

Venerable Father Michael Joseph McGivney

Father McGivney was born on August 12, 1852 and died on August 14, 1890. He lived only 38 years and two days but in that short period of time he established an Organization that would change the face of the earth.

Father McGivney was the eldest of 13 children, six of whom died in infancy or childhood. He knew the seriousness of the struggle to provide for the needs of such a large family. When he was 13 years of age he began working in a local spoon factory. Several years later he began his formal studies for the priesthood and began his priestly ministry on Christmas Day in 1877 at St. Mary's Church in New Haven, Connecticut.

His ministry to the young and underprivileged was to be marked by such fervor and success. The young working man and his family were of the object of Father McGivney's special concern and affection. In those days, men worked in such deplorable conditions that affected the health of many to the detriment of their families.

It was both their spiritual and material benefit that prompted Father McGivney to gather a group of his young friends in the basement of St. Mary's Church on October 2, 1881. At the age of 29, Father McGivney became the founder of the Sons of Columbus. Father McGivney suggested that this organization would provide fraternal support among Catholic men and insurance benefits for

them and their families in the time of death and need. In the beginning most of their work was done in secret. However, the Sons of Columbus was fully organized on February 6, 1882. The organization would bind Catholicism and Americanism together through the faith and bold vision of the New World's discoverer. The word "knights" replaced "sons" because key members of the organizing group, who were Irish-born Civil War veterans, felt it would help to apply a noble ritual in support of the emerging cause of Catholic civil liberty.

Before everything else, Father McGivney was a priest and his burning desire was to bring all those he met to Christ and His Church. He made converts among the young Protestants of New Haven and ministered loving care to those in prison. After his time at St. Mary's, Father McGivney had only one other assignment, as pastor of St. Thomas Church in Thomaston, Connecticut.

Never robust in health, Father McGivney was suddenly stricken with a serious case of pneumonia in January 1890. It hung on. Various treatments for consumptive illness were tried, but his decline persisted. The young priest lost physical strength just as the Order, he founded, was moving toward new vitality. It was at St. Thomas Church, less than 10 years after the establishment of the Knights of Columbus, that the servant of God died two days after his 38th birthday. Father McGivney's younger brothers, Msgrs. Patrick and John J. McGivney, served the Order as Supreme Chaplains; so would one of Father McGivney's

nephews. In fact, it would be the 1930's before someone outside of the McGivney clan served as Supreme Chaplain.

Remarkably developed from its simple beginnings in a church basement, the Knights of Columbus today combines Catholic fraternalism and one of the most successful American insurance enterprises. The four towers of the international headquarters symbolize the Order's worldwide commitment to charity, unity, fraternity and patriotism. In 2015, the Knights of Columbus contributed more than 175 million dollars to various charities throughout the world, volunteering more than 73.4 million hours. The organization has more than 15,000 Councils throughout the world and more than 1.9 million members.

Father McGivney was declared Venerable in 2008, when the Vatican recognized his heroic virtue. A miracle attributed to his intercession is needed for him to advance to beatification.

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