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Three Cheers for the Knights of Columbus

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Every year for a few days at the beginning of August the Knights of Columbus hold their annual convention. This year more than 2,000 delegates gathered in Washington, D.C. with their wives and families for a deepening of fraternity, a re-affirmation of unity and re-commitment to the life and works of charity.

The main "events" take place on the second full day. With over 50 of my brother bishops and scores of priest chaplains of the K of C, Archbishop Donald Wuerl of Washington presided at a solemn Mass at the Basilica Shrine of the Immaculate Conception. His homily was a primer on what every Catholic lay person is called and gifted by God to live. The Mass also set the tone and expressed the spirit of the convention: a deep sense of oneness in the Lord and in His Church and a faith-filled commitment to build up the Body of the Church by supporting bishops, priests and one another as a common witness to the world of the saving message of Christ.

The third event of the day took place in the evening with the "States Dinner." The K of C began in New Haven through the inspiration and leadership of the Servant of God, Father Michael McGivney. It has grown to be the largest Catholic benevolent and fraternal organization in the world with membership not only in every state of our nation but in Canada, Mexico, the Philippines and Poland as well. The composition of the membership shapes the celebratory dinner in the following way.

With the bishops on the dais from all five countries, the Supreme Knight, Mr. Carl Anderson, and the Supreme Chaplain, Bishop William Lori of Bridgeport opened the dinner which is introduced by prayer and the national anthems of all five countries plus the Vatican City State. Then, during the dinner, a small orchestra plays the songs of every state of the union, every province of Canada, as well as songs from the other three countries. If a Knight, including us bishops, has a connection with any one or several of these places, he is urged to stand, join in the singing and wave the appropriate flag. It is a festive atmosphere that demonstrates both the rich variety of the membership and the enthusiastic fraternal support that characterize the K of C. This year the Knights gave a special award and recognition to the Archbishop of Havana, Cuba, Cardinal Jaime Ortega for his defense of religious liberty and his witness in a communist nation to human dignity in accordance with the teachings of the Church.

The "second event" had already taken place. That is the business meeting in the early afternoon. What makes that so important is that the Supreme Knight, Mr. Anderson, who has led the Knights for the past 10 years, makes his Annual Report to the membership. For me it was once again an extraordinary presentation of the breadth and depth of why the K of C is the most important fraternal lay organization in the Catholic Church today. Having chosen as this year's theme the words from the Book of Genesis, "I am my brother's keeper," Mr. Anderson gave us an overview of all the activities and commitments not just of the past year but over the last 10 years as well. They are very impressive.

Let me share a few with you. First is that the membership growth indicates a very dynamic group growing from 1.72 million in 2006 to 1.81 million members in 2009. In 2009, members contributed 69.3 million hours of voluntary service which had a dollar value of \$151 million. The life insurance sector which is the "bread and butter" mainstay of the K of C has grown from 57.7 million to 74.3 million in the same period with all the associated categories increasing similarly.

These are concrete reasons to be proud of the Knights. But to me even more important is the amount of commitment the K of C makes to the Church and to the work of the Church. Their support for dioceses, parishes and clergy amounted to more than \$800,000. Grants made to the Church and Church entities at all levels were \$7.9 million. No group has been more supportive of the protection of life, unborn life and family life, than the Knights. Their efforts to support marriage and to defend against same-sex marriage legislation have wrought very positive results, most recently in Maine. The K of C supports seminarians and promotes vocations in a variety of ways, including scholarships for men to enter the seminary and be prepared for priesthood. They are major supporters of Catholic education and youth. They commit themselves faithfully to concerns as different as cultural activities through, for example, the Pope John Paul II Cultural Center and to hands-on care in homes for young mothers in difficult pregnancies. In short, if there is a need and if the K of C can help advance the Church and help those who turn to the Church in their need, then this great fraternal organization is there, putting themselves and their resources at the disposal of all that is right, true and good.

During his presentation, Mr. Anderson brought the audience to their feet with a standing ovation. He said that the Year for Priests called by the Holy Father has come to an end but "For the K of C the year for priests is every year. We will never stop praying and supporting our bishops and priests for whom we are grateful to God because of their holy lives and their pastoral care of the Church." As a priest and bishop I am deeply grateful to him and to all the Knights and their families throughout the world, but especially to all of you here in our diocese, for your unrelenting and total commitment to the priests of this diocese. I know the goodness and the prayerful character of the priests who serve here. I am proud of them and humbled to be numbered among them.

And so, to the Supreme Knight, Carl Anderson, to all the Knights of Columbus and their families and to all of you, the faithful of our diocese: I express my gratitude to God and my thanks to you for your prayers, your support, your care and love for the priests who serve God by serving you in this most wonderful ministry of being priests of Jesus Christ here on Long Island in union with our Holy Father and the one Catholic Church around the world.

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The Bishop's Weekly Column

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The Catholic Press Association of the United States and Canada -

Awarded Bishop Murphy's column, third-place in the category of best regular column by a bishop or archbishop. **Judges praised Faith and New Works as "a consistently good column" with "clearly stated opinions" on current issues.**