

= Knights of Columbus =

The Knights of Columbus is the world 's largest Catholic fraternal service organization . Founded by Father Michael J. McGivney in New Haven , Connecticut , in 1882 , it was named in honor of the mariner Christopher Columbus . Originally serving as a mutual benefit society to low @-@ income immigrant Catholics , it developed into a fraternal benefit society dedicated to providing charitable services , promoting Catholic education and Catholic public policy positions , and actively defending Roman Catholicism in various nations .

There are 1 @, @ 883 @, @ 598 members in nearly 15 @, @ 000 councils , with 302 councils on college campuses . Membership is limited to " practical " Catholic men aged 18 or older . Membership consists of four different degrees , each exemplifying a different principle of the Order . The Order is a member of the International Alliance of Catholic Knights .

Councils have been chartered in the United States (including the territories of Puerto Rico , the Virgin Islands and Guam) , Canada , the Philippines , Mexico , Poland , the Dominican Republic , Panama , the Bahamas , Cuba , Guatemala , Saipan , South Korea , Ukraine , Lithuania , and on US military bases around the world . The Knights ' official junior organization , the Columbian Squires , has over 5 @, @ 000 circles and the Order 's patriotic arm , the Fourth Degree , has more than 2 @, @ 500 assemblies .

For their support for the Church and local communities , as well as for their philanthropic efforts , Pope John Paul II referred to the Order as a " strong right arm of the Church . " In 2014 , the Order gave over US \$ 173 million directly to charity and performed over 71 @. @ 5 million man @-@ hours of voluntary service . Over 413 @, @ 000 US pints (195 @, @ 000 l ; 344 @, @ 000 imp pt) of blood were donated in 2010 .

The Order 's insurance program has more than 2 million insurance contracts , totaling more than US \$ 100 billion of life insurance in force . This is backed up by \$ 21 billion in assets as of 2014 . Within the United States on the national and state level , the Order is active in the political arena lobbying for laws and positions that uphold the Catholic Church 's positions on public policy and social issues .

= = History = =

= = = Founding = = =

Michael J. McGivney , an Irish @-@ American Catholic priest , founded the Knights of Columbus in New Haven , Connecticut . He gathered a group of men from St. Mary 's Parish for an organizational meeting on October 2 , 1881 , and the Order was incorporated under the laws of the state of Connecticut on March 29 , 1882 . Although the first councils were all in that state , the Order spread throughout New England and the United States in subsequent years . By 1889 , there were 300 councils comprising 40 @, @ 000 knights . Twenty years later , in 1909 , there were 230 @, @ 000 knights in 1 @, @ 300 councils .

The Order was intended as a mutual benefit society . These organizations , which combined social aspects and ritual were especially flourishing during the latter third of the nineteenth century , the so @-@ called " Golden Age of Fraternalism . " As a parish priest in an immigrant community , McGivney saw what could happen to a family when the main income earner died , and wanted to provide insurance to care for the widows and orphans left behind . He also had to temporarily leave his seminary studies to care for his family when his father died . However , Roman Catholics In the late 19th century were regularly excluded from labor unions , popular fraternal organizations and other organized groups that provided social services and papal encyclicals issued by the Holy See prohibited Roman Catholics participating as lodge members within Freemasonry . McGivney wished to provide them an alternative . He also believed that Catholicism and fraternalism were not incompatible and wanted to found a society to encourage men to be proud of their American @-@ Catholic heritage .

McGivney traveled to Boston to examine the Massachusetts Catholic Order of Foresters and to Brooklyn to learn about the recently established Catholic Benevolent League , both of which offered insurance benefits . He found the latter to be lacking the excitement he thought was needed if his organization were to compete with the secret societies of the day . He expressed an interest in establishing a New Haven Court of the Foresters , but the charter of Massachusetts Foresters prevented them from operating outside their Commonwealth . McGivney 's committee of St. Mary 's parishioners decided to form a club that was entirely original .

The name of Columbus was also partially intended as a mild rebuke to Anglo @-@ Saxon Protestant leaders , who upheld the explorer (a Catholic Genovese Italian working for Catholic Spain) as an American hero , yet simultaneously sought to marginalize recent Catholic immigrants . In taking Columbus as their patron , they were expressing their belief that not only could Catholics be full members of American society , but were instrumental in its foundation . McGivney had originally conceived of the name " Sons of Columbus " , but James T. Mullen , who would become the first Supreme Knight , successfully suggested that " Knights of Columbus " would better capture the ritualistic nature of the new organization .

By the time of the first annual convention in 1884 , the Order was prospering . The five councils throughout Connecticut had a total of 459 members . Groups from other states were requesting information . The Charter of 1899 included four statements of purpose , including : " To promote such social and intellectual intercourse among its members as shall be desirable and proper , and by such lawful means as to them shall seem best . " The new charter showed members ' desire to expand the organization beyond a simple mutual benefit insurance society .

The original insurance system devised by McGivney gave a deceased Knight 's widow a \$ 1 @,@ 000 death benefit . Each member was assessed \$ 1 upon a death , and when the number of Knights grew beyond 1 @,@ 000 , the assessment decreased according to the rate of increase . Each member , regardless of age , was assessed equally . As a result , younger , healthier members could expect to pay more over the course of their lifetimes than those men who joined when they were older . There was also a Sick Benefit Deposit for members who fell ill and could not work . Each sick Knight was entitled to draw up to \$ 5 a week for 13 weeks (roughly equivalent to \$ 125 @.@ 75 in 2009 dollars) . If he remained sick after that , the council to which he belonged regulated the sum of money given to him .

= = = Creation of the Fourth Degree = = =

From the very early days of the Order , members wanted to create a form of hierarchy and recognition for senior members ; this issue was discussed at the National Meeting of 1899 . As early as 1886 Supreme Knight James T. Mullen had proposed a patriotic degree with its own symbolic dress . The K of C established the Grand Cross of the Knights of Columbus but awarded it only to Cristobal Colón y de La Cerda , Duke of Veragua and descendant of Columbus , when he visited the US in 1893 .

About 1 @,@ 400 members attended the first exemplification of the Fourth Degree at the Lenox Lyceum in New York on February 22 , 1900 . The event was infused with Catholic and patriotic symbols and imagery that " celebrated American Catholic heritage " . The two knights leading the ceremony , for example , were the Expositor of the Constitution and the Defender of the Faith . The ritual soon spread to other cities . The new Fourth Degree members returned to their councils , forming assemblies composed of members from several councils . Those assemblies chose the new members .

In 1903 , the Board of Directors officially approved a new degree exemplifying patriotism Order @-@ wide , using the New York City model . There was from early on a " desire to receive within its ranks only the best " , and each candidate was required to produce a certificate from his parish priest attesting that he had received Holy Communion within the past two weeks .

= = = Persecution by the Ku Klux Klan = = =

Not long after the establishment of the Fourth Degree , during the nadir of American race relations , a bogus oath was circulated claiming that Fourth Degree Knights swore to exterminate Freemasons and Protestants , as well as flay , burn alive , boil , kill , and otherwise torture anyone , including women and children , when called upon to do so by church authorities . " It is a strange paradox " , according to some commentators , that the degree devoted to patriotism should be accused of anti @-@ Americanism .

The " bogus oath " was based on a previous oath falsely attributed to the Jesuits more than three centuries earlier . The Ku Klux Klan , which was growing into a powerful force through the 1920s , spread the bogus oath far and wide as part of their campaign against Catholics . During the 1928 Presidential election , the Klan printed and distributed a million copies of the oath in an effort to defeat Catholic Democratic candidate Al Smith . Thomas S. Butler , US Representative from Pennsylvania , read it into the Congressional Record . The bogus oath was refuted by the Committee of Public Information , a war @-@ time propaganda agency of the US Government .

Misunderstanding Catholicism , the Klan alleged that Knights were only loyal to the Pope and that they advocated the overthrow of the United States government . Across the country , local , state , and the Supreme Councils offered rewards to anyone who could prove that the widely circulated oath was authentic . No one could , but that did not stop the Klan from continuing to publish and distribute copies . Numerous state councils and the Supreme Council believed that this " violent wave of religious prejudice was actuated by mercenary motives " , and that publication would stop if fines were imposed and jail time assessed ; they began suing distributors for libel . This caused an end to such publication . As the Order did not wish to appear motivated by a " vengeful spirit " , it asked for leniency from judges when sentencing offenders .

To help combat this misconception of what the Fourth Degree was about , the actual oath taken by Fourth Degree members was submitted to various groups of prominent non @-@ Catholic men around the country for them to examine . Many made public declarations attesting to the loyalty and patriotism of the Knights . After examining the true oath , a committee of high @-@ ranking California Freemasons , a group singled out for violence in the bogus oath , declared in 1914 :

The ceremonial of the Order [of the Knights of Columbus] teaches a high and noble patriotism , instills a love of country , inculcates a reverence of civic duty and holds up the Constitution of our Country as the richest and most precious possession of a Knight of the Order .

= = = Pierce v. Society of Sisters = = =

After World War I , many Americans had a revival of concerns about assimilation of immigrants and worries about " foreign " values ; they expected public schools to teach children to be American . Numerous states drafted laws designed to use schools to promote a common American culture , and in 1922 , the voters of Oregon passed the Oregon Compulsory Education Act . The law was primarily aimed at eliminating parochial schools , including Catholic schools . It was promoted by groups such as the Knights of Pythias , the Federation of Patriotic Societies , the Oregon Good Government League , the Orange Order , and the Ku Klux Klan .

The Compulsory Education Act required almost all children in Oregon between eight and sixteen years of age to attend public school by 1926 . Roger Nash Baldwin , an associate director of the ACLU and a personal friend of then @-@ Supreme Advocate and future Supreme Knight Luke E. Hart , offered to join forces with the Order to challenge the law . The Knights of Columbus pledged an immediate \$ 10 @,@ 000 to fight the law and any additional funds necessary to defeat it .

The case became known as Pierce v. Society of Sisters , a seminal United States Supreme Court decision that significantly expanded coverage of the Due Process Clause in the Fourteenth Amendment . In a unanimous decision , the Court held that the act was unconstitutional and that parents , not the state , had the authority to educate children as they thought best .

= = = Racial integration in the U.S. = = =

In the 1920s there was growing anti @-@ Semitism in the United States , a lingering anti @-@

German sentiment left over from World War I , and anti @-@ black violence was prevalent throughout the country . To combat the animus targeted at racial and religious minorities , including Catholics , the Order formed a historical commission which published a series of books , among other activities . The " Knights of Columbus Racial Contributions Series " of books included three titles : The Gift of Black Folk , by W. E. B. Du Bois , The Jews in the Making of America by George Cohen , and The Germans in the Making of America by Frederick Schrader .

As the 20th century progressed , some councils in the United States became integrated , but many were not . Church officials and organizations encouraged integration . By the end of the 1950s , Supreme Knight Luke E. Hart was actively encouraging councils to accept black candidates . In 1963 , Hart attended a special meeting at the White House hosted by President John F. Kennedy to discuss civil rights with other religious leaders . A few months later , a Notre Dame alumnus ' application was rejected by a local council because he was black . Six council officers resigned in protest , and the incident made national news . Hart declared that the process for membership would be revised at the next Supreme Convention , but died before he could see it take place .

The 1964 Supreme Convention was scheduled to be held at the Roosevelt Hotel in New Orleans . A few days before the Convention , new Supreme Knight John W. McDevitt learned the hotel only admitted white guests and immediately threatened to move to another venue . The hotel changed its policy and so did the Order . The Convention amended the admissions rule to require one @-@ third of those voting to reject a new member . In 1972 the Supreme Convention amended its rules again , requiring a majority of members voting to reject a candidate .

= = = Recent history = = =

In 1997 , the cause for McGivney 's canonization was opened in the Archdiocese of Hartford , and then was placed before the Congregation for the Causes of Saints in 2000 . The Father Michael J. McGivney Guild was formed in 1997 to promote his cause and currently has more than 140 @,@ 000 members . Membership in the Knights of Columbus does not automatically make one a member of the guild , nor is membership restricted to Knights ; members must elect to join .

On March 15 , 2008 , Pope Benedict XVI approved a decree recognizing McGivney 's " heroic virtue " , significantly advancing the priest 's process toward sainthood . McGivney may now be referred to as the " Venerable Servant of God " . If the cause is successful , he would be the first priest born in the United States to be canonized as a saint .

= = Degrees and principles = =

The Order is dedicated to the principles of Charity , Unity , Fraternity , and Patriotism . A First Degree exemplification ceremony , by which a man joins the Order , explicates the virtue of charity . He is then said to be a First Degree Knight of Columbus ; after participating the subsequent degrees , each of which focuses on another virtue , he rises to that status . Upon reaching the Third Degree , a gentleman is a full member . Priests do not participate directly in Degree exemplifications as laymen do , but rather take the degree by observation .

The first ritual handbook was printed in 1885 , but contained only sections teaching Unity and Charity . Supreme Knight Mullen , along with primary ritual author Daniel Colwell , believed that the initiation ceremony should be held in three sections " in accord with the ' Trinity of Virtues , Charity , Unity , and Brotherly love ' " . The third section , expounding Fraternity , was officially adopted in 1891 .

= = = Fourth degree = = =

After taking their third degree , knights are eligible to receive their fourth degree , the primary purpose of which is to foster the spirit of patriotism and to encourage active Catholic citizenship . Fourth degree members , in addition to being members of their individual councils , are also members of Fourth Degree assemblies which typically comprise members of several councils . As of

2013 , there were 3 @, @ 109 assemblies worldwide .

Fewer than 18 % of Knights join the Fourth Degree , which is optional , and whose members are referred to as " Sir Knight " . Of a total 1 @, @ 703 @, @ 307 Knights in 2006 , there were 292 @, @ 289 Fourth Degree Knights . This number increased to 335 @, @ 132 in 2013 . A waiting period of one year from the time the third degree was taken was eliminated in 2013 , and now any Third Degree Knight is eligible to join the Fourth Degree .

A new Military Overseas Europe Special District was established in 2013 to oversee assemblies of military personnel serving on that continent . Over 100 Department of Defense civilian employees and active @-@ duty personnel based in Germany , Italy , and Britain took part in a special Fourth Degree Exemplification Ceremony at Ramstein Air Force Base in Germany in 2013 , and in that year exemplifications were also held in Camp Zama , Japan , and Yongsan Garrison in Seoul , Korea , where there are existing assemblies .

Knights volunteer at 136 of the 153 Veteran 's Affairs Medical Centers .

= = = Color corps = = =

Fourth Degree Knights may optionally purchase and wear the full regalia and join an assembly 's Color Corps . The Color Corps is the most visible arm of the Knights , as they are often seen in parades and other local events wearing their colorful regalia . Official dress for the Color Corps is a black tuxedo , baldric , white gloves , cape , and naval chapeau . In warm climates and during warm months , a white dinner jacket may be worn , if done as a unit .

Baldrics are worn from the right shoulder to left hip and are color specific by nation . In the United States , Panama , and the Philippines , baldrics are red , white , and blue . Red and white baldrics are used in Canada and Poland ; red , white , and green in Mexico ; and blue and white in Guatemala . Service baldrics include a scabbard for a sword and are worn over the coat while social baldrics are worn under the coat .

The colors on a Fourth Degree Knight 's cape and chapeau denote the office he holds within the Degree . Faithful Navigators and Past Faithful Navigators are permitted to carry a white handled silver sword . Masters and Vice Supreme Masters , as well as Former Masters and Former Vice Supreme Masters , are also denoted by their gold swords .

= = Charitable giving = =

Charity is the foremost principle of the Knights of Columbus . In 2013 , the Order gave more than \$ 170 @. @ 1 million directly to charity and performed over 70 @. @ 5 million man hours in volunteer service . According to Independent Sector , this service has a value of more than \$ 1 @. @ 6 billion . The total charitable contributions , from the past decade , ending December 31 , 2013 rose to \$ 13 @. @ 8 Billion . Finally in 2013 , Knights of Columbus , on an average per member basis , donated \$ 91 @. @ 80 and contributed 38 hours of community service .

More than \$ 1 @. @ 2 million were donated to Habitat for Humanity in 2012 , in addition to 1 @. @ 4 million volunteer hours . Over 42 @, @ 000 winter coats were distributed in 2012 to children in cold weather areas as well .

The very first ever national blood drive was sponsored by the Order in 1938 . In 2012 , council blood drives attracted more than 423 @, @ 000 donors .

United in Charity , a general , unrestricted endowment fund , was introduced at the 2004 Supreme Council meeting to support and ensure the overall long @-@ term charitable and philanthropic goals of the Order . The fund is wholly managed , maintained , and operated by Knights of Columbus Charities , Inc . , a 501 (c) (8) charitable organization . Before United in Charity was formed , all requests for funds were met with the general funds of the Order or in combination with specific appeals .

= = = Global Catholic donations = = =

The Vicarius Christi Fund has an endowment of \$ 20 million and has earned more than \$ 35 million since its establishment in 1981 for the Pope 's personal charities . The Knights ' Satellite Uplink Program has provided funding to broadcast a number of papal events , including the annual Easter and Christmas Masses , as well as the World Day of Peace in Assisi , World Youth Days , the opening of the Holy Door at St. Peter 's Basilica for the Millennial Jubilee , Pope John Paul II 's visit to Nazareth , and several other events . In missionary territories the Order also pays for the satellite downlink .

The Order also has eleven separate funds totaling \$ 18 million to assist men and women who are discerning religious vocations pay tuition and other expenses . The multimillion @-@ dollar Pacem in Terris Fund aids the Catholic Church 's efforts for peace in the Middle East . In 2012 , \$ 1 @.@ 8 million was given by state and local councils to seminaries , with an additional \$ 5 @.@ 9 million in direct assistance to seminarians . A further \$ 20 million went to church facilities and \$ 7 @.@ 4 million to Catholic schools from state and local councils .

= = = The disabled = = =

The Knights have a tradition of supporting those with physical and developmental disabilities . More than \$ 382 million has been given over the past three decades to groups and programs that support the intellectually and physically disabled , with \$ 4 @.@ 1 million donated in 2012 alone .

One of the largest recipients of funds in this area is the Special Olympics . In 2012 , there were more than 107 @,@ 000 Knights who donated 315 @,@ 000 hours of service at nearly 20 @,@ 000 Special Olympics events . Individual councils donated \$ 3 @.@ 7 million to the Special Olympics in 2013 . The Order 's support for the Special Olympics goes back to the very first games in 1968 .

In 2012 , more than 5 @,@ 000 wheelchairs were distributed in 10 countries in a partnership with the Global Wheelchair Mission .

= = = Disaster relief = = =

Aside from their other charitable activities , The Knights of Columbus gave significant charitable contributions to the people of Haiti in the aftermath of the devastating earthquake in January 2010 . The Order also donated 1 @,@ 000 wheelchairs to the people of Haiti in partnership with the Global Wheelchair Mission . Recognizing that the need was still great in Haiti some seven months after the disaster , the Knights of Columbus partnered with Project Medishare in August 2010 for an initiative entitled , " Healing Haiti 's Children " . The initiative , backed by a more than \$ 2 @.@ 5 million commitment from the Knights of Columbus provides free prosthetic limbs and a minimum of two years of rehab to every child who suffered an amputation from injuries sustained during the earthquake . As of 2013 , more than 800 children had already been aided by the program .

After the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting , a local council in Newtown , Connecticut , established a program asking people to pray a minimum of three Hail Marys for the victims and their families . Over 100 @,@ 000 people pledged to say 3 @.@ 25 million prayers .

More than \$ 500 @,@ 000 was donated to Hurricane Sandy relief efforts , and \$ 202 @,@ 000 to victims of the April 2012 tornadoes in Oklahoma . After West Fertilizer Company explosion in Texas , nearly a quarter of a million dollars were raised . In total , more than \$ 3 @.@ 3 million were donated by individual councils for disaster relief in 2012 .

= = Insurance program = =

The Order offers a modern , professional insurance operation with more than \$ 100 billion of life insurance policies in force and \$ 19 @.@ 8 billion in assets as of June 2013 , a figure more than double the 2000 levels . Nearly 80 @,@ 000 life certificates were issued in 2013 , almost 30 @,@ 000 more than the Order 's closest competitor , to bring the total to 1 @.@ 73 million . The program has a \$ 1 @.@ 8 billion surplus .

Over \$ 286 million in death benefits were paid in 2012 and \$ 1 @. @ 7 billion were paid between 2000 and 2010 . This is large enough to rank 49th on the A. M. Best list of all life insurance companies in North America . Since the founding of the Order , \$ 3 @. @ 5 billion in death benefits have been paid . Premiums in 2012 were nearly \$ 1 @. @ 2 billion , and dividends paid out totaled more than \$ 274 million . Over the same time period , annuity deposits rose 4 @. @ 2 % , compared to an 8 % loss for the industry as a whole .

Every day in 2012 more than \$ 10 million was invested , for a total of \$ 2 @. @ 7 billion on the year , and an annual income of \$ 905 million . The Order maintains a two prong investment strategy . A company must first be a sound investment before stock in it is purchased , and secondly the company 's activities must not conflict with Catholic social teaching . The Order also provides mortgages to churches and Catholic schools at " very competitive rates " through its ChurchLoan program .

Products include permanent and term life insurance , as well as annuities , long term care insurance , and disability insurance . The insurance program is not a separate business offered by the Order to others but is exclusively for the benefit of members and their families . According to the Fortune 1000 list , the Knights of Columbus ranked 900 in total revenue in 2011 and , with 1 @, @ 504 agents , was 909th in size in 2013 . All agents are members of the Order .

The Order 's insurance program is the most highly rated program in North America . For 38 consecutive years , the Order has received A. M. Best 's highest rating , A + + . Only two other insurers in North America have received the highest ratings from both A. M. Best and Standard & Poor 's . Additionally , the Order is certified by the Insurance Marketplace Standards Association for ethical sales practices . Standard & Poor 's downgraded the insurance program 's financial strength / credit rating from AAA to AA + in August 2011 not due to the Order 's financial strength , but due to its lowering of the long @- @ term sovereign credit rating of the United States to AA + . Additionally , the insurance program has a low 3 @. @ 5 % lapse rate of the 1 @. @ 7 million members and their families who are insured .

= = Organization = =

As of 2013 there were 1 @, @ 843 @, @ 587 knights , and membership has grown each year for 41 consecutive years . Each member belongs to one of 14 @, @ 606 councils around the world . In the 2012 fraternal year , 229 new councils were established , including two in the Ukraine , eight in Mexico , 10 in Poland , 13 in Canada , 80 in the Philippines , and 117 in the United States . In addition , there is a " round table " presence in Lithuania .

Knights of Columbus councils , Fourth Degree assemblies , and Columbian Squire circles have similar officers . In the councils , officer titles are prefixed with " Worthy " , while in assemblies officer titles are prefixed with " Faithful " . In addition to the Columbian Squires ' officers listed below , there is an adult position of " Chief Counselor " that helps oversee the circle .

(* Appointed annually by each council 's Grand Knight or assembly 's Navigator)

(* * Appointed for a 3 @- @ year term by the Supreme Knight)

= = = Supreme Council = = =

The Supreme Council is the governing body of the Order and is composed of elected representatives from each jurisdiction . In a manner similar to shareholders at an annual meeting , the Supreme Council elects seven members each year to the Supreme Board of Directors for three @- @ year terms . The twenty @- @ one member board then chooses from its own membership the senior operating officials of the Order , including the Supreme Knight .

= = = Assemblies = = =

Fourth degree members belong to one of 3 @, @ 109 assemblies , including 75 created in 2012 . The first assembly in Europe was established in 2012 , and in 2013 a new assembly for Boston

@-@ area college councils was created at Harvard University . As of 2013 there were 335 @,@ 132 Fourth Degree members , including 15 @,@ 709 who joined the ranks of the Patriotic Degree the year before .

= = = College councils = = =

In 1898 , Keane Council 353 was established at The Catholic University of America , though in later years it moved off campus . The University of Notre Dame Council 1477 was founded in 1910 , and was followed by the councils at Saint Louis University and Benedictine College . In 1919 , Mount St. Mary 's College and Seminary Council 1965 became the first council attached to a college and seminary , at what is now Mount St. Mary 's University .

In each autumn since 1966 , the Supreme Council has hosted a College Council Conference at their headquarters in New Haven , Connecticut . Awards are given for the greatest increases in membership , the best Youth , Community , Council , Family , and Church activities , and the overall Outstanding College Council of the year . The most recent winner of the Outstanding College Council Award was The Catholic University of America Council .

= = Evangelization = =

Since its founding , the Knights of Columbus has been involved in evangelization . In 1948 , the Knights started the Catholic Information Service (CIS) to provide low @-@ cost Catholic publications for the general public as well as for parishes , schools , retreat houses , military installations , correctional facilities , legislatures , the medical community , and for individuals who request them . Since then , CIS has printed millions of booklets , and thousands of people have enrolled in CIS correspondence and on @-@ line courses .

= = Awards = =

The Order sponsors a number of international awards . The first , the Gaudium et Spes Award , is named after the document from the Second Vatican Council , and is the highest honor bestowed by the Order . It " is awarded only in special circumstances and only to individuals of exceptional merit " and comes an honorarium of \$ 100 @,@ 000 . Since its institution in 1992 , it has only been awarded five times . The award " recognizes individuals for their exemplary contributions to the realization of the message of faith and service in the spirit of Christ as articulated in the document for which it is named " .

The second international award , also only given " when merited " , is the Caritas Award . Named for the theological virtue alternatively translated as either charity or love , it recognizes " extraordinary works of charity and service " . It has been awarded once since its establishment in 2013 . The Saint Michael Award was established in conjunction with the Caritas Award to recognize members of the Order who have exemplified a lifetime of service on behalf of the Knights of Columbus .

Additionally , at its annual convention each year , the Order recognizes other individuals and councils with awards . These include the Family of the Year award , and prizes for the best activities in the categories of church , community , council , culture of life , family , and youth . Additionally , top selling general and field insurance agents are recognized , as are top recruiting individuals and councils .

= = Political activities = =

While the Knights of Columbus support political awareness and activity , United States councils are prohibited by tax laws from engaging in candidate endorsement and partisan political activity due to their non @-@ profit status . Public policy activity is limited to issue @-@ specific campaigns , typically dealing with Catholic family and life issues . The Order has adopted resolutions advocating

a Culture of Life , defining marriage as the union of one man and one woman , in defense of religious liberty , and promoting faithful citizenship .

= = = United States = = =

In 1926 , a delegation of Supreme Council officers met with President Calvin Coolidge to share with him their concerns about the persecution of Catholics in Mexico . The Order subsequently launched a \$ 1 million campaign to educate Americans about the attacks on Catholics and the Church in the Cristero War . Twenty @-@ five martyrs from the conflict would eventually be canonized , including six knights .

Several decades later , in 1954 , lobbying by the Order helped convince the U.S. Congress to add the phrase " under God " to the Pledge of Allegiance . President Dwight Eisenhower wrote to Supreme Knight Luke E. Hart thanking the Knights for their " part in the movement to have the words ' under God ' added to our Pledge of Allegiance " . Similar lobbying convinced many state legislatures to adopt October 12 as Columbus Day and led to President Franklin Delano Roosevelt 's confirmation of Columbus Day as a federal holiday in 1937 .

On April 9 , 2006 , the Board of Directors commented on the " U.S. immigration policy [which] has become an intensely debated and divisive issue on both sides of the border between the U.S. and Mexico " . They called " upon the President and the U.S. Congress to agree upon immigration legislation that not only gains control over the process of immigration , but also rejects any effort to criminalize those who provide humanitarian assistance to illegal immigrants , and provides these immigrants an avenue by which they can emerge from the shadows of society and seek legal residency and citizenship in the U.S. " .

The Knights have also been active in political campaigns across the United States in the area of gay marriage , contributing over \$ 14 million to help maintain the definition of marriage as a union between one man and one woman . In 2008 , they were the largest single donor in support of Proposition 8 . A financial contribution of over \$ 1 million was made to support the successful initiative to define marriage within the California State Constitution as a union solely between a man and a woman . The Knights have also made financial contributions of \$ 1 million to support similar ballot campaigns in Maine , Maryland , Minnesota , and Washington .

= = = Canada = = =

In a 2005 attempt to stop the Canadian parliament from legalizing gay marriage , the Order funded a campaign that included 800 @,@ 000 postcards encouraging members of parliament to reject the measure . As it was in the United States , this effort was criticized by some gay marriage supporters .

Also in 2005 , a local Knights of Columbus council in Canada was fined \$ 2 @,@ 000 by the British Columbia Human Rights Tribunal . The council 's Hall Manager signed a contract for the use of their facilities with Tracey Smith and Deborah Chymyshyn , but canceled it and returned their money after they became aware that it was for a lesbian wedding reception . The tribunal found that the local council did not have to rent the hall if in so doing they would violate their religious beliefs , but " could have taken additional steps that would have recognized the inherent dignity of the complainants and their right to be free from discrimination " . Instead of simply canceling the appointment , the court said , the council could have directed the complainants to other halls and assisted them in finding another place to hold their event .

= = = Mexico = = =

Following the Mexican Revolution , the new government began persecuting the Church . To destroy the Church 's influence over the Mexican people , anti @-@ clerical statutes were inserted into the Constitution , beginning a 10 @-@ year persecution of Catholics which resulted in the death of thousands , including several knights who were later canonized .

Leaders of the Order began speaking out against the Mexican government , and Columbia , the official magazine of the Knights , also ran articles critical of the regime . The November 1926 cover of Columbia portrayed Knights carrying a banner of liberty and warning of " The Red Peril of Mexico " , the Mexican legislature banned both the Order and the magazine throughout the country .

= = = Heads of state = = =

The Knights of Columbus invites the head of state of every country they operate in to the Supreme Convention each year . In 1971 , U.S. President Richard Nixon gave the keynote address at the States Dinner ; Secretary of Transportation and Knight John Volpe was responsible for this first appearance of a U.S. President at a Supreme Council gathering . President Ronald Reagan spoke at the Centennial Convention in 1982 . President George H.W. Bush appeared in 1992 . President Bill Clinton sent a written message while he was in office , and President George W. Bush sent videotaped messages before he attended in person at the 2004 convention . President Barack Obama has also sent written messages during his term in office .

John F. Kennedy , the only Catholic to be elected President of the United States , was a Fourth Degree member of Bunker Hill Council No. 62 and Bishop Cheverus General Assembly . Supreme Knight Luke E. Hart visited Kennedy at the White House on Columbus Day , 1961 . The president told Hart that his younger brother , Ted Kennedy , had received " his Third Degree in our Order three weeks before " . Hart presented Kennedy with a poster of the American Flag with the story of how the Order got the words " under God " inserted in the Pledge of Allegiance .

In 1959 , Fidel Castro sent an aide to represent him at a Fourth Degree banquet in honor of the Golden Jubilee of the Order 's entry into Cuba . Supreme Knight Hart attended a banquet in the Cuban Prime Minister 's honor in April of that year sponsored by the Overseas Press Club and later sent him a letter expressing regret that they were not able to meet in person . Reagan also presented the Order with a President 's Volunteer Action Award at the White House in 1984 .

The Knights of Columbus were among the groups that welcomed Pope Benedict XVI on the South Lawn of the White House on April 16 , 2008 , the pontiff 's 81st birthday , during his visit to the U.S.

= = Famous Knights = =

Many famous Catholic men from all over the world have been Knights of Columbus . In the United States , some of the most notable include John F. Kennedy ; Ted Kennedy ; Al Smith ; Sargent Shriver ; Samuel Alito ; John Boehner ; Ray Flynn ; Jeb Bush ; and Sergeant Major Daniel Daly , a two @-@ time Medal of Honor recipient , once described by the commandant of the U.S. Marine Corps as " the most outstanding Marine of all time " .

Many notable clerics are also Knights , including Cardinal William Joseph Levada , prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith ; Cardinal Sean O 'Malley , Archbishop of Boston ; and Cardinal Jaime Sin , former Archbishop of Manila . In the world of sports , Vince Lombardi , the famed former coach of the Green Bay Packers ; wrestler Lou Albano ; James Connolly , the first Olympic gold @-@ medal champion in modern times ; Floyd Patterson , former heavyweight boxing champion ; and baseball legend Babe Ruth were all knights .

On October 15 , 2006 , Bishop Rafael Guizar Valencia (1878 ? 1938) was canonized by Pope Benedict XVI in Rome . In 2000 , six other Knights were declared saints by Pope John Paul II .

= = Emblems of the Order = =

= = = Emblem of the Order = = =

The emblem of the Order was designed by Past Supreme Knight James T. Mullen and adopted at the second Supreme Council meeting on May 12 , 1883 . Shields used by medieval knights served as the inspiration , and the emblem consists of a shield mounted on a Formée cross , which is an

artistic representation of the cross of Christ . This represents the Catholic identity of the Order .

Mounted on the shield are three objects : a fasces ; an anchor ; and a dagger . In ancient Rome , the fasces was carried before magistrates as an emblem of authority . The Order uses it as " symbolic of authority which must exist in any tightly @-@ bonded and efficiently operating organization " . The anchor represents Christopher Columbus , patron of the Order . The short sword , or dagger , was a weapon used by medieval knights . The shield as a whole , with the letters " K of C " , represents " Catholic Knighthood in organized merciful action " .

= = = Fourth Degree emblem = = =

The Fourth Degree emblem features a dove , a cross , and a globe . In the tradition of the Knights these symbols " typify the union of the three Divine Persons in one Godhead , referred to as the most Blessed Trinity " . The red , white , and blue are taken from the American flag and represent patriotism , the basic principle of the Fourth Degree . Styled with the continents of the western hemisphere in white , the blue globe represents God the Father . A red Isabella cross , for the queen who sponsored Columbus , serves as a symbol of God the Son . The white dove is a symbol of peace and God the Holy Spirit . Columbus ' name in Italian (Colombo) also means " dove " .

= = = Colombian Squires emblem = = =

The emblem of the Squires symbolizes the ideals which identify a squire . On the arms of a Maltese cross are the letters " P " , which represents the physical development necessary to make the body as strong as the spirit ; " I " , which stands for the intellectual development needed for cultural and mental maturity ; " S " , which represents the spiritual growth and practice of our faith ; and " C " , which stands for the development of citizenship and civic life . The larger letters : " C " , representing Christ and also Christopher Columbus ; " S " , the Squires ; and " K " , the Knights of Columbus , by whom the Squires program is sponsored , are intertwined in the center of the cross . They are the three foundations of the program .

The Latin motto , " Esto Dignus " , encircles the emblem . Translated into English , it means " Be Worthy " .

= = Auxiliary groups = =

= = = Women 's auxiliaries = = =

Many councils also have women 's auxiliaries . At the turn of the 20th century two were formed by local councils and each took the name the Daughters of Isabella . Using the same name , both groups expanded and issued charters to other circles but never merged . The newer organization renamed itself the Catholic Daughters of the Americas in 1921 and both have structures independent of the Knights of Columbus . Other groups are known as the Columbiettes . In the Philippines , the ladies ' auxiliary is known as the Daughters of Mary Immaculate .

= = = Columbian Squires = = =

The Knights ' official junior organization is the Columbian Squires . Founded in 1925 in Duluth , Minnesota , this international fraternity for boys 10 ? 18 has grown to over 5 @, @ 000 circles . According to Brother Barnabas McDonald , F.S.C. , the Squires ' founder : " The supreme purpose of the Columbian Squires is character building . "

Squires have fun and share their Catholic faith , help people in need , and enjoy the company of friends in social , family , athletic , cultural , civic and spiritual activities . Through their local circle , Squires work and socialize as a group of friends , elect their own officers , and develop into Catholic leaders . When Squires process in a color guard , they wear blue cape , similar to those worn by

members of the Fourth Degree , and black berets .

Each circle is supervised by a Knights of Columbus council or assembly , and has an advisory board made up of either the Grand Knight , the Deputy Grand Knight and Chaplain , or the Faithful Navigator , the Faithful Captain , and Faithful Friar . Circles are either council based , parish based , or school based , depending on the location of the circle and the Knight counselors .

= = = Squire Roses = = =

The Squire Roses are a youth sorority run by individual state councils for Catholic girls between the ages of 10 and 19 . Founded by Russell DeRose and the Virginia State Council of the Knights of Columbus in 1996 , the Roses are a sister organization to the Squires .

= = Similar organizations = =

The Knights of Columbus is a member of the International Alliance of Catholic Knights , which includes fifteen fraternal orders such as the Knights of Saint Columbanus in Ireland , the Knights of Saint Columba in the United Kingdom , the Knights of Peter Claver in the United States , the Knights of the Southern Cross in Australia and New Zealand , the Knights of Marshall in Ghana , the Knights of Da Gama in South Africa , and the Knights of Saint Mulumba in Nigeria . The Loyal Orange Institution , also known as the Orange Order , is a similar organization for Protestant Christians .