Who are the Knights of Columbus?

In 1882 an assistant pastor of St. Mary's Church in New Haven Conn. and some of his parishioners joined together to form the Knights of Columbus to provide financial aid to members and their families who are sick, disabled or needed help. Social and intellectual fellowship is promoted among members and their families through educational, charitable and religious works.

The history of the Knights shows how the foresight of Father Michael J. McGivney, whose cause for sainthood is being investigated by the Vatican, brought about what has become the world's foremost Catholic fraternal benefit society. The Order has helped families obtain economic security and stability through its life insurance, annuity and long-term care programs, and has contributed time and energy worldwide to service in communities.

The Knights of Columbus has grown from several members in the one original council to more than 13,000 councils and 1.8 million members throughout the United States, Canada, the Philippines, Mexico, Poland, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Panama, the Bahamas, the Virgin Islands, Cuba, Guatemala, Guam, Saipan, Lithuania, Ukraine, and South Korea.

1882-1899: The Founding
Late-19th century Connecticut was marked by the growing prevalence of fraternal benefit societies, hostility toward Catholic immigrants and dangerous working conditions in factories that left many families fatherless. Recognizing a vital, practical need in his community, Father Michael J. McGivney, the 29-year-old assistant pastor of St. Mary's Church in New Haven, Conn., gathered a group of men at his parish on Oct. 2, 1881. He proposed establishing a lay organization, the goal of which would be to prevent Catholic men from entering secret societies whose membership was antithetical to Church teaching, to unite men of Catholic faith and to provide for the families of deceased members.
As a symbol that allegiance to their country did not conflict with allegiance to their faith, the organization's members took as their patron Christopher Columbus — recognized as a Catholic and celebrated as the discoverer of America. Thanks to Father McGivney's persistence, the Knights of Columbus elected officers in February 1882 and officially assumed corporate status on March 29.
In addition to the Order's stated benefits, Catholic men were drawn to the Knights because of its emphasis on serving one's Church, community and family with virtue. Writing in *The Columbiad* in 1898, a year before he was elected supreme knight, Edward L. Hearn wrote that a Knight should live according to the virtues of loyalty, charity, courtesy and modesty, as well as "self-denial and careful respect for the feelings of others." Fraternity and patriotism were added to the Knights' founding principles of charity and unity in 1885 and 1900, respectively.

Our Principles

All the good works the Knights do are informed by our four core principles:
Charity, Unity, Fraternity, and Patriotism

Levels or Degrees of Knighthood

There are 4 levels or degrees of Knighthood. Once a member has attained the 4th level he can become a member of a special group called the Color Corps. The Color Corps is the most visible sign to the public.

Emblem of the Order

The emblem indicates a shield mounted upon the Formée cross (having the arms narrow at the center and expanding toward the ends). The shield is that associated with a medieval knight. The Formée cross is the representation of a traditional artistic design of the cross of Christ through which all graces of redemption were procured for mankind. This then represents the Catholic spirit of the Order.

Mounted on the shield are three objects: a fasces (a bundle of rods bound together about an ax with the blade projecting) standing vertically and, crossed behind it, an anchor and a dagger or short sword. The fasces from Roman days, carried before magistrates as an emblem of authority, is symbolic of authority, which must exist in any tightly bonded and efficiently operating organization. The anchor is the mariner's symbol for Columbus, patron of our Order, while the short sword or dagger was the weapon of the Knight when engaged upon an errand of mercy. Thus, the shield expresses Catholic Knighthood in organized merciful action, and with the letters, KofC, it proclaims this specific form of activity.

Each Knight receives the emblem as a lapel pin upon initiation.

Fourth Degree Emblem

The triad emblem of the Fourth Degree features the dove, the cross and the globe. The dove, classic symbol of the Holy Spirit and peace, is shown hovering over the orb of the Earth (globe). Both are mounted on a variation of the Crusader's cross, which was found on the tunics and capes of the Crusading knights who battled to regain the Holy Land from the pagans.

Spiritually, the sacred symbols on the emblem typify the union of the Three Divine Persons in one Godhead, the most Blessed Trinity:

* The Globe—God the Father, Creator of the Universe.

* The Cross—God the Son, Redeemer of Mankind.

* The Dove—God the Holy Spirit, Sanctifier of Humanity.

The colors of the symbols are

* A blue globe with the land of the Western Hemisphere in white.

* A red cross with gold borders and gold knobs at the end of the points forming the ends of the arms of the cross, also known as the Isabella cross.

* A white dove.

Red, white and blue are the colors of the flag of the country in which the Knights originated. They are used to stress patriotism, the basic principle of the Fourth Degree.

Purpose of The Color Corps of the Fourth Degree

When knighthood was in flower as in the time of the Knights of the Round Table, knights carried the sword to defend their God, their Church, their country and their fellow man according to the code of chivalry. Today, Sir Knights wear regalia and carry the sword to honor Christ and His apostles, especially on religious and civic occasions. The primary purpose of the Fourth Degree is to encourage active Catholic citizenship and foster the spirit of patriotism in members and the community.

Patriotism is the core principle of the 4th Degree and is exemplified by performing precision drill as a salute to God and to country and visually exhibiting a love for both. One example is displaying the flag of the United States every day.

The public appearance of Fourth Degree Knights as a Color Corps at religious and civic functions is an important activity. Their colorful capes and chapeau add dignity and the pride of Church and country to any event.

What do the various colors mean?

Color Corps

- Red Cape and Chapeau/White Plume Faithful Navigator
- White Cape and Chapeau/White Plume
-Color Corps Commander - Purple Cape and Chapeau/Purple Plume

Service Baldric - The colored stripes represent different countries, for example:
-United States – Red, White and Blue
-Mexico – Red, White and Green
Poland – White and Red