

Knights of Columbus

Excerpted from an article on Wikipedia



Knights of Columbus emblem

The **Order of the Knights of Columbus** is the world's largest Catholic fraternal service organization. Founded in the United States in 1882, it is named in honor of Christopher Columbus and dedicated to the principles of Charity, Unity, Fraternity, and Patriotism. There are more than 1.7 million members in 14,000 councils, with nearly 200 councils on college campuses. Membership is limited to practical Catholic men aged 18 or older.

Councils have been chartered in the United States, Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean, Central America, the Philippines, Guam, Saipan, and most recently in Poland. The Knights' official junior organization, the Columbian Squires, has over 5,000 Circles. All the Order's ceremonials and business meetings are restricted to members though all other events are open to the public. A promise not to reveal any details of the ceremonials except to an equally qualified Knight is required to ensure their impact and meaning for new members; an additional clause subordinates the promise to that Knight's civil and religious duties.

In the 2005 fraternal year the Order gave \$136 million directly to charity and performed over 63.2 million man hours of voluntary service. The Order's insurance program has more than \$55 billion of life insurance policies in force and holds the highest insurance ratings given by A.M. Best, Standard & Poor's, and the Insurance Marketplace Standards Association.

In light of the order's strong support of the Church, several popes (including Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI) have referred to the Knights of Columbus as the "strong right arm of the church", a designation the order proudly includes in recruitment publications.

The Knights of Columbus was founded by a Catholic priest, Father Michael J. McGivney in New Haven, Connecticut on February 2, 1882, and incorporated under the laws of the U.S. state of Connecticut on March 29, 1882. Though the first councils were all in that state, the Order spread throughout New England and the United States in the following years.

The primary motivation for the Order was to be a mutual benefit society. As a parish priest in an immigrant community, McGivney saw what could happen to a family when the breadwinner died and wanted to provide insurance to care for the widows and orphans left behind. He himself had to temporarily leave his seminary studies to care for his family when his father died. In the late 19th century, Catholics were regularly excluded from labor unions and other organizations that provided social services. In addition, Catholics were either barred from many of the popular fraternal organizations, or, as in the case of Freemasonry, forbidden from joining by the Catholic Church itself. McGivney wished to provide them an alternative. He also believed that Catholicism and fraternalism were not incompatible and wished to found a society that would encourage men to be proud of their American-Catholic heritage.

McGivney traveled to Boston to examine the Massachusetts Catholic Order of Foresters and to Brooklyn to learn about the recently established Catholic Benevolent League, both of which offered insurance benefits. He found the latter to be lacking the excitement he thought was needed if his organization were to compete with the secret societies of the day. He expressed an interest in establishing a New Haven Court of the Foresters, but the charter of Massachusetts Foresters prevented them from operating outside their Commonwealth. The committee of St. Mary's parishioners McGivney had assembled then decided to form a club that was entirely original.

McGivney had originally conceived of the name "Sons of Columbus" but James T. Mullen, who would become the first Supreme Knight, successfully suggested that "Knights of Columbus" would better capture the ritualistic nature of the new organization. The Order was founded 10 years before the 400th anniversary of Columbus' first visit to the New World and in a time of renewed interest in him. Columbus was a hero to many American Catholics and the naming him as patron was partly an attempt to build a bridge between the Irish-Catholic founders of the Order and the Catholic immigrants of other nationalities living in Connecticut.

The *Connecticut Catholic* ran an editorial in 1878 that illustrated how American Catholics esteemed Columbus. "As American Catholics we do not know of anyone who more deserves our grateful remembrance than the great and noble man - the pious, zealous, faithful Catholic, the enterprising navigator, and the large-hearted and generous sailor: Christopher Columbus."

The name of Columbus was also partially intended as a mild ridicule of Anglo-Saxon Protestant leaders, who upheld the explorer (a Catholic Genovese Italian working for Catholic Spain) as an American hero, yet simultaneously sought to marginalize recent Catholic immigrants. In taking Columbus as their patron they were sending the message that not only could Catholics be full members of American society, but indeed they were instrumental in its foundation.

By the time of the first annual convention in 1884 the Order was prospering. In the five councils throughout Connecticut were 459 members and groups from other states were requesting information. The Charter of 1899 included four statements of purpose,

including "to promote such social and intellectual intercourse among its members as shall be desirable and proper, and by such lawful means as to them shall seem best." The new charter showed members' desire to grow the organization beyond a simple mutual benefit insurance society.

The original insurance system devised by McGivney gave a deceased Knight's widow a \$1,000 death benefit. Each member was assessed \$1 upon a death and when the number of Knights grew beyond 1,000 the assessment decreased according to the rate of increase. Each member, regardless of age, was assessed equally. As a result, younger, healthier members could expect to pay more over the course of their lifetimes than those men who joined when they were older. There was also a Sick Benefit Deposit for members who fell ill and could not work. Each sick Knight was entitled to draw up to \$5 a week for 13 weeks. If he remained sick after that the council to which he belonged regulated the sum of money given to him. At the time, \$5 was nearly $\frac{2}{3}$ of the pay a man in his 30s or 40s could expect to bring home each week.

Today there are more than 14,000 councils around the world and the Knights of Columbus is a multi-billion dollar non-profit charitable organization. Knights may be seen distributing Tootsie Rolls to raise funds to fight developmental disabilities, volunteering for the Special Olympics and other charitable organizations, erecting pro-life billboards and "Keep Christ in Christmas" signs, conducting blood drives and raising funds for disaster victims, or parading at patriotic events with their bright capes, feathered chapeaux, and ceremonial swords. The cause for McGivney's canonization is currently before the Congregation for the Causes of Saints and a guild has been formed to promote his cause. If his cause is successful he will be the first American-born priest to be canonized as a Saint.

The Supreme Council is the governing body of the Order and is composed of elected representatives from each jurisdiction. The Supreme Council acts in similar manner to shareholders at an annual meeting and each year elects seven members to the Supreme Board of Directors for three year terms. The twenty-one member board then chooses from its own membership the senior operating officials of the Order, including the Supreme Knight.

State Councils in each of the 50 United States, each province in Canada, and other jurisdictions carved out of member countries are led by State Deputies and other officers elected at state conventions. Territorial Deputies are appointed by the Supreme Knight and lead areas not yet incorporated into State Councils.

District Deputies are appointed by the State Deputy and oversee several local councils, each of which is led by a Grand Knight. Other elected council officers include the Deputy Grand Knight, Chancellor, Warden, Recorder, Treasurer, Advocate, Guards and Trustees. A Chaplain is appointed by the Grand Knight and a Financial Secretary by the Supreme Knight. Council officers are properly addressed by using the title "worthy" (e.g. Worthy Grand Knight). Councils are numbered in the order in which they chartered into

the Order and are named by the local membership. San Salvador Council #1 was named for the first island Columbus landed on in the New World.

The title "Knight" is purely fraternal and is not the equivalent to a sovereign accolade. Therefore *Knights* of Columbus do not rank with Chevaliers and Commanders of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre, the Order of Malta, the Order of St. Gregory the Great, or members of any other historic military or chivalric orders.

Degrees and principles

The Order is dedicated to the principles of Charity, Unity, Fraternity and Patriotism. A First Degree exemplification ceremony, by which a man joins the Order, explicates the virtue of charity. He is then said to be a First Degree Knight of Columbus and after participating in the subsequent degrees, each of which focuses on another virtue, rises to that status. Upon reaching the Third Degree a gentleman is considered a full member. Priests do not participate directly in Degree exemplifications as laymen do, but rather take the degree by observation.

The first ritual handbook was printed in 1885 but contained only sections teaching Unity and Charity. Supreme Knight Mullen, along with primary ritual author Daniel Colwell, believed that the initiation ceremony should be held in three sections "in accord with the 'Trinity of Virtues, Charity, Unity, and Brotherly love.'" The third section, expounding Fraternity, was officially adopted in 1891.

The Fourth Degree is the highest degree of the order. Members of this degree are addressed as "Sir Knight". The primary purpose of the Fourth Degree is to foster the spirit of patriotism and to encourage active Catholic citizenship. Fewer than 20% of Knights join the Fourth Degree, which is optional. A Knight must be active in his council for one year before he can join a Fourth Degree Assembly.

Assemblies are distinct from councils and are led by a separate set of elected officers. The Supreme Board of Directors appoints a Supreme Master and twenty Vice Supreme Masters to govern the Fourth Degree. Each Vice Supreme Master oversees a Province which is then broken up into Districts. The Supreme Master appoints District Masters to supervise several assemblies.

Each assembly is led by a Navigator. Other elected assembly officers include the Friar, Captain, Admiral, Pilot, Scribe, Purser, Controller, Color Corps Commander, Sentinels and Trustees. Assembly officers are properly addressed by using the title "faithful" (e.g. Faithful Navigator). Assemblies are numbered in the order in which they chartered into the Order and are named by the local membership.

Only Fourth Degree Knights may optionally purchase the full regalia and join the Assembly's Color Corps. The Color Corps is the most visible arm of the Knights as they are often seen in parades and other local events wearing their colorful regalia. Official dress for the Color Corps is a black tuxedo, baldric, white gloves, cape and naval

chapeau. White tuxedos may also be used on certain occasions. Baldrics are worn from the right shoulder to left hip and are color specific by nation. In the United States, baldrics are red, white and blue. Service baldrics include a holster for a sword and are worn over the coat while social baldrics are worn under the coat. The colors on a Fourth Degree Knight's cape, and chapeau, denote the office he holds within the Degree. Faithful Navigators and Past Faithful Navigators are permitted to carry a white handled silver sword. Masters and Vice Supreme Masters, as well as Former Masters and Former Vice Supreme Masters, are also denoted by their gold swords.

The need for a patriotic degree was first considered in 1886 and a special plea was made at the National Meeting of 1899. The first Fourth Degree exemplification followed in 1900 with 1,100 Knights participating at the Lenox Lyceum in New York City. Today there are more than 2,500 Assemblies.

Insurance program

Many early members were recent immigrants who often lived in unsanitary conditions and performed hazardous jobs for poor pay. Since its founding, a primary mission of the Knights of Columbus has been to protect families against the financial ruin caused by the death of the breadwinner. While this method originally was intended to provide a core group of people who would support a widow and her children after the death of their husband and father, it has flourished and matured into much more.

Today the Order offers a modern, professional insurance operation with more than \$55 billion of life insurance policies in force. Products include permanent and term life insurance as well as annuities and long term care insurance. Insurance sales grew 19% in 2004, more than three times the rate of the industry at large. The Order holds \$12 billion in assets and had \$1.5 billion in revenue and \$71 million in profits in 2005. This is large enough to rank 72nd on the A.M. Best list of all life insurance companies in North America and places it on the Fortune 1000 list of top companies. Only four other insurers in North America have received the highest ratings from both A.M. Best and Standard & Poor. The Order is certified by the Insurance Marketplace Standards Association for ethical sales practices.

Charitable giving

Charity is the foremost principle of the Knights of Columbus. In the 2005 fraternal year the Order gave \$136 million directly to charity and performed over 63.2 million man hours in voluntary service. Endowed funds of over \$54 million support a number of Church related causes. A Knight's highest duty is to assist the widow or orphan of a fallen brother Knight.

The Knights have a tradition of supporting those with physical and developmental disabilities. More than \$382 million has been given over the past three decades to groups and programs that support the intellectually and physically disabled. One of the largest recipients of funds in this area is the Special Olympics. In addition, the Order's highest

honor, the Gaudium et Spes Award, was given with its \$100,000 honorarium to Jean Vanier, the founder of l'Arche, in 2005. L'Arche is a faith-based network that provides care, in a community setting, for people with severe developmental disabilities.

The *Vicarius Christi* Fund has a corpus of \$20 million and has earned more than \$35 million, since its establishment in 1981, for the Pope's personal charities. The multimillion dollar *Pacem in Terris* Fund aids the Catholic Church's efforts for peace in the Middle East. The Order also has eleven separate funds totaling \$18 million to assist men and women who are discerning religious vocations pay tuition and other expenses.

Days after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 the Order established the \$1 million Heroes Fund. Immediate assistance was given to the families of all full-time professional law enforcement personnel, firefighters and emergency medical workers who lost their lives in the rescue and recovery efforts. Orderwide, more than \$10 million has been raised for Hurricane Katrina relief efforts. On May 6, 2006, \$3 million was dispersed to the Archdiocese of New Orleans and the dioceses of Lafayette, LA, Houma-Thibodaux, LA, Lake Charles, LA, Biloxi, MS and Beaumont, TX. The Order also donated more than \$500,000 to the Indian Ocean Tsunami of 2004 relief efforts.

The Order funded the first renovation of the façade of St. Peter's Basilica in over 350 years.

At the 2006 American Cardinals Dinner, it was announced that the Knights would be giving a gift of \$8 million to The Catholic University of America. The gift is to renovate Kean Hall, an unused building, and rename it McGivney Hall, after Fr. McGivney. The new McGivney Hall will house the John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family, a graduate school of theology affiliated with the Pontifical Lateran University in Rome as well as CUA. Supreme Knight Anderson serves on CUA's board of trustees and is the vice president of the John Paul II Institute. The Knights have a long history of donating to CUA.

The Knights' Satellite Uplink Program has provided funding to broadcast a number of papal events including the annual Easter and Christmas Masses, as well as the World Day of Peace in Assisi, the Peace Summit in Assisi, World Youth Days, the opening of the Holy Door at St. Peter's Basilica's for the Millennium Jubilee, Pope John Paul II's visit to Nazareth and several other events. In missionary territories the Order also pays for the satellite downlink.

United in Charity, a general, unrestricted endowment fund, was introduced at the 2004 Supreme Council meeting to support and ensure the overall long-term charitable and philanthropic goals of the Order. The fund is wholly managed, maintained and operated by Knights of Columbus Charities, Inc., a 501(c)(3) charitable organization. Before United in Charity was formed all requests for funds were met with the general funds of the Order or in combination with specific appeals. Requests from the Church and organizations closely aligned with the mission of the Order often far exceeded the

amount available and it is hoped that eventually United in Charity's earnings will be sufficient to completely fund the Order's charitable priorities.

College councils

While most Knights of Columbus Councils are located at parishes or near multiple parish communities, many men first join the Knights while in college. Over 14,000 Knights are members of 199 College Councils worldwide. College Knights are full members of the Order.

The first College Council was at The Catholic University of America, Keane Council 353 (it has since moved off-campus). The Catholic University of America has a new council, number 9542. Today, the University of Notre Dame Council 1477 has the longest continually running College Council in the country. In 1937, the University of Illinois became the first public university with a Knights of Columbus Council, The Illini Council Number 2782. The Crusader Council No. 2706 at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts, chartered in 1929, is the oldest College Council in New England and the oldest council established on a Jesuit college or university campus.

Some College Councils hold a unique form of the Knights Membership Blitz styled "Go Roman Week". The name is a play on the fact that most fraternities on college campuses are given Greek alphabet designations, while the Knights of Columbus is a Catholic organization. At some Catholic universities, such as the University of St. Thomas, the Knights are the only fraternity permitted on campus.

Each September, the Supreme Council hosts a College Council Conference at their headquarters in New Haven, Connecticut. Awards are given for the greatest increases in membership, the best Youth, Community, Council, Family and Church activities and the overall Outstanding College Council of the year. In 2005, the Outstanding College Council award went to Msgr. Cornelius George O'Keefe Council 8250 at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. In years of an international World Youth Day the Order is represented by members of the College Council Conference Coordinating Committee, who travel with the diocese of the Supreme Chaplain (currently Bishop William E. Lori of the Diocese of Bridgeport).

Emblems of the Order

At the second Supreme Council meeting on May 12, 1883 Supreme Knight James T. Mullen introduced the emblem of the Order. It consists of a shield mounted upon a Formée cross. The Formée cross, with its arms expanding at the ends, is an artistic representation of the cross of Christ. The shield harkens back to medieval knights and the cross represents the Catholicity of the Order. Mounted on the shield is a fasces with an anchor and a short sword crossed behind it. The fasces is a symbol of authority while the anchor is the mariner's symbol for Columbus. The sword, like the shield it is mounted on, was used by knights of yesteryear when engaged upon an errand of mercy. Each Knight receives the emblem as a lapel pin.

Three elements form the emblem of the Fourth Degree. A dove floats over a globe showing the Western Hemisphere, the New World Columbus is credited with discovering. Both are mounted on the Isabella cross, a variation of the Maltese cross with knobs at the end of each of the 8 points. This cross was often found on the tunics and capes of the crusading knights who fought for the Holy Land.

Spiritually, the symbols of the emblem symbolize the three persons of God. The Globe represents God the Father, Creator of the Universe. The Cross is symbolic of God the Son, who redeemed mankind by dying on the cross, and the Dove represents God the Holy Spirit, the Sanctifier of Humanity. The colors of the emblem, the red cross, white dove and blue earth are the colors of the flag of the United States, where the Order was founded. The elements serve as a reminder that the principle of the Degree is patriotism but also that the Order is thoroughly Catholic.

Additionally only officers elected to the chief position in either a council (GK), assembly (FN), chapter (President), or state/territory (State or Territorial Deputy) are referred by the title "Past" once they have left office. All other members having previously held a chief position are referred by the title "Former", the distinction being made between having been elected (Past) and having been appointed (Former).

Political activities

In 1954, lobbying by the Order helped convince the U.S. Congress to add the phrase "under God" to the Pledge of Allegiance. President Dwight Eisenhower wrote to Supreme Knight Luke E. Hart thanking the Knights for their "part in the movement to have the words 'under God' added to our Pledge of Allegiance." Similar lobbying convinced many state legislatures to adopt October 12th as Columbus Day and led to President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's confirmation of Columbus Day as a federal holiday in 1937.

While the Knights of Columbus support political awareness and activity, United States councils are prohibited by tax laws from engaging in candidate endorsement and partisan political activity due to their non-profit status. Nevertheless, President George H. W. Bush appeared at the annual convention during the election year of 1992 and President George W. Bush sent videotaped messages before he attended in person at the 2004 election year convention. Public policy activity is limited to issue-specific campaigns, typically dealing with Catholic family and life issues.

In the United States, the Knights of Columbus often adopts socially conservative positions on public issues. They have adopted resolutions advocating a Culture of Life, defining marriage as the union of one man and one woman, and protecting religious expression in public schools, government, and voluntary organizations such as the Boy Scouts of America. The Order also funded a postcard campaign in 2005 in an attempt to stop the Canadian parliament from legalizing same-sex marriage.

On April 9, 2006 the Board of Directors commented on the "U.S. immigration policy [which] has become an intensely debated and divisive issue on both sides of the border between the U.S. and Mexico." They called "upon the President and the U.S. Congress to agree upon immigration legislation that not only gains control over the process of immigration, but also rejects any effort to criminalize those who provide humanitarian assistance to undocumented immigrants, and provides these immigrants an avenue by which they can emerge from the shadows of society and seek legal residency and citizenship in the U.S."

Famous knights

Many famous Catholic men from all over the world are Knights of Columbus. In the United States several of the most notable include John F. Kennedy, Samuel Alito, an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States and Jeb Bush, the Governor of Florida and brother of President George W. Bush. Daniel Daly, a two-time Medal of Honor winner once described by the commandant of the Marine Corps as "the most outstanding Marine of all time" was also a Knight of Columbus.

Many notable clerics are also Knights, including William Cardinal Levada, the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Sean Patrick Cardinal O'Malley, the Archbishop of Boston and Cardinal Jaime Sin, the former Archbishop of Manila. In the world of sports, Vince Lombardi, the famed former coach of the Green Bay Packers, James Connolly, the first Olympic Gold Medal champion in modern times, and baseball star Babe Ruth were Knights.