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Legion of Mary Story in Rochester Diocese



HELPED LEGION SPREAD. This photo from Nov. 11, 1958, includes four people who played vital parts in the Legion's rapid growth in the Rochester Diocese during the fifties. They are visiting with a guest speaker, Mrs. Rose Fox, second from left, at a Legion Congress. At far left, Dr. J. Raymond Hensler, Curia president from 1953 to 1956; Miss Margaret Snyder, Curia president (1956-59) and now Sister M. Barnabas in the Mercy congregation; Miss Isabelle Dolan, (who founded Loretto House in inner-city Rochester, later transplanted it to Cleveland, Ohio) and Father John Merklinger, Diocesan moderator for the Legion of Mary from 1951 to 1959.

Legionaries would be quick to credit much of their spiritual harvest to the army of Auxiliary members which stands behind the Actives. While there are just over 800 active members in the Rochester Diocese, there are at least 20,000 Auxiliary members, who pledge themselves to pray the Legion prayers daily, including the Rosary, to provide added spiritual force to the Legion's apostolate.

Like all Catholic organizations, the Legion is feeling the fresh breezes of "aggiornamento" these days, and while Legion leaders have been willing to change on secondary matters, they feel that their strength is closely tied to the essential principles on which the Legion was built. The weekly meetings, weekly work assignment, pattern of the meeting, etc. are all likely to continue as Legion landmarks.

A few years ago, in recognition of the Legion's fine record in the Diocese, Bishop Kearney announced that he was giving the Legion of Mary a special mandate as an official Catholic Action group in this area.

His proclamation on that occasion noted:

"The Legion of Mary has distinguished itself in the Diocese . . . has seen a most remarkable growth in its members . . . has not hesitated to engage in the most arduous and exacting tasks of the apostolic activity of the Church."

The Bishop's words sum up the story of the first 27 years of Legion of Mary activity in the Diocese of Rochester.

—Father Robert J. Kaska

16 COURIER-JOURNAL
 Friday, May 27, 1966

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FIRST COMMUNION PREPARATION is purpose of this call by Geneva legionaries Miss Jennie Luciano and Mrs. Mary Mishanee, right. They ask parents to help prepare their children for First Communion, offer teaching aids. Mrs. Edmund Aquista, left, looks on as her daughter, Christine receives a Miraculous Medal from the visitors. Christine makes her First Holy Communion in St. Francis de Sales church on May 28.

(Continued from Page 15)
 "The spirit of the Legion has been preserved due to religious adherence to the system outlined in the handbook."
 Silence, a Legion Virtue

Because Legionaries often come across information in their calls which could raise eyebrows if known publicly, there is a firm insistence on secrecy about information gained during Legion work. The handbook tells them that apart from their unit meeting, when they make their report, they are not to discuss any particulars of their work. They are remarkably close-mouthed about their calls, and this trait has won over many pastors who wondered if

parish visitors might not be a source of spreading parish scandals.
 Father Joseph Dailey, now vice-Chancellor of the Diocese, speaks highly of this trait of Legionaries, from his own parish experience.

"The principle of Legion secrecy is one of the basic reasons for its (The Legion) success. The emphasis on secrecy, strict observance of it, realization of this by the people—all of this has opened doors to Legionaries that have been closed tight to others."
 Legion growth in the Diocese centered first in the Rochester area, then spread to the rest of the Diocese. By 1957, there were enough parish units to justify setting up a Curia in the Elmira area. In 1960, a Curia was formed in Auburn.

The Elmira region now boasts 14 senior units, 4 junior groups. The Auburn area has 10 senior groups, 2 juniors.

While much of the effects of Legion work cannot be recorded—spiritual progress is not easy to define—there are always the striking cases that testify to the Legion's efforts.

The yearly report to the Auburn Curia from the Waterloo unit, Our Lady of Hope, details such an incident:
 A young girl, severely injured and hospitalized for several months, was visited frequently by Legionaries. Her accident and the long hospitalization resulted in a real crisis of faith. "She questioned God's existence and the value of prayer," the report noted.

Continued and sympathetic visits by Legionaries, and they

added, "a great deal of assistance from Our Blessed Lady," began to bear fruit.
 "Her faith gradually revived," the report concluded, "and she is once again faithful to prayer, the Mass and the Sacraments."

Another striking story came from the Legion unit at St. Ann's in Hornell. Our Lady of Mercy. The members had been visiting a home for retired men. They had talked patiently and perseveringly with one man, who had been away from the Sacraments for years.

"One night, our spiritual director called at the home." This time, he was able to persuade the procrastinator to make his confession.

Although not apparently in critical condition, this man, who had finally made his peace with God, died suddenly later that night.

Other Results
 Not all the Legion reports can be so dramatic, but even their matter-of-fact yearly reports indicate much spiritual good accomplished. Some samples follow:

St. John the Evangelist, Greece (Mother of Grace parish): two marriages validated, a family of four returned to the Mass and Sacraments.

Sacred Heart Cathedral parish: Legion groups promoted an Inquiry class for non-Catholics. They visited homes, invited people to the course, accompanied some hesitant about coming alone, acted as hosts at the classes. Results: "Thirteen were baptized at the Easter Vigil services."

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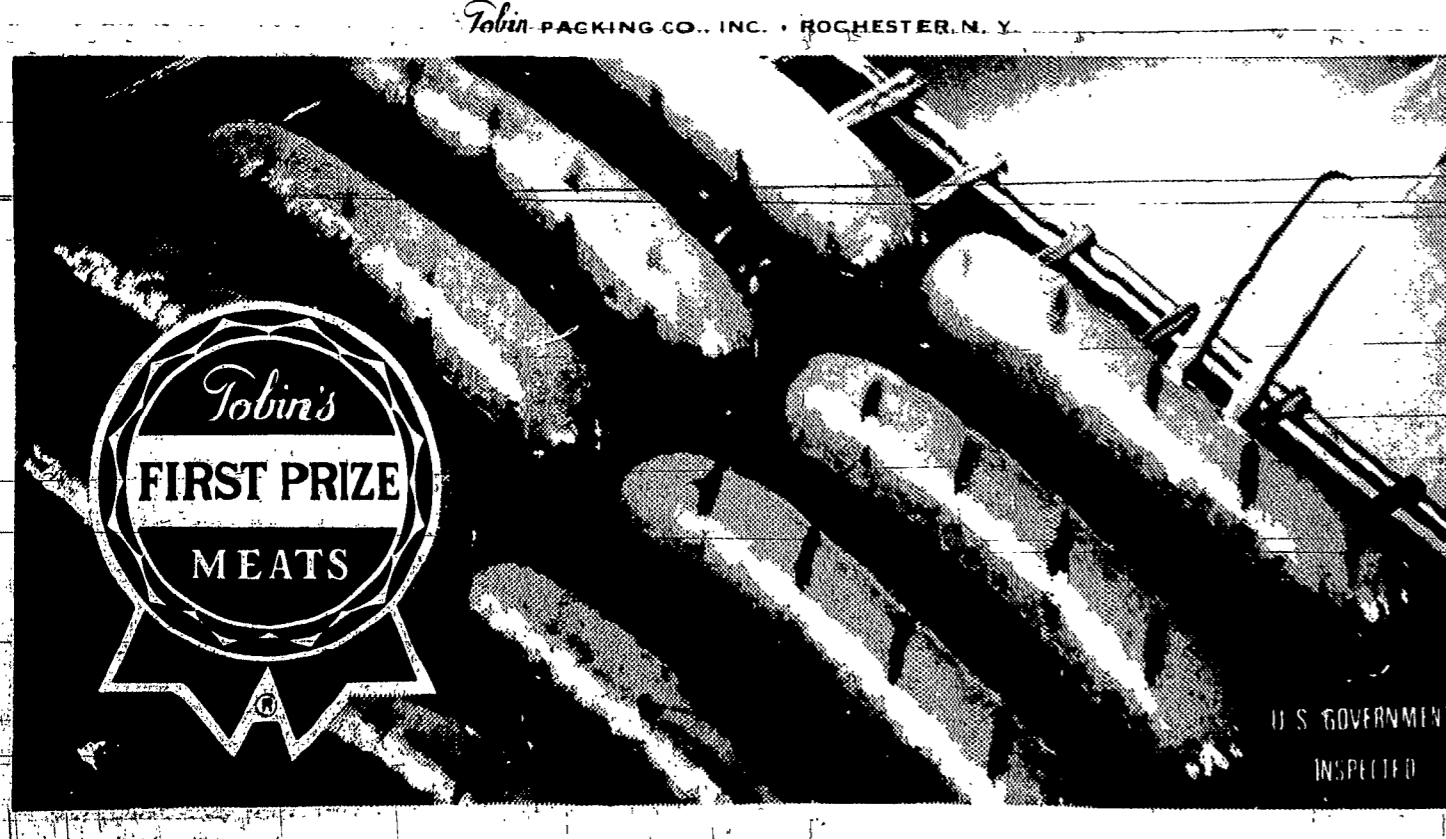
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