

Why Encourage Membership in Knights? It's an Opportunity to Grow in Jesus Christ

BY FATHER BENEDICT CROELL, O.P.

Since 2010, Father Benedict Croell has served as director of vocations for the Dominican Province of St. Joseph (Eastern) at the Dominican House of Studies in Washington, D.C. He previously served in parish, university and itinerant preaching ministries. He also served five years in the Order's East African missions, where he was novice master for young men from seven countries in their initial stage of formation.

The Dominican Friars have felt a certain affinity with the Knights of Columbus over the years because Venerable Father Michael J. McGivney is entombed in St. Mary's Church in New Haven, where the Knights was founded. The Dominican Friars were privileged to be invited to take over St. Mary's shortly after Father McGivney was assigned to a different parish. The connection with Father McGivney is more than the parish itself, though. In fact, everything Father McGivney stood for in his founding of the Knights is everything we want for the young men coming to discern a vocation with us.

We have a general principle from which we work in encouraging men who feel the call: Be active in your Catholic faith and build up the Church. We want them to be socially connected with both men and women in good, healthy relationships. In particular, to follow the Lord Jesus, they should be especially connected with other young Catholic men. College-age or young adult men need a strong fraternity within a Christian community of men who can help them navigate today's ambient culture. Where do young university-age or young professional-age men find this countercultural Catholic fraternity? The Knights of Columbus!

During my eight years as vocation director, our friars and I have visited more than 45 (mostly secular) college campuses. Our sense is that the role of men, especially fathers and husbands, is under attack in a big way in our culture. The whole vocation to be a man and to be a follower of Jesus Christ is being thwarted in various ways. Young men need to understand by the guidance of the Church's teachings what it means to be a young man; what it means to be masculine; what it means to follow Jesus Christ; what it means to be in the world, but not to be of the world; what it means to love your country. All of the things that the Knights of Columbus stands for are the kinds of qualities that we look for in young men who want to become Dominicans. This begins with being a college Knight and continues as they mature.

With the assistance of the Knights of Columbus on college campuses, young men come "to mature manhood, to the extent of the full stature of Christ" in Jesus Christ (Eph 4:13). After they go to college, some guys "go off the deep end" and lose their bearings and, many times, their faith. What better place for them to make their own choices in life, away from home and family, than within a campus ministry that has a dynamic college council?

I have seen how a strong college council actually strengthens the campus ministry. On most campuses we have visited, there are disproportionately more women than men. Why is that? Where are all the men?

While the culture is strong, college and young adult Knights provide a Catholic identity to universities and young adult ministries. The Knights are a way to strengthen and build up the Church.

I've also found that when a man finishes college and goes into the world (say, for example, he moves to Washington, D.C., to get a job and is trying to find his way), the Knights of Columbus offers a great opportunity to really be connected. While the Knights are an independent Catholic organization, their role as men is to build up the Catholic faith and be leaders.

A lot of young men have received everything from everyone else their whole life. The Knights of Columbus enables young men to give back and be involved with their community and the local Catholic community. College students and young adults are called to build up the Church — now, not later.

We Dominicans have three super active young adult ministries within the D.C./Baltimore area. One is at our parish at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore; one is at our seminary, the Dominican House of Studies; and the last is at St. Dominic Church in Washington, D.C. Young men and women join these groups because they're searching for their way in life. I also think a lot of them are looking to find their future spouses. Such young adult groups can be found across the country in most big cities.

If these young adult groups also knew the Knights of Columbus, I think not only would the young Catholic men be strengthened, but the groups and ministries themselves would be strengthened by the Knights. Some young men will meet their future spouses, and some will also discover their vocation to the priesthood or religious life!



Photo by Spirit Juice Studios

Father Croell served as a chaplain for college Knights during a special pilgrimage just prior to World Youth Day Kraków 2016. Here he walks along Poland's Tatra Mountains with Father Gabriel Gillen (left), who served as a media consultant for the K of C-sponsored Mercy Centre.