

# CHAPLAIN'S HANDBOOK



WHEN A KNIGHT ACTS *selflessly*,  
he acts on behalf of the world.



**KNIGHTS  
OF COLUMBUS**  
IN SERVICE TO ONE. IN SERVICE TO ALL.

# **CHAPLAIN'S HANDBOOK**

**KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS  
SUPREME COUNCIL HEADQUARTERS  
1 COLUMBUS PLAZA  
NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT 06510-3326**

## COUNCIL OFFICERS' CHECKLIST

DUE DATE	FORM/REPORT/ACTION
July 1	Council <b>Per Capita and Catholic Advertising Levied</b> by Supreme Council. (\$2.25 per member)
July 1	Report of <b>Council Officers.</b> (#185)
July 10	Suspension of Council if <b>April Catholic Advertising Fund</b> is not paid.
August 1	<b>Service Program Personnel</b> Report (#365)
August 15	Semiannual <b>Audit Report.</b> (#1295)
September 1	<b>Columbian Squires Officers and Counsellors Report.</b> (#468)
October 10	Suspension of Council if <b>July Per Capita Tax</b> is not paid.
January 1	Council <b>Per Capita and Catholic Advertising Levied</b> by Supreme Council. (\$2.25 per member)
January 10	Suspension of Council if <b>October Catholic Advertising Fund</b> is not paid.
January 31	Annual <b>Survey of Fraternal Activity.</b> (#1728)
February	Check with your state deputy or state program director on due dates for entries in <b>State/International Service Program Awards Contest</b> – Church, Community, Council, Family, Youth.
February	Check with your state deputy or state program director on due dates for entries in <b>State/International “Family of the Year”</b> contest.
February 15	Semiannual <b>Audit Report.</b> (#1295)
April 1	Applications for <b>Refund Support Vocations Program</b> (#2863) due at Supreme Council office between now and June 30.
April 10	Suspension of Council if <b>January Per Capita tax</b> is not paid.
June 30	<b>Columbian Award Application.</b> (#SP-7).
Immediately	<b>Membership Document</b> (#100). Submit after initiation.
Immediately	<b>Columbian Squires Activity Report</b> form (#1616). Submit after each activity has been conducted.
As Required	<b>“Notice of Intent to Suspend.”</b> (#1845)
Monthly	<b>“Family of the Month”</b> selection. (#1993)

## **FOREWORD**

*The material in this manual is not intended to be all-inclusive, since many activities which may be appropriate will be governed by local conditions. The manual is a guide to assist all council chaplains in the execution of their duties and to increase the understanding among council officers of the chaplain's role in the success of the council.*

*It would be appreciated if, when a chaplain is being transferred, he would deliver the manual to his successor, so that the new chaplain will have it immediately after his appointment.*



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## **THE CHAPLAIN'S APPOINTMENT**

The laws of the Knights of Columbus (Section 128) state:

*“The Grand Knight, Deputy Grand Knight and Board of Trustees may annually select a priest to act as Chaplain, but such selection must be made in accordance with any rules established by the bishop of the diocese in which the council is located.”*

Therefore, the laws provide that the chaplain shall be a priest and that the selection be made by specific officers of the council – the grand knight, deputy grand knight and board of trustees.

It is the responsibility of the grand knight to determine what, if any, rules the bishop of the diocese has established for the appointment of chaplains. If such rules have been established, they must be followed.

## **ROLE OF THE CHAPLAIN**

The chaplain of a Knights of Columbus council . . . must recognize that the Order is a Catholic lay organization founded by a priest. Father McGivney founded the Order, to be sure, but it was administered and supported by Catholic laymen. In our day, especially with the Second Vatican Council and Revised Code of Canon Law in 1983, specifying clearly and unequivocally the rights and duties of the Catholic laity, the Knights of Columbus itself, as a fraternal society, has its own special role to play in the Church. The chaplain, who always is a priest, must recognize this fact and rejoice in it.

Given his education and priestly formation, and as founder of the Order, Father McGivney might well say that it is the priest-chaplain who is called to exercise his apostolic ministry for the Knights and their families, even as he is called to do so for all those to whom he has been assigned. For the council,



and in collaboration with his bishop, he is the teacher, the shepherd, the sanctifier of souls.

Since it is his calling and therefore his duty, he should collaborate with local, state and supreme officers to develop ways and means to preach God's Word to brother Knights and their families, to help them to be more firmly rooted in faith, hope, and charity, and to further their growth in the knowledge of their Catholic faith so as to be able witnesses of the mystery of salvation everywhere and to everyone. The Knights of Columbus provide for the priest-chaplain-teacher a ready audience and even more, a docile one, eager to be taught more about the faith and the Catholic Church.

Like Father McGivney, the priest-chaplain is a shepherd of the flock. The Order represents a special flock, one that is highly organized, one, as we know, that is specifically structured – even worldwide. Surely the priest-chaplain must want to know his flock, to help individuals be faithful, for their families to be true “domestic churches,” and for his council to be dedicated to the ideals of the Order. All these duties are integrated into the apostolic mission of the Church.

As a priest he is present as much as possible to encourage special attention to adolescents and youth, to be available to the poor and elderly, to the disabled and underprivileged. For in all these areas of charitable and social service activities are to be found Knights of Columbus and their families. The chaplain's presence by word and example has an impact and influence that only the Lord can measure. Knights love their priests . . . and like to have them around as good shepherds.

Perhaps since Father McGivney himself was a very holy priest, he would highlight the sanctifying role of the priest-chaplain. Surely he would note the importance, the essential character, of the Eucharistic celebration in the lives of Knights and their families. For the Eucharistic sacrifice “is the center and culmination of the whole life of the Christian community” and certainly of the Knights of Columbus council on every level. As chaplain, he would plan with officers and members

the ways and means to promote attendance at Mass, even daily Mass, the frequent and fervent reception of the Sacraments, especially of penance and reconciliation and, of course, the “trademark” of the Order, the recitation of Our Lady’s Rosary. For it is holiness that is the priority for the chaplain; that identification with the Lord Jesus that provides the impulse, the power for mission.

How would Father McGivney summarize the role of the chaplain? Maybe he would paraphrase the old definition of the priest:

To live in the midst of the community and council without wishing to dominate by direction. To be a member of each council and of each member’s family but possessed by none, to feel all suffering; to penetrate all secrets; to heal all wounds; to go from Knights and their families to God and offer Him their praise; to return from God to Knights and their families to bring God and hope; to have a heart of fire for charity and a heart of bronze for chastity; to teach, to pardon, console and bless always. My God, what a singular privilege is yours, priest-chaplain of the Knights of Columbus.

## **ORGANIZED ACTIVITY**

A priest has many obligations in his parish which require his time and his effort. Therefore, as early as possible – preferably in June, after the election of officers – there should be a meeting of the council officers, including the council chaplain, for the purpose of discussing the particular programs in which the council chaplain will participate.

Also, as soon as the director of Church activities has been appointed, he and his committee chairmen should meet with the council chaplain and discuss a tentative program for the year and to determine the particular participation of the chaplain in these programs.

The council chaplain is a member of the council vocations committee and can be especially helpful to the chairman of this committee. The programs developed by the Supreme Council Vocations Committee and the state vocations committee should be implemented on the local level, along with other

programs developed specifically within the diocese and by the council. Many of these programs are described in the *Vocations Handbook* (#1492) and the *Surge . . . with Service* booklet (#962) included in the “Surge . . . with Service” kit mailed at the start of the fraternal year to every financial secretary of record.

## **NATURE OF THE ORDER**

It is well that the nature and objectives of the Order be understood. The Knights of Columbus was organized as a fraternal benefit society in New Haven, Conn., in 1882 by the Reverend Michael Joseph McGivney, a curate at St. Mary’s Parish in New Haven, and a small group of Catholic men for the primary purpose of providing protection for the families of its members. The Order was granted a charter by the Legislature of the State of Connecticut on March 29, 1882. The charter has been so amended as to now provide that *“the purposes for which said corporation is formed are the following –*

- (a) of rendering pecuniary aid to its members and beneficiaries of members;*
- (b) of rendering mutual aid and assistance to its sick, disabled and needy members;*
- (c) of promoting social and intellectual intercourse among its members; and*
- (d) of promoting and conducting educational, charitable, religious, social welfare, war relief and welfare and public relief work.”*

Consequently, under its charter, as the program of the Order has been expanded to meet particular needs, its history is filled with examples of outstanding contributions to Church, state and community. Whenever and wherever there is a need for the strength available in an organized body of loyal Catholic laymen, the Knights of Columbus – by the very nature of its organization – is able to respond quickly and efficiently. A few examples of such areas of K of C involvement include:

- strengthening family life;
- reaching out to widows and children of deceased brother Knights;
- promoting devotion to the Blessed Sacrament;
- defending the unborn and aged;
- encouraging frequent and heartfelt recitation of the Holy Rosary;
- working to increase awareness of every Catholic's Christian vocation and taking an active part in the recruitment of candidates for Church-related vocations;
- providing assistance to hungry, homeless, physically and mentally handicapped individuals and anyone in need.

These are illustrative of the type of programs in which the Order has participated. Local councils, under the guidance of their council chaplains, can join in any and all of these Orderwide efforts. In 2007, through such programs, as well as local initiatives, the Knights of Columbus donated \$144 million to charitable causes and volunteered 68 million hours of community service.

In addition to programs on an international or national level, countless useful religious activities are being promoted by Knights of Columbus everywhere. A narration of such projects would fill many pages, but typical are such programs as assistance to parish priests and bishops in their local areas, cooperation with other Catholic groups in various projects, participation in Catholic fund drives, direct financial

assistance to parishes, financial contributions to the missions and the poor, donation of the use of council facilities to other Catholic groups, sponsorship of religious celebrations, financial assistance to seminarians, Catholic press promotion, sponsorship of “Clergy Nights” and lectures, distribution of Catholic pamphlets and magazines, opposition to anti-religious legislation, sponsorship of Cana conferences, promotion of community retreats, sponsorship of protests against indecent entertainment, literature, etc.

In particular, the Order encourages vocations to the priesthood and religious life through the Refund Support Vocations Program (RSVP), a program of direct financial and moral support of seminarians and postulants. A detailed outline of RSVP, as well as a description of suggested council vocations initiatives, is contained in the *Vocations Handbook* (#1942). A copy of this handbook is provided in the “Surge . . . with Service” programming kit for the council chaplain’s use.

Council chaplains receive *Columbia* magazine and two Supreme Council newsletters, *Knightline* and *Program Supplement*. Each issue of *Columbia* includes articles on a wide variety of subjects of interest to members and their families. Projects and initiatives within the Order’s far-flung membership are described and illustrated in reports and photographs. Of particular interest is the monthly column written by Supreme Chaplain Bishop William E. Lori, found on page 3.

*Knightline*, sent 18 times a year to council leaders, covers the activities of the Supreme Council office and reports on fast-breaking news of importance to the Order.

*Program Supplement*, sent in conjunction with *Knightline*, is a publication of special interest to the directors and chairmen of the Service Program. It contains current ideas, suggestions and guidelines to assist the program and membership chairmen in the discharge of their duties.

As an organization of Catholic men who are conscious of their responsibilities to the mission of Christ in the Church, the

Knights of Columbus look to their chaplains for encouragement and guidance so that their motivation may be duly spiritual and their thinking in harmony with the teaching of the Church and the policies of the local bishop and pastors.

The membership strength of the Order, its chain of organization and its record of accomplishment make possible the undertaking and effective implementation of major projects in support of the Church.

## **WORKING WITH THE COUNCIL**

Due to the nature of his office, the chaplain can render service to the council and its members and, through the council, to the community in which the council operates.

**ATTENDANCE AT MEETINGS AND ACTIVITIES** – It is desirable that the chaplain attend all the meetings of the council, including the officers' meetings. His advice is frequently needed by the officers and members, and his absence may result in the delay of important decisions that are to be made and voted upon. It is recognized, however, that the parochial duties of a chaplain may make it difficult for him to attend all meetings of the council. When this happens, the chaplain should attempt to find a substitute – another priest or a deacon or seminarian – to take his place at that particular meeting. At times there is discussion of controversial issues in which strong personal opinions and feelings may play a part. The presence of the chaplain may well, and frequently does, keep strong feelings under control. In his presence, harsh and rash words will remain unsaid and hasty thoughts will remain unexpressed. However, in his participation in such discussions, it should be made clear that there must be at all times free and honest expression of thoughtful opinion. The examples of the chaplain's own moderation will contribute greatly to the orderly conduct of such discussions.

The presence of the chaplain at meetings adds greatly to the dignity and importance of the meetings. The prayers he says and the opinions he expresses will constitute a basic spiritual good to the council and to the members, which cannot be supplied by any lay member.

As outlined in the “Order of Business” card (#1937), provided in the “Surge . . . with Service” kit, the chaplain should be called on twice during each council meeting to report on any business matters relative to his office. Normally he will report on matters of a religious nature immediately after the grand knight’s report or whenever he so desires. He may choose to use this time to discuss planned Church activities or, since he is a member of the council’s vocations committee, he may use this time to update members on the status of the council’s vocations committee. The chaplain is also provided an opportunity for a summation just prior to the closing prayer.

The Order recognizes that regular attendance may at times involve considerable sacrifice, but the influence of the chaplain’s presence means so much that it is hoped that each chaplain will make the utmost effort to attend every meeting possible.

**STATE COUNCIL MEETINGS** – The annual meeting of the state council affords an opportunity to see Columbianism at work at the state level. At meetings of chaplains at which the matter was discussed at great length, it was the consensus of opinion that while there may be times when it would be expedient for a chaplain to attend as a delegate, it is usually more desirable for him to attend as a chaplain. By arrangement with the state deputy, an opportunity might be provided for an informal meeting of the chaplains present at which they could discuss their own particular concerns. Arrangement for the chaplain’s attendance to observe the operation of the state council meeting, to learn in detail of the business of the Order at the state level and to obtain additional information from fellow chaplains would be made by his council and it would provide for the small expense which his attendance would involve.

The state council meeting usually opens with a solemn Mass, and in most jurisdictions a requiem Mass is held on the second day for the deceased members throughout the state. In cooperation with the state chaplain, the chaplains of the

local councils could invite all of the clergy of the city to attend these functions. This is particularly important when the ordinary of the diocese presides at the opening Mass.

**QUALIFICATIONS OF MEMBERS** – Active participation of the chaplain in the meetings and programs of the council offers him a constant opportunity to impress upon the officers and members the required qualification for membership in the Order – practical Catholicity. (See pages 17-19). Whenever there is a question of a member's failure to remain a practical Catholic, the officers should consult with the chaplain and the member's pastor so that no injustice will be done and no unjust or un-Christian gossip is permitted to be spread. If the situation cannot be adjusted satisfactorily, the laws of the Order provide appropriate procedures for the exclusion of such a one from membership in the Order.

**HELPFUL ADVICE** — When the different committee members are outlining their programs for the year, the chaplain can be most helpful by offering advice on the types of programs to be conducted and the procedures to be followed. He will know, for example, whether any of the programs under discussion would conflict with similar programs already in operation under the auspices of other groups of Catholics. He can offer suggestions as to the proper procedures to be followed. For example, the chaplain could suggest how to arrange for a corporate communion or conduct a special vocations recruitment activity. Such suggestions might include contacting the pastor of the church where an event is to be held, providing him with full information prior to any announcement of the activity. Arrangements for the date and time could then be cleared before the committee proceeds with plans.

**SPIRITUAL PRESENCE** – The presence of the chaplain to lead the prayers at the wakes of members of a council is vitally important. His presence offers spiritual solace to the bereaved family and good example to the members of the council. The chaplain can encourage the holding of an annual memorial Mass in memory of deceased members, make the presentation of a chalice to a missionary priest, assist in arranging for spiritual bouquets, etc.



CHAPLAIN'S COLUMN – Another means by which the chaplain may help to provide information concerning Catholic doctrine and liturgy is through a “Chaplain’s Column” in the council bulletin. We know that not all members attend council meetings, and, therefore, the chaplain’s influence can be expanded by his presenting regularly some Catholic information through this column. Early in the term the chaplain should consult with the editor of the council bulletin to determine the deadline for copy and the approximate number of words he should provide for publication each month. In this way, the members who are not present at council meetings will also have the benefit of the teaching ministry of the chaplain.

## **WORKING IN THE COMMUNITY**

The following suggestions – covering some phases of a chaplain’s participation in the work of his council and the Order – clearly indicate that great good can come from the work and the influence of a chaplain. It affords him the opportunity to work among Catholic men and to inspire, direct and instruct them as such.

COMMITTEE WORK – Through the operations of the different committees, in cooperation with the council chaplain, the influence of the council may become widespread in the community. For example, the chaplain can assist in arranging for the presentation of public forums or lecture series. The Lenten season is an excellent time for giving such a series, which can be held on Sunday afternoon or on a specified evening during each of the first four weeks of Lent. The program may consist of a prepared talk on an assigned topic by a speaker or forum leaders, followed by questions from the audience. The submission of questions in writing is found to be desirable because many people who might wish to get information may be timid about asking a question orally, and they enable the forum leaders to eliminate questions not pertinent to the subject being discussed in that particular forum or lecture. They also enable the leader to combine several questions which are closely related and thereby avoid duplication of answers. Religious

teaching, vocations, family life, social questions and the like are all suitable forum subjects.

Annually the council might conduct a “Clergy Night” to which all priests in the community would be invited, for the dual purpose of discussing the work of the Order with the priests and of determining projects of local Catholic interest in which the council can cooperate. The chaplain could be very helpful in such a project by sending invitations to the priests over his signature, by contacting them personally and by assisting in preparing the program and making arrangements for the meeting.

**CONTROVERSIAL QUESTIONS** – Occasionally there arise in a community, in a jurisdiction or in a nation controversial questions in which the position of the Church or of Catholics is involved. Before any public action is taken with regard to such a matter, the council officers and the committee chairmen involved should sit down with the chaplain and discuss the matter thoroughly, so that if the council does take a position, or if it should ask its members to take a position, the question will be thoroughly understood and handled properly.

**GOOD EXAMPLE** – One of the most important contributions a council may make to the life of its community is the example given by its members in their religious, social and business lives. For this purpose the presence of the chaplain at as many council meetings and activities as possible is highly desirable, enabling him to emphasize in his talks and in his conversations the importance of members of the Order giving outstanding example in their communities.

## **QUALIFICATIONS FOR MEMBERSHIP IN THE KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS**

The qualifications for membership in the Knights of Columbus are set down in Section 101 of the Laws of the Order. They are as follows: *“Only practical Catholics in union with the Holy See shall be eligible to and entitled to continue membership in the Order. An applicant for membership shall not be less than 18 years of age on his last birthday.”*

There are no other requirements. Nothing is said about the candidate's profession, education, national background, the color of his skin, his nationality, his cultural level or his financial status.

PRACTICAL CATHOLIC–Guidelines have been established to assist in judging the practical Catholicity of an applicant or member. Those guidelines also appear in our *Grand Knight's Handbook* (#915) so that the grand knight can perform his duties as an informed and responsible Catholic gentleman when conducting sessions of his council's Admission Committee. The main components of this requirement may be described as follows:

- The practical Catholic in union with the Holy See is one who, in general, regulates his life according to the teachings of Christ and the Church, and endeavors to observe the commandments of God and of the Church.
- A practical Catholic strives to have a greater knowledge of the teachings of Christ and his Church, and to accept, respect and defend the Church's authority (vested in the Supreme Pontiff, the hierarchy and clergy united with him) to teach, govern and sanctify the faithful.
- A practical Catholic gives material and moral support to the Church and her works on all levels, promoting the programs of the parish and diocese and comes to the aid of the missions, the needy, the underprivileged; espousing and advancing the just causes of minority groups; endeavoring to eliminate unjust discrimination, prejudice, etc.; supporting the Church in her defense of marriage and family life and in her crusades against divorce, abortion, pornography and all the evils of today.
- If a Catholic marries outside the Church, that is, contrary to the laws of the Church, he ceases to be a practical Catholic and hence may not be a member of the Knights of Columbus. A man who, living in a valid marriage, obtains a civil divorce and remarries outside the Church ceases to be a practical Catholic and hence loses his right to join or continue in the Order of the Knights of Columbus. If his former marriage is declared null by the Church and he remarries validly according to the Church's laws, he may be reinstated into the Order.

- A Catholic who is a member of a forbidden, secret society is not a practical Catholic and hence may not become or continue to be a member of the Knights of Columbus.

**OTHER CONSIDERATIONS** – If a member of the Order is married, he should be a faithful and devoted husband and father. Married or unmarried, the Knight should always be an exemplarily Catholic gentleman and a dutiful patriotic citizen.

**DETERMINING QUALIFICATION** – Before a candidate is presented for membership, his sponsor should be sure that the candidate possesses and manifests the necessary qualifications for membership. These are then appraised by the Admission Committee and a subsequent ballot by the membership determines acceptance or rejection. This is in keeping with the lodge system under which the Order of the Knights Columbus operates. If questions arise at any time during the admission process as to the candidate's practical Catholicity, the proposer or the Admissions Committee should consult the council chaplain and/or the candidate's pastor.

## **THE LIFE AND TIMES OF FATHER McGIVNEY**

*During his tenure, a council chaplain may be called upon to speak about another priest whose importance to the Order is profound – Father Michael J. McGivney, founder of the Knights of Columbus. All chaplains are in a sense asked to carry on the legacy of this holy priest. The following article can be valuable to a chaplain, both as information useful in preparing council programs and as insight into the history of our Order, its founder and the relationship between the lay members of the Knights of Columbus and the clergy they look to for guidance.*

### **THE LIFE AND TIMES OF FATHER MICHAEL J. McGIVNEY**

In mid-August of 1890 one of the largest funerals in the history of Waterbury, Conn., took place. The throngs who attended were grieving the death, at age 38, of Father Michael J. McGivney, founder of the Knights of Columbus.

Delegations were present from almost every one of the 57 K of C councils which had sprung up in the Order's first eight years. The bishop of Hartford and more than 70 of Connecticut's Catholic priests were joined by many civic leaders. It was reported that every available carriage for miles around had been rented for the great procession.

Father McGivney's funeral was an indication of the love and respect the people felt for this hard-working, holy parish priest. It also reflected the deep personal appeal that immigrant Catholics immediately found in the Knights of Columbus. The Order has never since ceased to grow. Today it is the largest society of Catholic men in the world, with more than a million and a half members in the United States, Canada, the Philippines, Mexico, and several Central American and Caribbean countries.



**Reverend Michael J. McGivney**

To mark their hundredth anniversary in 1982, the Knights of Columbus brought the remains of Father McGivney from Waterbury back to St. Mary's Church in New Haven, where he had founded the Order. There he now rests in a setting in which daily Mass is offered for the deceased members of the Order and their wives and prayers are said in his honor.

Father Michael McGivney was born in Waterbury on Aug. 12, 1852. His parents Patrick and Mary (Lynch) McGivney, had arrived in the great 19th Century wave of Irish immigration. Patrick McGivney became a molder in the heat and noxious fumes of a Waterbury brass mill. Mary McGivney gave birth to 13 children, six of whom died in infancy or childhood. So their first child, Michael, with four living sisters and two brothers, learned early about sorrow, and the harsh grip of poverty. He also learned about the powers of love, and faith and family fortitude.

He went to the small district schools of Waterbury's working-class neighborhoods. A good child, he was admired by his school principal for "excellent deportment and proficiency in his studies." Then, after the Civil War, when the Connecticut metals industry was booming, he left school at age 13 to go to work. His job in the spoon-making department of a brass factory provided a few more dollars for family survival.

When Michael reached the age of 16 in 1868, he left the factory. With the priesthood clearly in mind, he traveled with his Waterbury pastor to Quebec, Canada. There he registered at the French-run College of St. Hyacinthe. He worked hard on subjects which would prepare him to apply for seminary admission.

Two academic years followed at Our Lady of Angels Seminary, attached to Niagara University in Niagara Falls, N.Y. Young McGivney moved next to Montreal to attend seminary classes at the Jesuit-run St. Mary's College. He was there when his father died in 1873.

Lacking funds and concerned about his family, he went home to the funeral, lingering a while in Waterbury. Then, at the request of the bishop of Hartford, he entered St. Mary's Seminary in Baltimore. After four years of study, on December 22, 1877, he was ordained in Baltimore's historic Cathedral of the Assumption by Archbishop (later cardinal) James Gibbons. A few days later, with his widowed mother present, he said his first Mass at Immaculate Conception Church in Waterbury.

Father McGivney began his priestly ministry on Christmas Day in 1877 as curate of St. Mary's Church in New Haven. It was the city's first parish. A new stone church had been built, after the old one burned, on one of New Haven's finest residential streets, Hillhouse Avenue. There was neighborhood objection which even *The New York Times* noted in 1879, under the headline, "How An Aristocratic Avenue Was Blemished By A Roman Church Edifice." So Father McGivney's priestly ministry in New Haven began with tension and defensiveness among the working-class Irish families he served.

One of the responsibilities of St. Mary's priests was pastoral care of inmates of the city jail. In a notable case, a 21-year-old Irishman, while drunk, shot and killed a police officer. James (Chip) Smith was tried for first-degree murder in 1881, convicted and sentenced to be hung. Father McGivney visited him daily. After a special Mass on the day of execution, the priest's grief was intense. The young offender comforted him: "Father, your saintly ministrations have enabled me to meet death without a tremor. Do not fear for me, I must not break down now."

Father McGivney worked closely with the young people of St. Mary's parish, holding catechism classes and organizing a total abstinence society to fight alcoholism. In 1881 he began to explore with various laymen the idea of a Catholic fraternal benefit society. In an era when parish clubs and fraternal societies had wide popular appeal, the young priest felt there should be some way to strengthen religious faith and at the same time provide for the financial needs of families overwhelmed by illness or death of the breadwinner.

He discussed this concept with Bishop Lawrence McMahan of Hartford, and received his approval. He traveled to Boston to talk with the Massachusetts Catholic Order of Foresters, and traveled to Brooklyn to consult the Catholic Benevolent Legion. He met with other priests of the diocese. Whenever he could, he sought information that would help the Catholic laymen to organize themselves into a benefit society.

People who knew Father McGivney in this period were impressed by his energy and intensity. Father Gordian Daley later recalled: "I saw him but once, and yet I remember this pale, beautiful face as if I saw it only yesterday. It was a 'priest's face' and that explains everything. It was a face of wonderful repose. There was nothing harsh in that countenance although there was everything that was strong."

William Geary, one of the Order's charter members, said that at the first council meeting in 1882 he "was acclaimed as founder by 24 men with hearts full of joy and thanksgiving, recognizing that without his optimism, his will to succeed, his counsel and advice they would have failed."

Father McGivney had suggested Sons of Columbus as a name for the Order. This would bind Catholicism and Americanism together through the faith and bold vision of the New World's discoverer. The word "knights" replaced "sons" because the key members of the organizing group who were Irish-born Civil War veterans felt it would help to apply a noble ritual in support of the emerging cause of Catholic civil liberty.

In a first-ever public reference to the Order on Feb. 8, 1882, the *New Haven Morning Journal and Courier* said the Knights of Columbus' initial meeting had been held the night before.

On March 29, the Connecticut Legislature granted a charter to the Knights of Columbus, formally establishing it as a legal corporation. The Order's principles in 1882 were "Unity and Charity." "Fraternity" and "Patriotism" were added later. Each of these ideals played a major role in ceremonials from the beginning. The Columbus-linked themes, say historian Christopher J. Kauffman, "reverberated with pride in the American promise of liberty, equality and opportunity."

In April of 1882, Father McGivney, with the permission of Bishop McMahan, wrote to all pastors of the Diocese of Hartford. The Order's primary objective, he wrote, was to dissuade Catholics from joining secret societies by providing them better advantages at time of death or sickness. He urged each pastor to exert influence "in the formation of a Council in your parish." Father McGivney personally installed the first officers of San Salvador Council No. 1 in New Haven, in May of 1882.

By May 1883, Council No. 2 had been instituted in Meriden, Conn., and Bishop McMahan, so impressed with the organization, himself became a member of Council No. 11 in 1884 and served it as council chaplain. By the end of 1885, there were 31 councils in Connecticut.

Father McGivney's dedication to the Order was evidenced in trips he made to all parts of Connecticut and in handwritten correspondence, little of which survives, about K of C business. At St. Mary's, despite all this, he remained the energetic curate with constant concern for every parishioner's problems.

Then, in November 1884, he was named pastor of St. Thomas' Church in Thomaston, Conn., a factory town 10 miles from his hometown. It was a factory parish, heavily in debt, serving working-class parishioners with few resources beyond faith. With prayerful acceptance, Father McGivney put his seven years at St. Mary's behind him.

His New Haven parishioners, in a testimonial resolution elaborately superimposed on the drawing of a chalice and host, declared that despite burdens and afflictions, his courtesy, his kindness, and the purity of his life had "secured the love and confidence of the people of St. Mary's, which will follow him in every future field of labor."

In six subsequent years at St. Thomas', he wrestled with the church debt and built the same close ties of devotion and charitable concern he had developed in New Haven. He continued, as well, to serve as the supreme chaplain, personally involved in helping the Order to extend its membership into Rhode Island. Later from 1901 to 1939, his younger brothers, Msgrs. Patrick and John J. McGivney, served the Order as supreme chaplains.



Never robust in health, Father McGivney was suddenly stricken by a serious case of pneumonia in January 1890. It hung on. Various treatments for consumptive illness were tried, but his decline persisted. The young priest lost physical strength just as the Order he founded was moving toward new vitality.

On Aug. 14, 1890, Father Michael J. McGivney died at the age of 38.

In 13 brief, busy years as a priest, Father McGivney's piety and compassion had won the love of those he served as curate and pastor. His Christian inspiration, leadership and administrative drive had bought him the loyalty and affection of thousands who knew him as the founder of the Knights of Columbus. From the moment he launched it, the organization fortified Catholics in their faith, offered them ways to greater financial security in a sometimes hostile world, and strengthened them in self-esteem.

Remarkably developed from its simple beginnings in a church basement, the Knights of Columbus today combines Catholic fraternalism and one of the most successful American insurance enterprises. The four towers of the international headquarters symbolize the Order's worldwide commitment to charity, unity, fraternity and patriotism. There are 13,000 active councils in 13 countries.

More than 1.7 million Knights contributed \$144 million dollars and 68 million hours of volunteer service for charitable causes in 2007. And – as a particular result of the Order's multi-faceted services to the Church – the board of directors in 1988 conducted formal business of the Order for the first time in a room named for the Knights of Columbus within the ancient St. Peter's Basilica in Rome.

At St. Mary's Church in New Haven, Father McGivney's polished granite sarcophagus, sheltered inside a totally restored church, now has become a shrine for pilgrim Knights at the place where the Order began.

At the first memorial service for all deceased Knights held later in the year he died, this tribute was accorded him: "He was a man of the people. He was zealous for the people's welfare, and all the kindness of his priestly soul asserted itself more strongly in his unceasing efforts for the betterment of their condition . . . Oh, Reverend Founder . . . that act alone of thine which gave life to the Knights of Columbus has surely secured for thee everlasting joy and eternal peace."

Father McGivney's cause has been formally accepted by the Vatican's Congregation for the Causes of Saints.





# KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS

## ORGANIZATIONAL CHART

