

# THE AMERICAN LEGION PREAMBLE

*"For God and Country, we associate ourselves together for the following purposes:*

*To uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States of America; to maintain law and order; to foster and perpetuate a 100-percent Americanism; to preserve the memories and incidents of our associations in all wars; to inculcate a sense of individual obligation to the community, state and nation; to combat the autocracy of both the classes and the masses; to make right the master of might; to promote peace and good will on earth; to safeguard and transmit to posterity the principles of justice, freedom and democracy; to consecrate and sanctify our comradeship by our devotion to mutual helpfulness."*

Each of the 10 clauses of the Preamble, though brief, has a world of meaning.

**FOR GOD AND COUNTRY, WE ASSOCIATE OURSELVES TOGETHER...** 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 Legionnaires to both God and Nation. First things have been put first. All that follows is in conformity.

**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- went to wars- 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. It means the citizen must never take the law into his own hands!

**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 ALL WARS...** 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, the combats in the wild blue yonder. It means also the un-erasable recollection of the comradeship, the bravery of pals, the teamwork, 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, sacrifice 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 his 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 CLASSES AND 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 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. There must be no hyphenated Americans-just Americans all.

***TO MAKE RIGHT THE MASTER OF MIGHT...*** All wars from the veterans of which The American Legion draws its membership were 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. Our belief in enthroning right over might is the main essence of our ideological conflict with Communism today. 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 all the 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 seek 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 aggressor.

***TO SAFEGUARD AND TRANSMIT TO POSTERITY THE PRINCIPLES OF JUSTICE, FREEDOM AND DEMOCRACY...*** On this ideal of safeguarding and transmitting to posterity 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 call 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 10th clause of our Preamble 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. Let us be factual and examine this.

At the close of World War I, America was just emerging from its lusty era of rugged individualism. It was an era when the individual hammered out his own destiny and progress with little or no help from the government. An honest facing of the facts brings out that American society was then a cold society insofar as any organized public hands of helpfulness were concerned. The individual who fell upon evil times was left to private charity which meant mostly the churches and the Salvation Army. There were no public resources or services to help the unfortunates.

When the veterans of World War I came marching home, they found the nation utterly unprepared to care for the combat casualties of the war. The wounded, the shell-shocked and the sick were lodged in poor houses, jails, asylums or what-have-you.

Veterans of World War I were much more closely knit than those of World War II. They trained in the same camps, fought on the one great front. Those who came home unscarred were appalled by the plight of their less fortunate comrades. They felt a concern for them and their dependents which was a new and dramatic action aspect to what the country had known as friendship. This concern formed the bond among the charter members of The American Legion and gave them a great and noble cause to fight for—the adequate care and protection of their disabled comrades and dependents, the war widows and orphans.

They faced a monumental task. Laws had to be drafted and enacted by the Congress to provide compensation for the war-handicapped, to build hospitals and to get protection for the widows and orphans upon whom the war had laid its heaviest and cruelest hand.

The American Legion wrote such laws, had them introduced in the Congress, went out over the land to arouse the conscience of the people of America and mobilize support for its legislative aims. It did both with a sacrificial fervor that overcame all obstacles.

The Congress enacted the laws, it provided the administrative machinery, it appropriated the funds, it built hospitals. Then to bring about a single responsibility for the carrying out of all veteran laws and to achieve a unification of these government services, The American Legion put through Congress the legislation to create the Veterans Bureau, then the Veterans Administration, and now the Department of Veterans Affairs. Over the years, a great network of government hospitals was built and a great structure of veteran legislation enacted which made the American veterans the best cared for on earth. The rehabilitation program of The American Legion for the World War I veteran brought about in its successful development a great awakening of social responsibility in America.

When the New Deal Program was being developed, the government planners looked at what The American Legion, through its vast rehabilitation program, had done for the veteran of World War I and they decided to do the same thing for all American people.

So out of the rehabilitation brainchild of The American Legion, there came the Social Security System with its retirement benefits and old age assistance programs for all the people. The planners took a look at The American Legion program of temporary emergency aid to needy children of veterans and there was born-with the support of Legionnaires-the state and federal program of aid to dependent children-all children.

This is how 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.

It 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.

The American Legion Preamble has been the beacon light of The American Legion for more than 100 years. It has been amended only twice in all that time. The last amendment consisted of removing reference to the "The Great" and adding the "All". It makes the Preamble read today "All Wars," so as to embrace all wars.