

# FEATURE

## Local Legion president committed to service

By Mike Latona  
Staff writer

GREECE — Bernadine Begley is not the type of person who makes commitments at the drop of a hat.



"I don't join up with everything," the 82-year-old Begley stated. "But when I do join, it has to be something I'm really interested in."

It's safe to say that Begley is "really interested" in the Legion of Mary at Our Mother of Sorrows Church. In 1962 she became a founding member of that "praesidium," or parish unit. She has served as president or vice president every year since, and is currently the president.

Begley recalled that she and another parishioner, Marian Ryan, were the only two people who showed up to the praesidium's first meeting 35 years ago. However, she said, they successfully increased membership over the next few years.

"Our Blessed Mother, I think, was nudging us on," remarked Begley, a Mother of Sorrows parishioner since the late 1930s.

Begley said that of all the parish groups available to her, she favored the Legion of Mary because of its commitment to service.

"I like the shut-in calls especially," she said.

The Legion of Mary is a worldwide coalition of Catholics who pledge to help their pastors perform spiritual works in their parishes and communities. Members also emphasize prayerful devotion to Mary.

The organization was founded in 1921 in Dublin, Ireland. The first praesidium in the United States was established in 1931.

At Mother of Sorrows, Begley's group performs a long list of service duties. Among them are phone calls, letters and visits to shut-ins; hospital and adult-home visits; and bereavement ministry.

In addition, the Legion of Mary assists such preexisting parish activities and groups as religious education; Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults; and parish council. Members also design rosaries, and distribute both the rosaries and religious medals.

"How many rosaries have we given out?" Begley asked Joan Feeney as the two were interviewed recently in the parish's Legion of Mary Room.

"Hundreds and hundreds," Feeney replied.

Feeney, who serves as the praesidium's secretary, noted that Legion of Mary ministry is performed largely behind the scenes.

"Unless they're in it, most people don't re-



Bernadine Begley, the president of the Legion of Mary at Our Mother of Sorrows Church, Greece, stands in the parish's Legion of Mary room.

Matthew Scott/Staff photographer

alize what we do," Feeney remarked.

Two years ago, Begley was a recipient of the very hospitality she has helped to promote in her parish. Following a knee operation, praesidium members brought full meals to Begley's house each day as she was recuperating.

"They would do anything for me," Begley said. "I can't imagine my life without the Legion. Ever since my husband died, I don't know what I would have done without my Legion friends. They're my best friends."

The Mother of Sorrows Praesidium includes 16 active members who meet on Monday evenings in the Legion of Mary Room. Active members also perform two hours of assigned duties each week; recite a catena (the Legion prayer) daily; and observe confidentiality regarding matters discussed during meetings or visits.

Although all members in her praesidium are women, Begley emphasized that the or-

ganization is open to men as well. For instance, her husband, Thomas, who died in 1982, was an active Legion member for several years.

Begley said she plans to continue her Legion of Mary involvement for as long as possible. One of her top priorities, she said, is to rebuild her praesidium's membership.

"All of us are getting older, and the younger people are going out to work," Begley said. "We do need more people — and young people."

She suggested auxiliary membership for those who can't make a full commitment. Auxiliary members say daily rosaries and other prayers, but are not required to attend meetings or perform service.

In addition, Begley noted, her praesidium welcomes people from nearby parishes that don't have their own Legion of Mary groups. Prospective new members can contact Begley at 716/663-8722.

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