



Our Mission to Build the Domestic Church and Strengthen Parish Life

Through a new Orderwide initiative, the Knights will better serve Catholic families and the Church

by Supreme Knight Carl A. Anderson



On Nov. 20, I delivered the following address at the Order's midyear organizational meeting of state deputies in San Antonio. I encourage all brother Knights to read and reflect on these remarks, in which I outline key principles for the future growth and work of the Knights of Columbus.

IN HIS APOSTOLIC exhortation *Evangelium Gaudium (The Joy of the Gospel)*, Pope Francis called for a new missionary spirit among Catholics. “By her very nature the Church is missionary,” the pope wrote. “She abounds in effective charity and a compassion that understands, assists and promotes” (179). This challenge has special resonance for Knights of Columbus, especially throughout North America, where we have benefited in so many ways from the sacrifice of countless missionaries.

The great Catholic institutions of our country were built by men and women filled with a great missionary spirit. Although Father Michael McGivney would probably not have described himself as a missionary, throughout his lifetime the United States remained “mission” territory in the eyes of the Vatican.

In this regard, we remember the words of Pope Benedict XVI during his 2008 visit to the United States when he named Father McGivney as an example of the missionary spirit

that built the Catholic Church in America.

On that occasion, Pope Benedict urged Catholics in America to “move together toward that true spiritual renewal desired by the [Second Vatican] Council, a renewal which can only strengthen the Church in that holiness and unity indispensable for the effective proclamation of the Gospel in today's world.”

The pope continued, “Was not this unity of vision and purpose — rooted in faith and a spirit of constant conversion and self-sacrifice — the secret of the impressive growth of the Church in this country? We need but think of the remarkable accomplishment of that exemplary American priest, the Venerable Michael McGivney, whose vision and zeal led to the establishment of the Knights of Columbus.”

This missionary spirit has been the lifeblood of the Knights of Columbus. How else can we account for the fact that within four decades of its founding, our Order had spread across the United States and Canada and had begun activities in the Philippines, Mexico and Cuba?

That same missionary spirit led the Order to establish a network of facilities throughout Europe during the First World War to serve countless members of the American and Canadian military. And then after the

Great War to open athletic facilities in Rome to serve and help evangelize the youth of that city — a work that continues to this day.

We see that same missionary spirit today as the Order begins activities in Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania and Korea, and as our charitable programs change thousands of lives for the better in places like Haiti, Uganda, Vietnam and Iraq.

This missionary spirit has been a constant dynamic throughout our history. It has always encouraged us to seek new challenges and to adapt to new situations — and to do so always in faithful service responding to the needs of our Church.

THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

Following the Second Vatican Council, it became clear that the vitality of our parishes and of our Catholic families was being tested as never before. Thousands of priests and religious left their ministries, and vocations to the priesthood and religious life plummeted. The widespread scourges of no-fault divorce, cohabitation outside of marriage, single-parent families and abortion made Catholic family life appear at times as the new “terra incognita.” At the same time, the Second Vatican Council called upon the laity to assume a greater role in meeting these challenges.



The Knights of Columbus responded with dramatic new initiatives to better meet the needs of our families and our parishes.

For example, we initiated one of the largest vocations programs in history. Through our Refund Support Vocations Program and scholarships, we have provided more than \$68 million to more than 115,000 men and women pursuing vocations.

We also began a shift away from establishing local councils dependent upon home association facilities. Instead, we promoted the establishment of parish-based councils aligned with Father McGivney's original vision for the Order.

And we began to encourage a greater focus on programs that would include more family members in our activities and would more directly support Catholic family life.

The result has been a tremendous success. This shift has opened the door to thousands of new councils that could not have taken on the financial burden of building or purchasing a meeting hall. At the same time, this shift opened the door of membership to hundreds of thousands of new brother Knights.

Similarly, many of the thousands of priests we have helped financially are now brother Knights who proudly serve as our council chaplains.

And this shift has done even more. It has led to the extraordinary growth of the Knights of Columbus in the charity we provide our neighbors — literally hundreds of millions of dollars and hundreds of millions of volunteer service hours.

Active Knights of Columbus councils are bringing our principles of charity, unity and fraternity, as well as *our energy and activities*, to enliven and strengthen thousands of parishes.

During this same time the Knights of Columbus sharpened its mission to better support Catholic family life.

This was always one of the core missions of the Order envisioned by Father McGivney. It was the reason the Order developed fraternal benefits to support widows and orphans. It led to the establishment of thousands of youth and family activities, to our support of parish-based Catholic schools, and to developing our spiritual and catechetical programs directed to families, such as our Catholic Information Service, our Pilgrim Virgin Icon program and Fathers for Good.

More recently, the Order has implemented a new program that brings together both our support of parishes

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and our support of families. It is titled *Building the Domestic Church: The Family Fully Alive*. Already, many thousands of local Knights of Columbus councils and families have begun participating in this program.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

In its 2012 document titled *Disciples Called to Witness*, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops made clear the connection between the parish and the family in the new evangelization.

Regarding parish life, the bishops' document stated, "It is the responsibility of both pastors and laity to ensure that [the doors of the parish] are always open. Evangelization must remain rooted in the parish. It is in the parish that one becomes engaged with the Church community, learns how to become a disciple of Christ, is nurtured by Scripture, is nourished by the sacraments, and ultimately becomes

an evangelizer. Successful evangelization and catechetical initiatives must be focused on the parish."

The document then went on to say this about the family's role: "A culture of witness is sustained within the Church through marriage and the family. ... It is within the Sacrament of Matrimony that the husband and wife evangelize, become evangelized, and share their witness of the faith to their children and to society."

It further noted, "The family, called the domestic Church, is often the first place where one experiences and is formed in the faith." And it concluded by quoting Pope Benedict XVI's 2011 address to the Pontifical Council for the Family that "the new evangelization depends largely on the domestic Church."

Thus we see a providential convergence of three initiatives of the Knights of Columbus: the development of thousands of new parish-based councils; new programs to strengthen family life, all leading to a deeper understanding of the family as domestic church; and our increasing commitment to serve the Church's mission of a new evangelization through the parish.

Indeed, each of these three initiatives points to the Knights of Columbus as the organization best situated to enliven and strengthen parish life. We are truly positioned today to move to a new level of service as the strong right arm of our parish churches.

Now the time has come for us to accelerate these initiatives as they affect our work in parishes and our work to strengthen Christian family life.

The family as domestic church is central to both the work of the new evangelization and to the future sustainability of our parishes — as well as the future sustainability of the Order. But the Catholic family cannot perform this important mission on its



own. The reason is simple: As Blessed Paul VI observed, the family can only truly be a domestic church when its daily life “mirrors the various aspects of the entire Church.” And for this to become a reality, the family must be more fully integrated into the sacramental life of the parish.

Knights of Columbus parish-based councils today are not only places that provide invaluable support to parish life in terms of charitable and social activities. They are a primary place to support the evangelization of family life through the mission of the domestic church. *Our councils can do this by more fully integrating families into the life of the parish through the many programs of our parish-based councils.*

If we do this, then we will continue the legacy of Father McGivney — a legacy which, as Pope Benedict observed, was to promote spiritual renewal among Catholics by strengthening them in holiness and unity. And as a parish priest, Father McGivney saw that this renewal could be assisted in powerful ways in the parish by the new organization he had established.

THE RENEWAL OF PARISH AND FAMILY LIFE

Today, we are determined to continue this work of renewal and unity. In this way, we will also realize the mission that St. John Paul II identified in *Eclesia in America*: “The renewal of the Church in America will not be possible without the active presence of the laity. Therefore they are largely responsible for the future of the Church” (44).

The pastoral visit of Pope Francis to the United States and his attendance at the World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia present a historic opportunity for Catholics throughout the world — and especially for Catholics in North America.

During the World Meeting of Families, Pope Francis called for a new alliance between the Church

and the family in order that Catholic families might receive greater encouragement and support.

“May God grant us this gift of a renewed closeness between the family and the Church,” the pope said. “Families need it, the Church needs it, and we pastors need it.”

But for millions of Catholic families, this new alliance will become a reality only if they can find this greater support within their local parish. There is no Catholic organization better positioned for this task today in thousands of parishes than the Knights of Columbus.

Today, the Knights of Columbus is providentially positioned to play a key role in the new alliance between the Church and the family called for by Pope Francis. But for us to do so requires that we adopt new methods.

We must devote even greater efforts to our fundamental mission of charity, unity and fraternity, and we must do so with even greater attention to the needs and the future of our parishes and our families. What is necessary now is our greater involvement in the renewal of parish and family life.

To meet this need we will have to do some things differently. Our councils will have to become even more active in our parish communities. We will have to stop duplicating activities that are more appropriately done by and through the parish. We will have to focus more on programs that support Catholic families in their mission as a domestic church.

For many councils, doing these things will require making choices between what is good and what is better. Often they may have to choose between what our Catholic community may have needed in the past and what it needs today *and in the future*.

A NEW K OF C INITIATIVE

Therefore, I am announcing a new Orderwide initiative to strengthen both our parishes and our families. It is titled *Building the Domestic Church*

While Strengthening Our Parish. This new initiative builds upon our past programs and accomplishments. At the same time, it requires that we do some things differently in the future.

First, this initiative requires that we accelerate the process of moving *away* from the home association system and moving *toward* more parish-based councils. We should no longer expend valuable resources supporting home associations whose activities are outside the mission of the Knights of Columbus or of the Church.

The deployment of our resources should be made on the basis of mission integrity with our core principles of charity, unity and fraternity. Some home associations, for example, served important social purposes in the past, such as hosting receptions and parties, as well as degree ceremonies and business meetings. However, because of the need to generate a constant stream of revenue just to maintain their buildings, many home associations have been forced into the facilities rental business, in which they are now subject to market forces, government regulations, and liability risks. Needless to say, this situation has diluted the mission integrity of the councils that use those buildings. These home associations may, at times, actually impede the work of the Order.

For this reason, I am asking every council using facilities owned by a home association to undertake a serious assessment of how that relationship supports the council in its fulfillment of the core mission of the Knights of Columbus. And every council using facilities owned by a home association should, as soon as practicable, enter into the contractual agreements required in a resolution adopted by the Supreme Council at its convention in 2014.

Second, our Building the Domestic Church While Strengthening Our Parish initiative requires that our parish-based councils move toward



greater integration into the life of our parishes.

Councils should begin to phase out the duplication of programs that may compete with parish activities. Instead, we will use our resources of time, talent and money to strengthen parish-based and parish-sponsored programs.

One important area where this will occur is youth-based parish ministry. Perhaps more than at any other time, our youth are in need of greater evangelization, catechesis and pastoral care. This pastoral care must take place within the parish and at the direction and supervision of its pastor. Today our youth need more not less involvement in the life of their parish.

There is no better organization today in so many parishes than the Knights of Columbus to assist our pastors in this responsibility. Councils should seek ways to work more closely with parish-based youth ministry programs. And councils should also seek new ways to support the activities of parish-based schools.

The Board of Directors has thus decided that as part of this new initiative, local units of the Knights of Columbus will no longer sponsor Boy Scout troops. Councils should move to end sponsorship as soon as practically possible — in many cases by the end of 2015 and in no case later than 2016.

Instead, local units should encourage troops that they presently sponsor to become parish-sponsored troops. Such new parish-sponsored Boy Scout troops can and should receive the volunteer and financial support of local councils. But the key change is that the mission and activity of scouting will be more properly integrated into a comprehensive strategy of the parish's youth ministry under the direction of the pastor. After considerable deliberation, we believe that this is the best way to provide for the fu-

ture sustainability of an authentic Catholic scouting program and of the Catholic identity of the young men who participate in it.

Additionally, councils should seek to more closely integrate the activities of Squires circles and their other youth activities within the youth ministry goals of the parish. Councils and assemblies in the United States and Canada that do not presently sponsor Squires Circles are encouraged not to institute new circles. Instead, these local units are encouraged to support existing parish-based youth ministry programs. In parishes where youth

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ministry programs can be improved, councils should work with their chaplain and pastor to find ways to begin new or more effective parish-based youth programs.

In the future, youth activities of the Order should be measured by how they assist the overall goals of parish youth ministry programs and how well they are incorporated within our Building the Domestic Church While Strengthening Our Parish program. As we move forward we will incorporate many existing programs into this initiative.

During this fraternal year, councils that formulate their activities through the Surge with Service Program should give priority within the Family Activity category to those activities related to our Building the Domestic Church program; they should give priority within the Church Activity category to those

programs which more fully integrate their council's activities within the life of their parish; and they should give priority within the Youth Activity category to those programs which strengthen or support parish-based youth ministry. They should also consider how their activities in the categories of council, Community and Culture of Life may be enhanced through greater participation by the wider parish community.

THE NEW EVANGELIZATION

When St. John Paul II spoke of the new evangelization he explained that the content of evangelization would not be new, but that this would be an evangelization “new in its ardor, methods and expression.”

This is this same dynamic that guides our mission today. The “content” of the Knights of Columbus has not changed. We are a Catholic brotherhood based upon the principles of charity, unity, fraternity and patriotism. We are dedicated to faithful and unparalleled service to the Church. But what will change is the “expression” of that service so that our work may become even more relevant and effective.

The changes outlined here may be difficult for some. Change is never easy. But the proven record of the past half century is clear: The closer the Knights of Columbus becomes to parish life, the closer we work with our parish priests, and the more we support Catholic families, the more our Order grows in membership and charity.

The challenge of effective leadership is to lead change, not to be led by change. The leadership of the Knights of Columbus has always succeeded in leading change. And this is what I am confident you and I will succeed in doing in the days ahead.

Vivat Jesus!