

Why We Offer Insurance

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September is designated as Life Insurance Awareness Month. It's an opportunity for insurance producers like the Knights of Columbus to educate consumers on the value of life insurance, and on the variety of life insurance products, options, and uses.

But, before you think about how you and your family would use life insurance, and what products and options you would need, there are a few more basic questions that need to be answered: What is life insurance? And why do the Knights of Columbus care about it?

It may seem counter-intuitive that a Catholic organization would be in the life-insurance business. It may seem odd that one of the world's largest *charitable* organizations is also one of North America's largest insurers. But it's not odd at all. Providing financial protection for Catholic families has been at the core of our mission since the beginning.

Two Problems, One Solution

The drive to offer financial protection for Catholic families comes from our venerable founder Father Michael J. McGivney. On numerous occasions in his brief life, Father McGivney witnessed first-hand the devastation wrought by the untimely death of a breadwinner. Two instances are particularly instructive.

In the summer of 1873, when young Michael was a seminarian in Canada, he was forced to hit pause on his theological studies and return home to aid his family after the sudden death of his father Patrick. "He was reeling," we learn in *Parish Priest*. "He packed his belongings, knowing that he would never return to Sainte-Marie, and went home..."

"Money for tuition was no longer available," the authors go on to say. "Even if the McGivney family could survive without Michael's financial support, it was not clear that he could survive without help from them – or someone." Michael went on to continue his studies, after receiving a scholarship from the then-Diocese of Hartford.

Less than a decade later, McGivney, now an associate pastor at St. Mary's Church in New Haven, Conn., was faced with an all-too-similar situation.

Parishioner Edward Downes, Jr., a good friend of Father McGivney's, was forced to quit the seminary and return home to New Haven to support his widowed mother and his twelve siblings when his father died unexpectedly.

In those days, the court had the right to assign children to public institutions if it had reason to believe

that their families couldn't properly care for and support them. The Downses were able to account for most of their family members, but were facing the very real prospect of losing their three teenage boys unless each had a guardian to sponsor and stand for him in court, and provide \$1,500 to back the claim to guardianship.

On February 6, 1882 – the very same day as the first organizational meeting for what would become the Knights of Columbus – Father McGivney appeared in court to stand as guardian for Edward's brother Alfred. The court accepted, and McGivney was satisfied with the outcome, but not with the recurring nightmare of financial hardship.

“Even though he was only a young man,” *Parish Priest* says of McGivney, “he was filled with a lifetime of anger and frustration at the sense of doom that settled over nearly every family that lost its wage earner....On the afternoon of February 6, he was more determined than ever that what had happened to the Downses family need not happen to anyone else.”

The Mission Begins – And Continues

And in that spirit, Father McGivney set off with “entrepreneurial zeal” to found the Knights of Columbus. In his own words, Father McGivney wanted the organization to “to unite the men of our Faith throughout the Diocese of Hartford, that we may thereby gain strength to *aid* each other in time of sickness; to *provide* for decent burial, and to render pecuniary assistance to the families of the deceased members. “

He knew what life was like without that assistance. The initial system of “life insurance” designed by Father McGivney was a simple one, a pass-the-hat system that each member participated in to help support his brother Knights.

But as the organization grew council-by-council, state-by-state, and country-by-country, so too did the insurance program, and the pass-the-hat system was transformed into one of the largest and most highly-rated life insurance programs in North America.

The Knights of Columbus has passed many milestones and received many accolades along the way: \$95 billion of life insurance in force, 39 consecutive A++, Superior ratings for financial strength from A.M. Best, 13 consecutive years of sales growth, designation as a 2014 “World's Most Ethical Company,” but all that is secondary.

What matters most is that we continue to fulfill Father McGivney's mission of offering and providing financial protection for Catholic families.

2014 is not 1882. Times are different. Laws are different. Economies are different. But even for those families who may have slightly more than next-to-nothing, insurance protection can be the difference between getting by and getting evicted. In its role as the premier Catholic life insurer, the Knights of Columbus continues to provide a valuable and noble service.

That's why we offer life insurance.

It's not for the \$8 billion in annual sales volume, or the \$95 billion in force, or the 1.8 million policies on the books. It's not the amounts that count, but the impact of those dollars.

It's the homes saved, the college tuitions provided, the Catholic funerals paid for, and the families shielded that create the legacy of protection that would make Father McGivney proud.

It's those things that are the hallmark of the Knights of Columbus Insurance program.

This September, as we observe Life Insurance Awareness month, take the time to reach out to your dedicate Knights of Columbus field agent – who is himself a brother Knight – and see what we might be able to offer to you and your family.