

The Knights of Columbus began in the Lehigh Valley just sixteen years after the Order was founded by the Venerable Servant of God, Father Michael J. McGivney. Founded in 1896, Trinity Council 313, Bethlehem, and Union Council 345, Easton were two of the earliest councils in Pennsylvania. Calvary Council 528, Allentown, followed shortly thereafter. These councils became the backbone of fraternal and charitable activities for Catholic men and their families in the Lehigh Valley. 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, their families and their faith. Patriotism was added to the three principles of the Order: charity, unity and fraternity. Lehigh Valley Knights demonstrated their patriotism, proudly served their country during World Wars I and II. In between the wars, the Knights continued to grow as new councils formed in Bangor, Northampton, Nazareth, Emmaus and Bethlehem. Trinity Council hosted the Knights of Columbus State Convention in 1940 on the Southside of Bethlehem. Conventioneers swelled the hotels of the Bethlehem, Allentown and Easton areas. The Lehigh Valley hosted another convention in 1970, when the Allentown, Bethlehem, Easton and Emmaus Councils jointly hosted a convention at the George Washington Motor Lodge in Allentown. The 114<sup>th</sup> Annual State Convention will be held this year back in the Lehigh Valley at the Holiday Inn Conference Center, Fogelsville.

The focal point of the council for conducting business and sharing fellowship was the council home. The homes also served in the time of need. During the flood of 1955, the Union Council Home was used as a temporary housing for those displaced by rising flood waters. Also during the mid 1950's, two Knights of Columbus Assemblies, Lehigh Valley Assembly 931, Bethlehem, and Pope Pius Assembly 941, Easton, were formed. Assembly 931 changed its name to Bishop Thomas J. Welsh Assembly in 2010 in honor of the departed bishop. These assemblies provide Honor Guards for a number of funerals, confirmations, ordinations, and parades.

In 1974, Art Yohe Jr, Calvary Council became the first Lehigh Valley Knight to become Pennsylvania State Deputy, the highest elected Knights of Columbus official in the state. F. Parker Lessel, Queenship of Mary Council, Northampton become the area's second state deputy, serving from 1990 to 1992. In 1976, the Knights of Columbus held a Bicentennial celebration to recognize that the United State was founded 200 years ago in an atmosphere of respect for God. The event was spearheaded by Trinity Council; the Mass and festivities at Allentown College involved 11 Councils and 2 Fourth Degree Assemblies.

The Lehigh Valley began to grow in the early 1990's as new businesses and homes were built. The Knight's presence began to grow as well. In 1992, new parish-based councils were formed at St Joseph the Worker, Orefield and St Paul, Allentown. A few years later another council formed at St Ann, Emmaus. Parish based councils offer a permanent presence and made the "strong right arm of the Catholic Church" within reach of the local pastor. In the last ten years, the expansion of parish-based councils has accelerated with new councils at St Rocco's, Martin's Creek; the Cathedral of St Catharine of Siena, Allentown; Sacred Heart of Jesus, Allentown;

Sacred Heart, Bath; St Joseph, Limeport; Assumption BVM, Colesville; St Theresa, Hellertown; St Anne, Bethlehem; and St Thomas More, Allentown. Most recently, the 4<sup>th</sup> Degree Cathedral Assembly was formed in 2010, along with Bethlehem Catholic High School Squires Circle 5528, a youth organization affiliated with the Knights of Columbus.

Today, the Knights are the largest Catholic fraternal service organization in the world. Locally, what began as just 3 Lehigh Valley councils has grown to 19 thriving councils with over 2500 Catholic men. These councils support their priests, parishes and communities with many hours of charitable service and generous donations. They coordinate vocations support and have donated tens of thousands of dollars in the last several years to help young men become priests and young women pursue their vocation to religious life. The Diocese Pro-life Essay Contest was started by local Knights councils and assemblies. Knights of Columbus councils support Catholic schools, as well as a variety of charitable organizations. These include: Ecumenical Soup Kitchen, New Bethany Ministries, Caring Hearts, Habitat for Humanity, Mercy Special Learning Center, ARC of the Lehigh Valley, Special Olympics, Mary's Shelter, the Veterans' Sanctuary, and countless others.