

Meaning of Our Preamble

The preamble of The American Legion's constitution is a literary and ideological classic. It sparkles with the purest gems of patriotic thought. It reflects all the spiritual glory of Divine precepts. It is remarkable for the simple brevity into which has been compacted an inspiring pattern for all the future of a free and decent way of life. It has impact as a tenet of faith in God. Each of the ten clauses of the Preamble, though brief, has a world of meaning.

For God and Country, we associate ourselves together for the following purposes. This is the introduction. It declares that The American Legion recognizes the influence of Almighty God in all worthwhile endeavors and declares the allegiance of American Legionnaires to both God and Nation.

To uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States of America. The Constitution of the United States is the written bulwark of our free way of life and representative government. It is our guarantee of liberty, freedom, justice and democracy. Members of The American Legion bore arms and went to war, to defend and uphold this document of freedom.

To maintain law and order. Without law and order, liberty would become license. Law and order protect our pursuit of happiness, one of our God-given rights. Members of The American Legion served in wars to uphold law and order among nations. It is just as important to maintain the due processes of law in our domestic affairs. It binds Legionnaires to obey the laws of the land and to support the constituted authorities in enforcing those laws.

To foster and perpetuate a 100 percent Americanism. Americanism is the gist of the American ideals of freedom, justice, individual rights and unfenced-in opportunities. It embraces all the freedoms we cherish and all the rights that are guaranteed to us. It is the very opposite of hatred, bigotry and intolerance. Americanism is the creed that has blazed the world-wide trail for justice, fair play, decency, belief in God, private enterprise, universal education, and progress in all human endeavors. It puts a premium on the virtues of loyalty, patriotism, hard work and thrift.

To preserve the memories and incidents of our associations in conflicts. Service in defense of America is the greatest experience in the lifetimes of all veterans - recalling the highlights of that service means more than flashbacks to tense moments of excitement and danger in battle, the grime of muddy trenches, the perils of sub-infested oceans and the combat in the wild blue yonder. It means also the un-erasable recollection of the comradeships, the bravery of pals, the team work, the sacrifices, the miseries and hardships of military campaigns shared in common. It means the bond that binds all ex-servicemen and women together in mutual affection, respect and gratitude. It also means keeping green forever the memories of the supreme sacrifices of gallant American patriots, sacrifices necessary to the winnings of wars. It means faithful annual observance of Memorial Day and Veterans Day.

To inculcate a sense of individual obligation to the community, state and nation. Always interested in building a better nation, the founders of The American Legion believed that such building must start first with the individual in their own community. So they made it one of the cardinal principles of The American Legion to inculcate that sense of personal obligation to the community, state and nation into the individual citizen. That means educating the citizen - young, old and future - in his and her responsibility to be active in making the hometown a better place in which to live, in discharging the duty of voting in elections, in paying taxes promptly, in contributing to community chest funds and to blood banks. The word —inculcate means —to impress by frequent admonitions and —to enforce by frequent repetitions. Like the duties themselves, the reminders that they remain to be carried forward, are never finished.

To combat the autocracy of both the classes and the masses. This clause places the Legionnaire on the side of right in opposing autocracy by either class or mass when this threatens. In a democracy such as ours, composed as it is of all nationalities, races, creeds and economic groups, there are bound to be both classes and masses. Indeed, the masses are composed of classes - but all groups within the mass must feel assured that in this nation, reason and fairness will prevail in all human activities and relations.

To make right the master of might. Many wars have been started by dictators who wanted their might to be the right. If human freedom is not to perish from the earth, right must always be master of might. The rights of small nations must be protected against the tyranny that powerful neighbors may seek to impose on them - just as the rights of minorities in our society must be protected and respected. Legionnaires are pledged by this clause always to stand with the right, protect the weak and preserve the liberties of the individual. This concept is the basis of The American Legion's continued advocacy of a strong national preparedness so as to achieve the ideal situation that right will be backed by adequate might.

To promote peace and good will on earth. Until the entire world becomes a good neighborhood, Legionnaires must continue the effort to promote peace and good will on earth. It is in pursuance of this founding ideal that The American Legion has supported from the beginning and seeks to strengthen the United Nations organization. Obliquely, The American Legion also contributes to this ideal by firmly supporting a strong national defense to discourage breaking of the peace by aggressors.

To safeguard and transmit to posterity the principles of justice, freedom and democracy. On this ideal of safeguarding and transmitting the principles of justice, freedom and democracy, all of the youth-training programs of The American Legion are built. All Americans can be proud that in our international relations we have tried to live by the golden rule, the mark of justice. We have granted to others, as we prize it ourselves, the great boon of freedom. Through the Monroe Doctrine, we called a halt to foreign imperialism in the western hemisphere. We gave freedom to the Philippines. These principles are part of the American heritage. Legionnaires are pledged to protect and preserve that heritage.

To consecrate and sanctify our comradeship by our devotion to mutual helpfulness. The last or tenth clause of our Preamble pledges Legionnaires to —consecrate and sanctify our comradeship by our devotion to mutual helpfulness. This is the most important ideal expressed in our Preamble. It marked a new concept in America - a concept that made The American Legion the greatest force for social betterment in all the history of the United States. We can hail The American Legion today as an unparalleled force in these United States for social betterment. American Legion concepts and its ideal of devotion to mutual helpfulness warmed up the whole social climate of America. Today America is extending its helpful hands all over the world through our assistance programs of foreign aid. This all came about because the veterans of World War I came home enriched with wonderful ties of friendship and gave those ties a meaning by consecrating them to the ideal of mutual helpfulness.

This is why we should all be proud to be Legionnaires!