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## BROTHER KNIGHTS: FORWARD, MARCH!

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As we prepare to celebrate the one hundredth birthday of the first Knights of Columbus council in New Brunswick at Saint John, this coming May, I want to give thanks to the Lord for the priceless gift which is ours, of having 22 councils and 9 assemblies, in our Diocese. This points to the fact that the work which Father Michael J. M<sup>c</sup>Givney started in Connecticut in the early 1880s quickly spread to our country. There were big challenges to overcome in the past, just as now, but thanks to the boldness, tenacity, and generosity of the Knights of Columbus, we hope to pick up those challenges which are ours today.

### THE CHALLENGES OF FAITH EDUCATION

Like their fellow citizens the Knights, too, are faced with the challenge of deepening their own religious formation at a time when secularism is taking more and more room in all areas of life. For some Knights, catechism lessons or new religious education courses go back several years! As they participate in the Sunday celebrations, the Gospel texts become more familiar to them. Nevertheless, the Knights owe it to themselves to set aside special times and places for quiet reflection on their faith. Father M<sup>c</sup>Givney would be glad to meet several of my brother Knights who are serious about their own and their families' growth in the Catholic faith. He would be proud to see Knights who participate in formation meetings for parish- and family-based religious education, and who are even involved in their children's religious formation. Father M<sup>c</sup>Givney would be proud of all the volunteer work his Knights do with youth, how they contribute financially in some places to the success of the catechetics programme. I am proud of the Knights of Columbus who as "the right arm of the Church," support our Church's pastoral priorities. And I thank them now, also, for responding to the call I have issued, to consolidate religious education and catechesis in our diocese.

### THE CHALLENGES OF THE FAMILY

Like their fellow citizens the Knights are faced with the challenge of strengthening their own families and those of their loved ones. Their generosity as Knights of Columbus incites them to contribute to the strengthening of the family bonds that exist among us. This is an ongoing task, a delicate task which requires tact, a non-judgmental attitude, and perseverance. Situations today are foreign to those that were experienced in years past, nor are they similar from one family to another. Convinced that families themselves are the best situated to evangelise other families, the Knights continue to promote the lasting values of past and future generations, values of fidelity, kindness, religious faith, and solidarity. However, they are dedicated above all to promoting the respect of life. The encyclical which Pope John Paul II wrote on the Gospel of Life is a major reference of several of the Knights' activities. They take part in the annual March for Life and offer generous help to expectant mothers. The support given by the Knights of Columbus to the Catholic Organisation for Life and Family is worth noting: the documents produced by COLF are of an outstanding quality. The latest one is titled *Marriage Matters*, available from the COLF Secretariat (2500 Don Reid Drive, Ottawa, ON K1H 2J2), is a most positive contribution to the actual debate regarding marriage.

### THE CHALLENGES OF YOUTH

Like their fellow citizens the Knights are faced with the challenge of entering into partnership with our youth. What can we do for them and with them? How do we reach them? Can we and the Knights build "bridges" together? Can we find among our youth upstanding "recruits" to carry on the K of C ideal? Year after year there is much effort expended for recruiting new members, but results are not always gratifying; and year after year we witness an aging membership... The Knights are most generous in promoting the recruitment and training of future priests, but there also, expectations and hopes are not always fulfilled. In the clergy also the aging process is evident, with fewer and fewer priests. Nevertheless, there is one virtue only, required for

working with youth, and it is the virtue of hope which presides over all our activities, the virtue of the sower who scatters the good seed.

### **THE CHALLENGES OF HOLINESS**

Like their fellow citizens the Knights are confronted with the need for ever greater intimacy with God and with one another. There are now over 50,000 Friends of Father Michael J. M<sup>c</sup>Givney, who hope and pray that he soon be counted among the blessed and saints of the Church. These Friends are themselves challenged to become saints of the new millennium, not only by their brother officers but by Pope John Paul II himself who calls on them to remain faithful to the vision of their founder: "Continue to search for new ways of being like a Gospel leaven," he said to them on October 9, "and to be at the heart of the Church's renewal, a spiritual force of holiness, unity, and truth." This is quite a programme! I am certain that several Knights strive to accomplish in their daily lives the most ordinary activities with the greatest zeal and charity: this is the high road to holiness.

### **THE CHALLENGES OF SOLIDARITY**

Like their fellow citizens the Knights are faced with the challenge of solidarity in the face of an individualism which always tries to get the upper hand, in our lives. If at special periods of the year and before trying situations the Knights engage in works that bring relief, life and courage to others, they also know how to look after, day after day, the needy and the suffering. More and more firmly rooted in their councils and assemblies, and rooted in their solid faith in Jesus Christ, they will stand in solidarity with families, with youth, and with future priests. This they will do because of their high ideal and because the strength of their organisation is there to support them and stimulate them. May they find new members among our population, in the weeks and months to come. Brother Knights, forward, march! Let us continue to build the Church together!

*+ François Thibodeau*

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« From A Bishop's Journal » (527) (11 February 2004)