The first presidia in the Philippines are the Purification of Our Lady. It was established in Hospicio de San Jose Manila, headed by Sister Joaquina Lucas and Fr. Manuel de Gracia, CM, as the spiritual director and the founder of the Legion of Mary in the country.

Currently, there are various Legion of Mary groups in the Philippines. The Sangguniang Laiko ng Pilipinas of the Catholic Bishop's Conference in the Philippines covers a Palawan, Mindoro, and Guam. There are other large big units in Bicol, Cebu, and Mindanao [8]. Some of the presidia of these big groups are found in the National Capital Region and Laguna province.

In the University of the Philippine Village Diliman, there are three active presidia in the area. The first is the Immaculate Heart of Mary which is composed of female members. It was established on March 20, 1970. The other two are the Immaculado Corazon which is for both men and women and Queen of the Most Holy Rosary which was formed in 2008.

In Christ the King Parish Green Meadows, Quezon City, the first LOM presidia is the Mary Queen of Peace. This was established in March 1989 by Priscilla Pacheco with Msgr. Jaime Mora as the spiritual director. It has only four members. After a year, another presidia was erected and it was called the Immaculate Heart of Mary. The main intention is to spread Marian Devotion particularly the Holy Rosary. It is also natural for them to lead the First Saturday Devotion with 2000 Hail Marys as well as to organize the October Rosary Month. They also visit Camp Karingal detention center for women, give catechism and church validation of the different sacraments like marriage, baptism, and confirmation.

The composition of membership in each presidium is the active members and auxiliary members. The active members are ones who attend the weekly meetings and perform apostolate work. They are tasked to observe the four standing instructions imposed on each one. On the other hand, the auxiliary members are the associates. They undertake the service of the daily recitation of the Tessera. They also do home visitations, visits to hospitals, jails, and other institutions. They are also in-charge of catechetical instruction and parish assistance.

The latest study on the Legion of Mary was discussed by Pecayo [6]. She stated that in the city of Calamba, Province of Laguna, the Mary Help of

Christians Parish founded the Senior Legion of Mary on July 3, 1973. It started with 27 presidia. They have singular-presidium which is the primary unitary place of meeting of any group of Legionaries. Also, there is 24 presidium for Junior legionaries. Their members reached 1,312 in 1997. Going back to their history, “in September 1979, the Presidia of that parish became Mayapa Curia (a Legion Council that governs a group of presidia in any city, or diocese). They conducted their meeting every 1st Saturday of the month. The Curia officers attended their meeting in San Pablo Comitium Calauan, Laguna every 1st Sunday of the month at 8:00 in the morning. Under the guidance of Msgr. Leo Drona, SDB, DD, the bishops decided that the Mayapa Curia has already met the qualification to become a Comitium- the next highest council that supervises one or more Curiae. Elections of officers of these Curiae are subject to ratification by the Comitium. It was on April 10, 2010, when the Mayapa Curia became Mayapa Comitium. It is composed of the 2nd district of Laguna from Cabuyao to Calauan with two cities Cabuyao and Calamba; three vicariates with two shrines and twenty-one parishes. As of 2017, the Comitium has 6 Senior Curia such as Canlubang, Calamba, Makiling, Fatima, Real, and Los Banos and also 1 Junior Curia. It has 27 directly attached presidium from Mary Help of Christians Parish. Their meetings are held every second Sunday of the month in the same parish. The Legionaries hope to render themselves worthy of the great heavenly Queen by their loyalty, virtues, and courage. The Legion aims to bring Mary to the world as the infallible or effective means of winning souls for Jesus. The legionary service is based on the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ, united and one with God through Mary [6].

Table 1. Positive experiences and Challenges

Areas	Positive Experiences	Challenges
Quezon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> develops piety becomes responsible taught to be more Christ-like inspiration from Mama Mary deepens faith to God social life was active 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> difficulty in recruitment of new members demands between the LOM and family
Cavite	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> inspiration from Mama Mary deepens faith to God 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> demands between the LOM and family
NCR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> revives one's faith to God deepens faith to God 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> demands between the LOM and family

Experiences of the Interviewed Legionaries

This study will focus on selected LOM presidium in the Luzon region. Interviews were done by the main researcher to discover the experiences of the members of the Legion of Mary in the selected presidium. A description of the results of the interview was presented in Table 1.

There are three areas where interviews were conducted namely: Quezon, Cavite and in the National Capital Region.

In Quezon province the main experiences of the interviewees were positive. The Legion taught them to pray religiously. Because of the daily structured prayers of the Tesserat, the members find this experience very helpful. Prayers nourish their spiritual life and bring them closer to God. It also develops devotion to Mary.

Some respondents also said that being a member of the Legion of Mary helped them to become a responsible person. Because of the works of mercy and other forms of apostolate, these became an avenue for them to become responsible citizens. It made them more self-giving and compassionate towards those who need their help. These acts are becoming more Christ-like in the example. Also, the members are inspired to model Mary in following the footsteps of Jesus. This is a positive experience among the members which allows them to have a deeper understanding of their faith to God and devotion to Mary.

Another positive experience of the association is that it gave them experiences to mingle, talk to people and gain new friends. The activities allow them to socialize and meet new people. It harnesses camaraderie since they tend to deal with other members of the presidium.

However, the respondents find several challenges in their association. First is the recruitment of new members. With the busy schedule of the people, it is very hard to have new members. Also, time and commitment are needed in the activities of the association. Hence, it is a challenge for the members to commit because it demands so much effort and time from the members. This is especially challenging for members with family.

For Cavite respondent, she views her Legion of Mary's experiences in her community as positive. She attributes her successes in life to the guidance and protection of Mary and Jesus. She draws inspiration from the Mother of Jesus and it allows her to have a strong faith in God. However, she finds it difficult to

have a full-time commitment to the association because of her other commitments. It demands time and effort which is also needed by her family and work.

As for the National Capital Region, the respondents have likewise positive experiences in their association. Their participation in the activities gives them the willingness to become holy. The association revives their faith to God because it allows them to exercise their apostolic ministry towards the needy. However, like the members of Quezon and Cavite, they find it difficult to have full commitment to the association due to the demands it takes from them.

Based on the data gathered, the experiences of the members of the Legion of Mary are found to be very positive. Their participation in the association allows them to develop piety and devotion to Mary. It also gives them a deeper sense of faith towards God. It moves them to become holy because the ministry of the legion makes them responsible members of the community. Indeed, the association gives the members avenue to deepen their spirituality through prayer, catechism, and works of mercy.

However, there are also several challenges that the members encountered. It includes the difficulty of recruitment of new members due to the busy schedule of other people. Some are too pre-occupied with technology and their family. Another reason challenge that they encounter is the demand that the legion is asking each member. Time and effort are part of the commitment. However, due to the responsibilities of the members not only in their jobs but also with their families, it is hard for them to give their full commitment. This makes it difficult for the association to fulfill its ministry.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The Legion of Mary contributed a lot to the church's ministry and evangelization. They promoted piety among its members. The legion worked for the Church in helping propagate the faith through catechism. They also incorporated acts of charity and works of mercy towards the needy. Many people have benefitted from this association both those who are members and recipients of their actions.

The paper looked at the experiences of the members of the Legion of Mary in the Philippines. It was found out that the majority of the members feel very positive about their association. Some find the legion an avenue for them to grow in holiness. This holiness should be directed to God, to others and the

community [9]. This made them closer to Mary and Jesus. Some grew in prayers while others transformed themselves as responsible persons who follow the examples of Christ. These positive experiences made the members satisfied.

However, due to the many distractions in the world including technology and social media, there are just a few people who are becoming attracted to join the Legion of Mary. This challenge of recruiting new members made it difficult for the members to do their ministry. In addition to this challenge, within the association, there is a need for a deeper commitment. Time and energy are valuable and some members find it difficult to commit these assets due to their commitment to their families.

Hence, this paper recommends that the remaining members of the associates try to devise ways on how to recruit new members in the group. These neophytes might be youth leaders who have less commitment than those who are head of the family. By recruiting youth leaders, there is a high chance of making the activities of the legion more attractive to those who are willing to commit and continue the mission of the association. With the help and inspiration of the Blessed Mother Mary and the commitment of the existing members, the continuation of evangelization and apostolic work of the association is possible.

It is also suggested praying to God that the Lord of the Harvest sends more laborers in His vineyard. This will allow the missionary spirit of the Legion to revive and flourish. This Marian study implicates future research involving the youth who can serve the Church.

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