

Learn about the Knights

On October 2, 1881, a small group of men met in the basement of St. Mary's Church on Hillhouse Avenue in New Haven, Connecticut. Called together by their parish priest, Father Michael J. McGivney, these men formed a fraternal society that has now become the world's largest Catholic family fraternal service organization. They sought strength in solidarity and security through unity of purpose and devotion to a holy cause. They vowed to be defenders of their country and their families and their Faith. These men were bound together by the ideal of Christopher Columbus, who brought the Holy Faith to this New World. They called themselves the Knights of Columbus.



Through the foresight of Father McGivney and the dedication of those early Knights and the millions who have followed in their footsteps, the Knights of Columbus has become the world's foremost Catholic fraternal benefit society, one that has helped millions of Catholic families grow in their faith and defend their beliefs. It has made its members better husbands, fathers, sons and citizens. It has helped families obtain economic security and stability through the Knights' life insurance program. It has built Catholic communities, fed the poor and defended the vulnerable. It has helped to renovate the Vatican and bring the Pope to the world.

Since it was incorporated on March 29th, 1882, the Knights of Columbus has grown to more than 12,000 councils and 1.7 million members throughout the United States, Canada, the Philippines, Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Panama, the Bahamas, the Virgin Islands, Guatemala, Guam, Saipan and Poland.

Love of Church and Country

Charity, unity, fraternity and patriotism - these are the ideals and principles of the Knights of Columbus, and since 1882, Knights of Columbus have backed up these words with actions.

During World War I, the Knights established soldiers' welfare centers in training camps throughout the United States and behind the lines in Europe and Asia.

During World War II, the Knights were the first national organization to sponsor a blood donor program. Many councils led war bond drives and thousands of Knights were killed in action during the war.



During the Cold War, the Knights operated speakers' bureaus and funded anti-Communist and pro-freedom media messages. In 1954, the Knights of Columbus led the effort to officially include the words "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance to the American flag.

In 1957, the Knights of Columbus donated a \$1 million, 329-foot bell tower to the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington DC—a tower that became known as the "the Knights' Tower." The Order has since donated a 56-bell carillon to the Shrine and provided funding for its operation.

During the 1960s and 1970s the Knights of Columbus stood as a tower to promote racial equality and love of country. Against a tide of dissension, the Order championed Church teachings on divorce, birth control, abortion and pornography.

Since the late 1970s, the Supreme Council has fostered devotion to the Church and the Blessed Mother, and pledged the Knights' support for the Holy Father, the cardinals, bishops and all the clergy and religious. Deep loyalty to the Vatican is represented by the Order's contributions to the pope's charities, architectural restoration of St. Peter's Basilica and Vatican communications technology.

In 2000, the current Supreme Knight, Carl A. Anderson, was elected to office. Continuing the tradition of devotion to the Church and the Blessed Mother, he rededicated the Order to its role as the "strong right arm of the Church" in the renewal of society. He



especially promised new vigor in the fight for the culture of life over the culture of death as the Order continues in the 21st century.



Membership in the Knights

Membership in the Knights of Columbus is open to practical Catholic men in union with the Holy See, who are at least 18 years old. A practical Catholic is one who lives up to the Commandments of God and the precepts of the Church. Application blanks are available from any member of the Knights of Columbus.

All priests and religious brothers having duly made application for membership and participated in the ceremonies become honorary life members of the Order and are exempt from payment of dues.

Candidates join local units called "councils," most of which are based in one Catholic parish or in the community at large. The candidate takes part in initiation degrees that explain the Knights of Columbus' four principles: Charity, Unity, Fraternity and Patriotism.



A candidate is considered a "Knight" after taking his First Degree, but is encouraged to advance through the Second and Third Degrees and on to the Fourth Degree, whose members promote the virtue of patriotism by serving in honor guards and color corps to promote respect for country and the flag.

The Knights of Columbus have a proud heritage. The qualified Catholic man can share in this heritage and build for an even greater future by affiliating himself with this forceful, effective fraternal organization.

