

## History of the Florida state council of the knights of columbus



The Knights of Columbus are the largest fraternal order of Catholic men in the world. They had their beginning in the United States during the late nineteenth century when Catholic immigrants from Europe faced prejudice and social hardships. A group of Irish American Catholic men in Connecticut led by Father Michael J. McGivney formed a fraternal insurance benefit society to help widows and orphans. They called themselves Knights of Columbus and received a charter from the state of Connecticut on March 29, 1882. For the next several years the Knights grew in membership, but mostly in Connecticut. After the turn of the century the organization spread to the neighboring states of Massachusetts, New York, and other New England states.

In 1901, a group of Catholic men gathered in St. Augustine, Florida under the leadership of William O. Boutwell to consider membership in the Knights. On October 13 Supreme Knight Edward L. Hearn instituted First Florida Council 611, with Boutwell as Grand Knight. Within the year, three other councils, Jacksonville Council 648 (later changed in name to Father Michael Maher Council), Tampa Council 667, and Pensacola Council 778 were established.

In the early 20th century, the Catholic faith in Florida was largely centered in St. Augustine, Jacksonville, Tampa, and Pensacola. Catholic men of those cities fought bigotry, atheism, and ignorance. Father Maher, Chancellor of the Diocese of St. Augustine, was the first Florida priest to become a Knight.

With the chartering of a fifth council Florida became a "Jurisdiction" and the first State convention was convened in St. Augustine; Boutwell, then Territorial Deputy, was unanimously elected first State Deputy.

Father Michael J. Curley, of DeLand, served as Chaplain of First Florida Council and as State Chaplain. He was consecrated as Bishop of St. Augustine and, later, as Archbishop of Baltimore. Father Patrick Barry, a charter member of Council 648, became Bishop of St. Augustine. Many priests have given of their time and effort to the order.

During World War I, the Knights of Columbus set up centers to help U. S. service men, in much the same way as the YMCA had. The National Catholic War Council and the Knights of Columbus set up huts to help provide for the needs of Catholic soldiers. The Florida Knights participated in these efforts and there was a K. of C. Center at Camp Jackson, at Jacksonville, in 1917. With many of these huts in the United States and in France, the order became well known for these efforts. The picture of one hut in France with a large sign reading "EVERYONE WELCOME, EVERYTHING FREE" is still a source of pride to Brother Knights.





Officers of the Fourth Degree, Knights of Columbus.

One of the Knights' more illustrious members was President John F. Kennedy, who was a Fourth Degree Knight. The Fourth Degree was instituted in 1900. Its members are the most visible Knights because of their colorful capes and plumed hats. They provide an honor guard for the bishops in ecclesiastic ceremonies.

The Knights promote activities designed to help children. The Squires is an organization sponsored by the Knights for boys ages 10 to 18. It sponsors Boy Scout Troops, a Spelling Bee, a basketball free throw contest, and altar server awards.

The Knights support seminarians, young men studying for the priesthood. They support the Pope, Cardinals, and Bishops whenever they can. Each council in Florida runs a Handicapped Drive in early March. All the money collected is donated to the mentally challenged and handicapped citizens in the council area.

Mike Zapp, a young man from South Florida, started a Run For Life several years ago. Mike with several other young men ran from Homestead to St. Augustine in an effort to collect funds that are turned over to the Knights of Columbus Charities, which disperses the funds to homes who give aid to unwed mothers and abused women.

The Knights of Columbus are an international organization. Worldwide Columbianism supports such programs as squires, annual golf, softball, and bowling tournaments, council activities, church activities, family activities, bible placement, health services, special Olympics, Keep Christ in Christmas, and decency programs. The Knights have lived up to any expectation that their founder Father Michael J. McGivney could have envisioned. The Knights did not do what they have done for praise or honor but because they believe in Columbianism.

The Knights of Columbus has a membership exceeding 1,620,000 members worldwide. The State of Florida Knights alone have raised and donated millions of dollars within the state.