

A Founding Vision, A Visionary Founder

3/11/2014

“Resolved by this assembly: That Michael J. McGivney, Matthew C. O’Connor, Cornelius J. Driscoll, James J. Mullen, John J. Kerrigan, Daniel Colwell, and William M. Geary, and all other persons now associated with them under the name of the Knights of Columbus, together with all other such person as may hereafter become associated with them, and their successors, are constituted a body corporate and politic by the name of the Knights of Columbus.

“The purpose for which said corporation is formed are the following: (a) of rendering pecuniary aid to its members, their families and beneficiaries of members and their families; (b) of rendering mutual aid and assistance to its sick, disabled and needy members and their families; (c) of promoting social and intellectual intercourse among its members and their families, and (d) of promoting and conducting educational, charitable, religious, social welfare, war relief and welfare, and public relief work.”

~ Excerpted from the Charter of the Knights of Columbus, Granted by the General Assembly of the State of Connecticut, Approved March 29, 1882.

As the Connecticut winter drew to a close in March of 1882, few could have imagined that the new Catholic organization just approved by the General Assembly would amount to much.

Secret societies and fraternal organizations were abundant. And besides, Catholics weren’t well-liked or highly thought-of. There was even some Catholic resistance to the idea of the Knights of Columbus. Local priests took issue with the concept. A similar Catholic group even refused to allow Father McGivney to establish a branch of their organization in Connecticut.

It was seemingly inconceivable that an organization, begun in such unwelcoming circumstances, would go on to become one of the world’s largest Catholic fraternal organizations.

It was baffling to think that a group of destitute Irish immigrants, fighting against unemployment, discrimination and diseases in New Haven, Conn., would cause a spark that would light up the world with more than 1.8 million members in more than a dozen countries.

It was so improbable that a group of men dedicated to serving the needs of their Catholic community would go on to donate nearly \$1.5 billion dollars to charitable causes and spend 673 million hours volunteering in just the last decade.

And it seemed so unlikely that a Catholic priest, who spent nearly every waking minute attending to the spiritual and material needs of his parishioners, would be the founder of one of North America’s largest life insurance companies.

Inconceivable? Baffling? Improbable? Unlikely? Perhaps — but not to Father McGivney. And not to the 75 men who dared to answer his call to found the Knights of Columbus. It is his vision — and theirs — that we celebrate each March as “Founder’s Day.”

And what, exactly, did they found? Father McGivney, we know, did not just found a charitable society, but a society of mutual aid through which members would insure their own well-being, and that of their families, with the help of their brother Knights.

Father McGivney, we're told in *Parish Priest*, began the founding of the Order and its insurance program with "an entrepreneurial zeal." Determined to provide financial protection for his parishioners and their families, he "had to delve into the subject of insurance and read all of the fine print, of which there was plenty."

Before deciding that a new group was in order, Father McGivney researched the finer points of other fraternal benefit organizations' insurance programs, ultimately concluding that their coverage was insufficient.

And when it came time to crunch the numbers and establish the newly-founded Knights' insurance program, it was Father McGivney himself who set down the terms and reported them to the members and other parishes in the diocese.

"In the way that Father McGivney had organized the insurance," *Parish Priest* says, "nearly anyone could afford coverage."

Father McGivney was devoted to his mission, working tirelessly until his premature death at age 38.

How proud must Father McGivney and his brother Knights be to know that the program he founded continues to provide affordable, quality insurance to Knights and their families?

How proud must they be to know that the Knights of Columbus continues to provide insurance by brother Knights, for brother Knights, protecting Catholic families for generations?

How proud must they be to know that the Knights of Columbus, with over \$92 billion in force and nearly 2 million active contracts, is protecting more Knights than ever before?

Not nearly as proud as we are to call Venerable Father Michael J. McGivney our beloved founder.

This March, let's make Father McGivney's priority our own. Let's continue his mission of protecting Catholic families from destitution and financial ruin by making sure that our families are protected with insurance for brother Knights, by brother Knights. After all, it's part of what being a Knight is all about.