



Knights of Columbus Council 10872



History of the Knights of Columbus Expanded

The Knights of Columbus was founded by an [Irish-American Catholic priest](#), By The [Venerable](#) Father [Michael J. McGivney](#) in [New Haven, Connecticut](#).

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 had originally conceived of the name "Sons of Columbus" but [James T. Mullen](#), 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' arrival in 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 bridge the division between the Irish-Catholic founders of the Order and Catholic immigrants of other nationalities living in Connecticut.

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.



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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. On March 15, 2008, [Pope Benedict XVI](#) approved a decree recognizing the heroic virtue of Father Michael J. McGivney, founder of the Knights of Columbus. The pope's declaration significantly advances the priest's process toward sainthood and gives the parish priest the distinction of "Venerable Servant of God." If his cause is successful, he will be the first priest born in the [United States](#) to be canonized as a [Saint](#).

Degrees

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 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.

Fourth Degree

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](#).

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 expanded into much more. Today the Order offers a modern, professional insurance operation.

Charitable Giving

Charity is the foremost principle of the Knights of Columbus. In the 2008 fraternal year the Order gave more than \$150 million directly to charity and performed over 68 million man hours in volunteer 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.



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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](#).

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.^[26]

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.

Order wide, more than \$10 million has been raised for [Hurricane Katrina](#) relief efforts. On May 6, 2006, \$3 million was disbursed 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 and \$50,000 to help victims of [Typhoon Durian](#) in the Philippines.^[28]

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 [Millennial Jubilee](#), [Pope John Paul II's](#) visit to [Nazareth](#) and several other events. In missionary territories the Order also pays for the satellite downlink.

Ever since its founding the Knights of Columbus has been involved in [evangelization](#). In 1948, the Knights started the [Catholic Information Service](#) (CIS) to provide low-cost Catholic publications for the general public as well as for parishes, schools, retreat houses, military installations, correctional facilities, legislatures, the medical community, and for individuals who request them. Since then, CIS has printed millions of booklets, and thousands of people have enrolled in CIS correspondence and on-line courses.



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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](#). Similar lobbying convinced many [state legislatures](#) to adopt October 12 as [Columbus Day](#) and led to President [Franklin Delano Roosevelt's](#) confirmation of Columbus Day as a federal holiday in 1937.

The Knights of Columbus support political awareness and activity. Public policy activity is limited to issue-specific campaigns, typically dealing with Catholic family and [life](#) issues.

The Knights of Columbus have adopted resolutions advocating a [Culture of Life](#) defining [marriage](#) as the union of one man and one woman. The Order also funded a postcard campaign in 2005 in an attempt to stop the [Canadian parliament](#) from legalizing same-sex marriage.