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**NEWS AND ACTIVITIES OF THE KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS ST. LOUIS COUNCIL 3335**



**Supreme Knight Patrick E. Kelly being interviewed by the National Catholic Register. On the right he is with his family flanked by the image of Blessed Michael J. McGivney, founder of the order at St. Mary's Church, New Haven, CT.**

**A CONVERSATION WITH SUPREME KNIGHT PATRICK E. KELLY  
Interview of March 9 Taken From the National Catholic Register**

**NEW HAVEN, Conn. — Among its many good works on behalf of the Church, the Knights of Columbus plays a key role in keeping the Church alive in the Middle East, Africa and Asia and, in the case of Iraq, against overwhelming odds. As the new supreme knight of the Knights of Columbus, Patrick Kelly sees the Knights taking up a similar challenge — this time on the home front.**

More than half of those raised Catholic leave the Church in their lives, and most never return. And stopping the exodus of Catholics and bringing them back is on the forefront of his mind as the new leader takes the helm of the world's largest Catholic fraternal order. In this interview with the Register, Kelly shares how he plans to build on the Knights' legacy left by Carl Anderson and also focus the Knights on evangelizing and forming men as missionary disciples. He sees this as key to building stronger marriages, stronger families and a stronger Church.

**What is it like to step into this role of supreme knight after the legacy left by Carl Anderson? You certainly have some huge shoes to fill.** It's true. I do have huge shoes to fill. But I would say I'm grateful for that, because I think we all know that Carl Anderson really left the Knights stronger than ever because of his two decades as supreme knight. He built really an incredible record of service and brotherhood for the Knights of Columbus.

We're stronger in so many ways in terms of our membership. We peaked with over 2 million members, and each year we do more charitable work in terms of service hours. We did 77 million service hours last year and [gave] \$187 million to charitable causes. And then our insurance, the way that Knights protect families through our insurance program, is also very strong. And particularly, on the pro-life front, the protection of the unborn has been a key initiative of his. It has always been a key part of the Knights of Columbus, but under Supreme Knight Anderson we put through an ultrasound program, which has been very, very successful.

These are all ways that Carl made the Knights stronger over the years. But I would say the real lasting legacy of Carl Anderson has been connecting [the Knights] with our founder. I think the beatification of Father McGivney was really a recognition from the Lord, of not only Father McGivney's virtue, but also the mission of the Knights. And so the founding vision of Father McGivney, and his example, will be the touchstone for me going forward.

**How would you describe the mission of the Knights of Columbus today in 2021 that Blessed Michael McGivney has given your organization?** I think it's a realization that we are stronger when we stand together, and the Knights of Columbus offers men something that I think all men want, which is *faith, friendship and service*. We empower men to live that in their parishes, their homes and their communities. I think that's something fundamental to the nature of this

organization. Men are motivated by service and by servant leadership. You know, as Christ says, “I come not to be served, but to serve” [Mark 10:45]. That is what we try to emulate in our service as Knights.

There’s that very famous quote from Benedict XVI, “*The world will offer you comfort, but you are not made for comfort. You were made for greatness.*” The Knights believe that men are made for greatness and to do great things: to serve their family, to serve others, and also to serve the Church. The Knights offer men a way to be better husbands, better fathers and better men of the Church. To be a well-ordered Catholic man, that really is his vocation.

**\*What brought you into the Knights of Columbus?** For me, it was friendship. It was friendship and brotherhood. I come from a family of Knights — I’m a third-generation Knight: My grandfather joined the Knights in 1915. He was a very young man, and it was right before he left for World War I. My father was a Knight, and he was a very faithful Knight, up until the point of his death 10 years ago. So I knew about the Knights, and I knew what the Knights did. But I have to say this: What I owed [joining the Knights] to was friendship. I was at Marquette University at the time, and I knew the other college men who were in the Knights. I liked them a lot. We were friends, and that kind of friendship where you have the most important things in common, that is to say our faith, is what really motivated me to become part of this brotherhood.

**So what drives you as a Knight of Columbus and now as supreme knight?** The opportunity *to show Catholic men and Catholic families a better way.* I think the Knights are needed now more than ever, because the young man who has a family, whether he’s in his 20s, 30s or 40s, he’s under a lot of stress. He’s struggling to keep his marriage healthy, and he’s struggling to keep his kids in the Catholic faith. For the men who are attending Mass on Sunday, that’s what they’re

struggling with. And the Knights need to be there for that man. We need to be there to offer him help.

It's a very serious thing. It's something I think about every day because I have young children, and I'm working hard to raise them in the faith. We did a video series, which we turned into a small-group program called "[Into the Breach.](#)" It really *shows men what it means to have healthy, authentic Catholic masculinity*. What does that look like? How do you think of that in your life? What do you do to maintain that? That is something we're going to really focus on. We're also going to be focusing on the marriage aspect of it, too. And coming in a bit, we're putting together a very similar program as it relates to marriage: What are the *things that we need to do to keep a healthy marriage?*

**That's wonderful. Now, I believe you left the Navy to study theology. Is that right? What has your journey in the Catholic faith been like?** Yes, I did. So I grew up in a Catholic family, eight children in all. We were a practicing Catholic family with a strong faith. I went to Marquette and joined the Knights at Marquette.

It was my service in the military, and my work with sailors, where I saw what happens when there really aren't any strong leadership figures in their lives, when perhaps there isn't a father figure in their lives, and when they have no faith. I was a lawyer in the military, in the JAG Corps at that time, and you would see so many of these good young men have such a difficult time. And that really got me thinking a lot and praying a lot. That's when I decided to leave the Navy and study theology. I did that at *the John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family* in Washington, D.C.

**Can you tell me about that background?** That experience — really, if it's not too dramatic, it changed my life. Just the richness of the teaching. We were studying Catholic teaching: fundamental theology, moral theology and the thought of John Paul II. I found John Paul II to

be a very compelling figure, but then reading his writings and studying them in such an intensive way for that master's program, I would just come away thinking, "This is the truth. This is the truth." It really grabbed me. And then, also, just to get to know the mind of the Church, and think with the mind of the Church, was very, very important for me.

**Are there particular Catholic saints that inspire you as a Knight?**

Yes! So first and foremost is Blessed Michael McGivney, our newly beatified founder. His example is so important, and I pray for his intercession every day. He confronted some very difficult times in his life. He saw the families in his parish really struggling, and he saw the men of his parish struggling in a culture that was very, very hard on them. Economically, it was very hard. There was tremendous anti-Catholicism, with Catholics sort of at the bottom of the social rung, and he struggled against that. That's why he formed the Knights of Columbus: So he could strengthen men in their faith.

I have a particular devotion as well to *St. Joseph*. To me, it's very providential that Pope Francis has declared this to be the Year of St. Joseph. I think it's just tailor-made for the Knights. The Knights of Columbus board of directors met with Pope Francis in 2013, and he commended to us the example of St. Joseph, the admirable qualities of St. Joseph, and the virtues of quiet strength, integrity and fidelity, which have always characterized the Knights of Columbus. I just have to say, I've always loved *St. Ignatius [of Loyola]*. I was exposed to him by the Jesuits and his discernment methods. I have a great devotion to St. Ignatius and find his method of discernment to be right on.

**What's on the horizon for the Knights of Columbus? What do you see as your priorities?** My priorities include, obviously, to continue the legacy of the great work and maintain that. But Pope Francis calls us to be missionary disciples. I do think that the Knights of Columbus going forward will become more active, not only in defending the faith ... but also in the area of *evangelization*.

I think there's a lot of work to be done in forming the Catholic man, which is forming the Catholic family. We all know that *the single most important determining factor in whether a child remains in the faith is the religious practice of the father*. If the child sees that the father is serious about his faith, that child, more likely than not, will stay in the faith. I think that's very important because we're losing our kids, and the demographic trends in the Church are very serious. The second-largest denomination, if you want to use that expression, in the United States are those Catholics who have left the faith. *One of the charisms of the Knights* is always to be in service of the Church, and so we will be redoubling our efforts to share our faith and to strengthen the man who is in the pew right now.

**What are the next steps for the Knights of Columbus to take this focus of missionary discipleship and evangelization at the heart of Catholic life and realize it at the local level?** First, we've got to come out of COVID. That will be an important thing. I think the Knights will have a role to play in that. In terms of assisting pastors, I think the local councils can assist pastors in bringing them their feedback and their views.

The healthier the parish, the healthier the Knights are. So I think that is a key part. And with "*Into the Breach*," with this [Catholic formation in] authentic masculinity, what does that look like? We've only begun to really work in that area. We put up this program and then COVID hit, but it's so rich; there's a lot that we can do with that program. And then I think the marriage program is also going to be really, really important. I can just tell you from my own personal experience, when a pastor is giving a homily on the subject of marriage, you can see everyone is inclining their ear. So it's going to be very important to the Knights *to help strengthen marriages, because the stronger the marriage, the stronger the children and the healthier for the Church*. Obviously, these initiatives will develop over time, and

there will be others as we go down the road. But that's the direction that I think we need to take, because the challenges are so great.

**Thank you so much, Supreme Knight. It's a big task you have on your shoulders. What would you say is going to be the biggest support to keep you grounded and keep you going?** I know what it is: *It's prayer; it's prayer.* It's going to be prayer every morning, starting the day on your knees. It's an important thing to do. I try to do an hour of prayer every morning and say the Rosary every morning. Even since I started March 1 as the supreme knight, it has already been a source of great comfort. But I also have the *support of a really good team here* at the Knights of Columbus. We have a fabulous team. And that's a joy to work with good people who are really committed to the Church. It's a blessing. And then obviously the *support of my wife*. She has always been so greatly supportive of this as my own vocation. So I think those three supports will stand me in good stead.