

“I now place myself entirely at your disposal with all that I am and have –my knowledge and ignorance, my ability and inability, but above all, my heart. (...)

“We want to create this organization. We – not I. For in this regard I will do nothing, absolutely nothing without your full consent. Here it is not a matter of momentary work, but of a foundation which can be useful for all future generations.”

– Fr. Joseph Kentenich, October 27, 1912

As leaders of the Schoenstatt University Men we want to reflect on three main areas where our contribution can make a great difference in promoting good virtues for sound living within our Branch:

1. Fostering a Marian atmosphere.
2. Fostering a healthy masculine spirit.
3. Fostering a deep respect for the human person.

1. Fostering a Marian Atmosphere

The first main area is to foster a *Marian atmosphere*. We think of what Fr. Kentenich called the “Immaculata soil” of our family. As a Marian movement we have a huge asset in forming pure and noble youth: it is love of Mary! Her freedom from sin, her freedom to entirely do God’s will - these engender a climate of native innocence and joy if we allow her to be present in our hearts and homes and meeting places, and if we take certain simple measures to counteract the opposing atmosphere.

First, we allow her to be present in our hearts and homes and meeting places. As Fr. Kentenich said to couples in 1964:

There was once an old priest whom the children liked for his simplicity. One day he was praying his breviary in front of his house, pacing back and forth. Every time he passed a certain spot he tipped his biretta. The children saw this and came running up to him. “What are you doing?” He told them simply, “Children, I greet the lilies.” What did he mean - “I greet the lilies”? He rejoiced in the lilies like he rejoiced in the innocence of these children. (...) We must speak about a subject that weighs heavily on us educators today, including our parents. We all know that today’s culture is so sexually saturated that it is extremely difficult for young men to preserve the purity of their state in life. When we know how important purity is *for our whole lifetime* for all of us, we understand the helplessness we feel. Then that which we so simply believe and expect from Mary in the home shrine - in *my* home shrine - means a great deal. (...) We want to entrust our purity to her every day (...). We also want to offer for this intention our own sacrifices in the realm of purity and consciously place them into the capital of grace so that the life stream of purity, the mother soil of purity will be planted and sown in our own family. This is doubly and triply important because we should normally not talk much about chastity. Quite the opposite, we must only see to it that we have the proper atmosphere at home. That is much more important than talking about these things a lot in the family. (February 3, 1964)

Fr. Kentenich placed great stock in the power of *atmosphere*. It has less to do with what we say and more to do with who we are. If I am a leader and take purity seriously in *my life*, this will radiate - without any words - to others. This shows in little things such as cleanliness and hygiene. If I treat my own body with respect and discipline, this will radiate to my peers as an unspoken lesson about the dignity of the body. If I treat women with respect and do not speak of them or look at them as objects of pleasure, this will radiate to my peers as an unspoken lesson on the dignity of women. If I choose my pastimes wisely (TV, movies, how do I use the internet?) and master my words of frustration (do swear words come out?), this will radiate to my peers an unspoken lesson in self-control. *Signs of our love for Mary* help form this atmosphere. This shows in having a place of honor for her in our meeting place, bringing our capital of grace, delighting in Marian prayers and songs, etc. If we are camping, we try to create for her a camp shrine or have some other way to remind us that she is with us. The orderliness, cleanliness, and decoration of our meeting place deserve special mention. The soul instinctively responds to the order or disorder of a place; a “Marian place” (clean, orderly, with a picture of her) helps the soul grasp its innate dignity, unselfishness, purity, and greatness, while un-Marian places set the soul adrift in a kind of fog of mediocrity, selfishness, laziness, and self-gratification.)

Marian virtues also help, like *joy* and a *generous spirit*. These are virtues that start with the group leader. If you are joyful and see the positive in what your group is doing, it will help create a Marian spirit among those in the group. If you show a generous spirit (magnanimity) and a willingness to sacrifice comfort for what you believe, this will also help shape a Marian atmosphere. To give one example, the effort to keep our meeting place orderly or to leave the Shrine or our meeting room as clean as when we found it, can just be a chore, or it can be motivated by a real desire to help make things *glow with love of Mary*. If we do this, our outer surroundings will help our inner spirit to intuitively grasp and live *Immaculata* spirit. *Vigilance* is also required, for we need to take certain measures to counteract the trends of our culture. Our times are oversaturated with sexual images and innuendo. To maintain a Marian atmosphere in a men’s group or at a camp requires a certain amount of vigilance. One should not over-react or become paranoid, but calmly draw boundaries that help all. For instance: There is no room for swear words. I dress modestly as a leader and expect a basic respect for modesty among the group members. I will not let suggestive pictures, songs, or language be a part of a life group or camp. Pornography has no place in our youth activities, nor in our lives as leaders. Our Marian atmosphere is also *covenant reality*. In other words, it is not some kind of educational “trick.” It is a reality rooted in the covenant of love with the MTA. When we consecrate ourselves to her with our eyes, ears, mouth, heart, and entire self without reserve, we are laying the best foundation for youthful souls to breathe the air of divine grace. In Schoenstatt it is our habit to *invite the MTA to be a part of everything we do*. Marian atmosphere originates in her, the Immaculata. When we belong to her as her men and leaders, she will help us to strengthen what is pure and good and holy, and to reject what is impure and evil and corrupt.

2. Fostering a Healthy Masculine Spirit

The second main area is to foster a *healthy masculine spirit*. One of the keys to being a Schoenstatt University Men is “becoming a father in whatever my future vocation holds.” As we grow to manhood, we will be called to bear witness to and be a transparency of *God’s fatherhood*. As a result, we want to strike the right balance between good-natured fun and disciplined action. True masculine spirit is not a crude or vulgar masculinity or one that excuses everything as “boys will be boys.” Group meetings should have an energy and excitement befitting men, but also respect for authority and the witness of a leader who knows when to call a meeting to order and when to have fun, when to laugh and when to call an errant member to task. Our goal is an atmosphere that is manly in a healthy way. Some of its main features are:

- Challenges and the spirit of conquest.
- Games and good, clean fun.
- Respect for authority.
- The call to masculine ideals and greatness.

Challenges and the spirit of conquest. Men like a challenge. Camps, trips and special activities are opportunities to test one's strength, and to dare to meet others and do new things. As a leader, watch how each individual respond to a challenge, and which challenges they need at their present stage of development. What inspires one person or one group may not inspire another, and over time the same group may need different kinds of challenges. *Games and good, clean fun.* These are essential. At heart every man is a boy, and boys love games. Most are attracted to sports and enjoy a good game. Others will be more attracted to puzzles or intellectual games. Either way, a game provides both a release of energy and a motivation. It gives the right flavor of testing one's strength and teaches social skills.

Respect for authority. Without this, no one can really grow up into a man. We do not have to be heavy-handed as leaders, but we must make sure that our authority is respected, and that I earn this respect. Finally, healthy masculine spirit is formed by the *call to high ideals and greatness.* As a leader you have the possibility to awaken in those entrusted to you the realization that God has placed each one here on earth for a great purpose. *God has a plan for my life!* To fail to do this is to leave youth in the desert of mediocrity. But a call to great ideals must be backed up by the quiet witness of my own life. As a leader *I must embody the faith in God's call for my life.* This especially shows in how seriously I take the little details of everyday life. This shows that the way to greatness is along the paths of fulfilling our duties well out of love for God. Fr. Kentenich spoke about greatness in a talk for high school boys from Madison, Wisconsin in 1953:

What place shall Schoenstatt take in my life's plan? Listen: the same place it held in the life of Joseph Engling, that is:

- 1) It embraces my whole life.
- 2) It completely shapes my whole life and lifestyle.
- 3) It opens to me a never-ending source of life.

Here you have the great goal, the great ideal. (...) What do we mean by saying that great ideas are the sign of a great man, or that great ideas are the means to shaping great men? Something is aroused in us when we hear the word "great." It may be something slumbering deep within us. It is the urge to be great, the desire for greatness. (...) [Think of] Joseph Engling. If you have understood even a little of his inner structure, you will know how often his desire for greatness was aroused. We read over and over in his life about his increasing desire for greatness. What he did and accomplished always seemed too small for him. The longing for greatness increased. Does this only apply to Joseph Engling? Certainly not. I know for a fact that it is found in every young man in Europe. Is the same true for American youth? (...) I would be greatly surprised if it were not. A real young man who experiences no urge for infinite greatness ceases to be young - and we want to be *young* men!

Note on Separate Branches for Men and Women

At times Schoenstatt is asked why it maintains separate youth branches for men and for women. As a movement which tries to form persons on a deeper level, our experience is that men and women need separate space to open up more naturally to discovering who they are

and what it means to be a man or woman. As a result, formation activities such as groups and retreats are separate, even though they might work together on other things such as special apostolic projects or outreach into the larger community. In general, this separation fosters a more “gender-true” personal and spiritual growth. As Fr. Kentenich notes in *The Jewel of Purity*: The more pronounced the character of each - the more masculine the man and the more feminine the woman - the stronger the mutual attraction⁸. The guiding principle is this: formation and branches are separate; special apostolate and social activities can be together (coordinated by the leadership of the two branches).

2. Fostering Deep Respect for Each Human Person

The third main area is to *foster respect for the human person*. The general breakdown of attachments tends to desensitize us to the dignity and needs of those around us. We are exposed to a world that treats people like objects, numbers, or parts in a machine. It is therefore extremely important that our youth activities radiate an atmosphere of mutual respect and personal interest. Our goal is *deep* respect, for Christian teaching reminds us that each person is a unique child of God and a special reflection of God’s love. Some very simple steps can help us create an atmosphere of personal respect. One is to know our members by their names and something about their family. We want to be interested in them and in the things they are doing. It may help to ask yourself what would interest Christ about these young men. If you feel that one or more person is really “testing your limits” -consider it an invitation from God to offer up some special sacrifice for them. Each one is striving to grow in *his* love for the MTA, *his* self-education, etc. You can respectfully invite them to share their experiences. At heart, this atmosphere is built on healthy respect both of the power of grace to ennoble and of the power of sin to corrupt. Showing respect for personal property, for authority, and for God and his holy places are also essential to an all-around spirit of personal respect.

Leadership Prayer

Dear Blessed Mother:

In the Shrine we renew our leader-promise to be fathers for our time.

We ask you: Make us leaders by our deeds and by our prayer,
and let our being form the life of those entrusted to our care.

We ask you: Forge community in the Cenacle, our home,
that our mutual Marian loyalty be the sign by which we’re known.

We ask you: Let us glow with love for the Shrine, your chosen place
and set our hearts on fire for our mission: SUM, transforming hearts
with Mary!

MTA, we your leaders ask: form us to be instruments
to build your Schoenstatt and live the covenant with YOU.

Amen.