

Catholic Organization Directory

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Rochester Knights mark century of service

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

Father Robert T. Werth can't say enough good things about Rochester's Knights of Columbus Council No. 178, which is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year.

"They have an unbelievable dedication to Catholicism and good works," said Father Werth, who is a member of the Knights himself and who serves as chaplain to No. 178.

For the uninitiated, the Knights of Columbus is the Catholic church's largest fraternal organization, founded by Father Michael McGivney in New Haven, Conn. Indeed, it is in many ways the prototypical church organization.

In addition to serving the church and the community beyond the church, the Knights of Columbus also provides such benefits for its members as life insurance, and work on behalf of such causes as the pro-life movement.

Council No. 178 is one of hundreds throughout this country, each of which is independently incorporated. But they are united by their attempts to live out the Knights of Columbus motto: Charity, Unity, Fraternity and Patriotism.

Father Werth said he has witnessed the Knights' dedication time and time again as pastor of the Roman Catholic Community of the 19th Ward, a cluster in the city's southwest area that encompasses the parishes of St. Augustine's, St. Monica's and Our Lady of Good Counsel.

He pointed out, for example, that No. 178 allowed St. Monica's to conduct its religious education program at council

headquarters at 670 Thurston Road for a number of years and charged no rent to the parish.

"They've always been gracious in the use of the building," he said, adding that the council also lets the 19th Ward parishes use its facility for minimal rent to put on such fundraisers as pancake breakfasts.

The council won't be at its Thurston Road address much longer, according to F. Robert Ridley, a past grand knight (head) of the council, and chairman of the council's Centennial Anniversary Committee. A deal to sell the building is in the works, and the council is seeking a new site among dozens of potential locations throughout the city, he said.

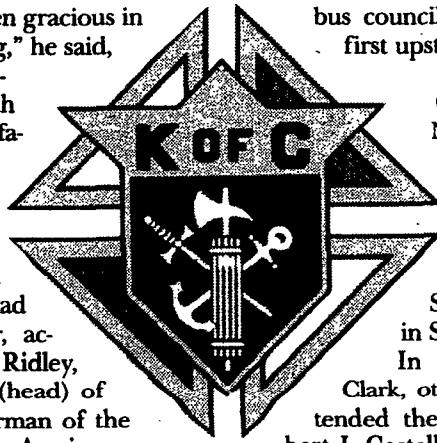
Wherever No. 178 is located, Father Werth commented, it, and the Knights of Columbus in general, offer something to lay Catholic men that they can't find just anywhere.

"Because parishes don't have real active men's groups anymore, I just see the Knights as the men's group of the Catholic church," he said. "It's one of the primary ways men can get together who are men of faith."

About 150 men and women celebrated the council's centennial on June 1 with a Mass at St. Monica's parish, followed by a banquet at the Holiday Inn near the Rochester airport.

Council No. 178 was the first Knights of Columbus council founded in the Diocese of Rochester, which now boasts about 50 such councils.

"We started it all in upstate New York," Ridley said, pointing out that No. 178 was the 12th Knights of Columbus council in the state, and the first upstate.



Bishop Matthew H. Clark concelebrated No. 178's centennial Mass at St. Monica's with Father Werth and Father Paul G. Wohlrab, priest-in-residence at St. John the Evangelist in Spencerport.

In addition to Bishop Clark, other dignitaries who attended the banquet included Albert J. Costello, supreme director of the Knights of Columbus in the United States; James A. Foy, New York state deputy of the Knights; Raymond P. Pfeifer, a past state deputy; and John D. Doyle, Monroe County executive.

The council earned several plaudits from these guests, including Bishop Clark.

"Your love for the church has manifested itself through your prayers, labors and sacrifices to support the needs of every decade," Bishop Clark wrote in a letter to No. 178's members.

Indeed, meeting the needs of others is apparently of primary concern to members of No. 178, who rattled off a veritable who's who list of Catholic and secular charities for which council members have raised money and/or worked for over the years.

Among the organizations the Knights assisted are: The School of the Holy Childhood and Al Sigl Center in Rochester, both of which serve people with developmental dis-

abilities; the Catholic Youth Organization; and the Veterans Administration Hospital in Bath where No. 178's Knights and the Ladies Auxiliary put on a song and dance show every year for the patients.

Betty Szembrot, recording secretary for No. 178's Ladies Auxiliary, said the work she puts into the annual show at the Bath VA hospital, which takes place in March, is one of the highlights of her year.

"You're tired but it's a great tiredness," she said. "You're feeling good because you're doing something for someone."

Her husband, Albert Szembrot, a trustee of the council and past grand knight, noted that it was the chance to have those kinds of feelings and share them with others that made him join the council in 1967. Belonging to an organization devoted to charitable Christian work made sense, he said.

"There's strength in numbers," Szembrot commented. "If you have a hundred people, you can get more done than if you act alone."

The Knights have also raised money and volunteered for numerous other groups devoted to serving people with such problems as kidney disease and crippling physical ailments, while financially supporting Catholic education throughout the diocese, members of the council said. Knights put a premium on such service, according to Peter Witkowicz, current grand knight of the council who will be succeeded by John Dengler on July 1.

"They have to want to give of themselves for God and community," Witkowicz said of potential members of the council. "If you don't want to volunteer and help out, you shouldn't be a Knight."



Ralph Handley

Pope Pius XII Knights aid job project client

IRONDEQUOIT — Like their brothers in Council No. 178, the Knights of Columbus in Pope Pius XII Council No. 4691 are working to improve the greater community.

Along with parishioners from Irondequoit's Christ the King Parish, the Knights are sponsoring the job training of an adult with developmental disabilities, according to Diane L. Mahon, public relations specialist for The Arc of Monroe County.

The Arc is an agency that works with people who have developmental disabilities.

The client will be paid from a \$1,200 fund donated by the Knights and the parishioners, Mahon said. The client is working at a nursing home learning to transport residents in wheelchairs and help them participate in social activities.

"He's basically volunteering for a local nursing home, but this (donation) allows him to get a paycheck," she said.

The Arc has helped 265 clients find employment in the mainstream work-force through its Job Path program, Mahon said. Some are sponsored at their jobs by outside funders, but the majority are paid by the businesses where they work, she said. Mahon added that The Arc is looking for other organizations, service groups and individuals to sponsor job training.

For information on sponsoring a Job Path client, or on setting up a similar opportunity for a person with developmental disabilities, call Mahon at 716/325-8050.

— Rob Cullivan