



A MESSAGE FROM THE SUPREME KNIGHT

1/1/2019



Dear Brother Knight:

There have been times in our country's past when uninformed or prejudiced people questioned whether Catholics could be good citizens or honest public servants. That's why Father McGivney chose the name "Columbus" for our Order — because the discoverer was the Catholic figure from American history most admired and accepted at the time. In fact, from our founding in 1882, until the election of Brother Knight John F. Kennedy in 1960, many still held that Catholics were unfit for public office. Throughout that time, the Knights of Columbus worked to counter such prejudice.

Sadly, it seems that in some quarters, this prejudice remains. ^[1] First, in 2017 a Notre Dame law professor was deemed unfit for a federal judgeship by a United States Senator who feared

that “the dogma lives loudly within you.” Now, two more senators have questioned a Brother Knight’s fitness for the federal bench precisely because our Order holds firm to the Church’s teachings on the sanctity of life and marriage.

Such attacks on the basis of our Catholic faith are hardly new. The Knights of Columbus was formed amid a period of anti-Catholic bigotry. We stood against that then, and we do so now. We have spoken out against persecution around the world for nearly a century. At the same time, here at home we stood against the Ku Klux Klan, including its attempts to ban Catholic education, and we published books on the black and Jewish contributions to American history decades before the Civil Rights movement. More recently, we stood with the Little Sisters of the Poor in their fight for religious liberty and have worked with both the Obama and Trump administrations — and both sides of the aisle in Congress — to help Christians, Yazidis and Shi’a Muslims targeted for genocide by ISIS.

From our very beginning, the Knights of Columbus has been an organization adhering to the teachings of the Catholic Church. As with the Church, our primary motivation in everything is Christ’s great commandment, that we love God completely and our neighbor as ourselves.

As the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* explains, “Jesus Christ reveals to us that ‘God is love’ and He teaches us that ‘the fundamental law of human perfection, and consequently of the transformation of the world, is the new commandment of love.’”^[iii]

This love impels us to our great charitable endeavors on behalf of those in need. From inner cities in the United States to refugee camps in the Middle East our Order’s donations over the last decade — more than one billion dollars and hundreds of millions of hours in volunteer work — are the result of this faith.

These works of charity have practical impacts that transform lives as we help people here at home and around the world. Our charity helped typhoon victims in the Philippines rebuild their lives and livelihoods; it brought prosthetics and rehabilitation to thousands of Haitian youth after the earthquake there; it puts coats on poor, cold children in some

of our country's most impoverished neighborhoods each winter; it gives wheelchairs to those who otherwise could not afford them in countries like Vietnam and Mexico; and it provides education, housing and medical care to AIDS orphans in Africa.

This love also motivates us to stand with the Church on the important issues of life and marriage, precisely because the Church's teaching reflects and is based on that love. We stand with our Church because we believe that what our faith teaches is consistent with reason, is timeless and transcends the changing sentiments of any particular time or place.

We do not stand alone.

In his first message to our international convention, Pope Francis asked "each Knight, and every Council, to bear witness to the authentic nature of marriage and the family, the sanctity and inviolable dignity of human life, and the beauty and truth of human sexuality."

And our positions on life are not new. My two predecessors as supreme knight spoke out forcefully to defend the rights of the unborn. In 1973, Supreme Knight John McDevitt wrote that *Roe v. Wade* was "a mortal blow to all who consider human life sacred." He urged the Order "to initiate or increase efforts to offset the harmful effects of this lamentable decision."

My immediate predecessor, Virgil Dechant, said in 1977: "With some 1.2 million unborn babies being killed by abortion each year in the United States alone, we are confronted with an outrage against human life paralleled only by the ravages of a bloody war."

Simply put, our positions are now, and have always been, Catholic positions.

We must remember that Article VI of the U. S. Constitution forbids a religious test for public office, and the First Amendment guarantees our free exercise of religion, freedom of association and freedom of speech. Any suggestion that the Order's adherence to the beliefs of the Catholic Church makes a Brother Knight unfit for public office blatantly violates those constitutional guarantees.

Let us continue to express our love of God and neighbor by helping those in need and by standing with our Church, regardless of the popularity of doing so. Let us remember that our “Christian witness is to be considered a fundamental obligation.” ^[i]

Let us also remember that, from our founding, we have embodied the truth that a good Catholic is a good citizen who shows civility and dignity even in the face of prejudice.

As we begin 2019, Dorian and I wish you a new year filled with the joy and wonders of His love. Thank you as well for all the many ways in which you have brought joy into the lives of millions around the world. May the inspiration of our founder prompt us to greater confidence in that love and encourage us to even greater works of charity.

Fraternally,

Carl A. Anderson

[i] See the excellent historical study by historian Philip Jenkins, *The New Anti-Catholicism: The Last Acceptable Prejudice*, (Oxford University Press, 2003).

[ii] Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2005), no. 54.

[iii] *Ibid.*, no. 570.