

Who Are the Fourth Degree Knights?

The Patriotic Degree reminds us of our duty to God and country.

by Andrew Butler

They are the Knights on Main Street, the men you probably envision when someone says Knights of Columbus to you. They're present in their distinct regalia at civic and Church events, acting as honor guards and color corps, or standing in respect at the funerals of members or during adoration of the Eucharist.

But there is more to being a Fourth Degree member of the Knights of Columbus than a uniform. They are the men who have chosen to embrace the Order's fourth principle of patriotism, the men who lead the efforts to reach out to veterans and active military and to embody the fact that one can be a faithful Catholic and also be a faithful citizen.

When the Knights of Columbus was founded in 1882, three principles united its members: charity, unity and fraternity. At that time people feared that members of the Catholic faith owed their entire allegiance to the Church and could not be trusted as citizens of their country. Patriotism was added to the Order's principles in 1900, based on the idea that Knights are loyal to both God and country.



Members who wish to live out patriotism together can join "the Fourth Degree." Members of this degree have the special honor of holding the title "Sir Knight," participating in color and honor guards and organizing programs that promote Catholic citizenship. They also become part of a Fourth Degree Assembly in their area. There are more than 3,500 Fourth Degree assemblies around the world.

"It is important, particularly in this day and age, that our Fourth Degree Assemblies encourage active Catholic citizenship and foster the spirit of patriotism in our members and the community at large," Supreme Master Dennis Stoddard said.

The Serving Those Who Served program is a major initiative of the Fourth Degree supporting Veterans Affairs facilities. The Knights of Columbus has representatives at almost every Veterans Affairs medical clinic in the United States, where they recruit and

manage K of C volunteers in developing activities and programs that aid patients' most essential needs.

The Fourth Degree has also supported priests, in particular those who go on to serve as military chaplains. Through a special scholarship program, the Knights helped fund the education of seminarians preparing to become Catholic chaplains in the U.S. Armed Forces.

Stoddard said Fourth Degree assemblies help Knights to put their faith, and their love of country, into action.

“The fourth principle ‘Patriotism,’ commits our members to the preservation of our Church, our Order and to the many nations where Knights serve,” Stoddard said.