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## A Catholic Convert Speaks Out: Forget the Stereotypes! I'm Proud to Be a Knight

- By Randy Sly
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As a convert, the Knights can play an important role in Catholic formation

Four years later, and now a Fourth degree Knight, I know a lot more about the Fraternal Order than I did back then. While there may be those in the group who fit the stereotyped stories that keep circulating, I found an organization - a fraternal order of brothers - who wanted to serve Christ and His Church while making a huge difference in the world.



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WASHINGTON, DC (Catholic Online) - After more than three decades of ministry leadership in the Protestant world, I came into full communion with the Catholic Church in November, 2006. One month later I became a first-degree member of the Knights of Columbus.

I had wanted to meet other men in our parish and have our family connected to other families. The Knights seemed to be the place to be. I saw their badges on our Ushers, Lectors, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion and the guys that hosted our monthly pancake breakfasts.

The bulletin was loaded with activities sponsored by the Knights, including a monthly food drive for the poor, monthly blood drive, the

Keep Christ in Christmas program, and KOVAR (Knights of Virginia assisting those with Intellectual Disabilities)

just to name a few.

As a former leader in the Protestant church, I had just a little knowledge about the Knights and had seen the Fourth Degree Knights marching in parades in their regalia. I had heard "stories" about the organization, ranging from it being another "secret society" to being a bunch of pot-bellied beer drinkers who hung around together playing cards and not doing much else.

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While covering the Supreme Convention in Washington DC this week, my pride (using the term in its best sense) of affiliation grew exponentially. The delight in my affiliation didn't come only from the amazing reports of the work of Knights around the world by Supreme Knight Carl Anderson during his annual report.

I was also blessed the people I met there who came from across the United States and other countries.

Awaiting the opening Mass at the Basilica, I chatted quietly with Wayne and Maryellen Griffin from New Hampshire. Wayne is the State Warden and shared encouraging reports about the work that was going on up there through the state's councils.

Another wonderful couple from Toronto, Ontario, Canada shared their experiences in serving the Church through the Knights for many years. Attending almost every convention since 1992, he had served as a Grand Knight, Faithful Navigator and District Deputy.

I rode back to the hotel from the Basilica next to a priest from Vera Cruz, Mexico. He was a college professor, provided pastoral service to many parishes and was a Council chaplain. He told me about some of the outreach programs they used down there, holding Masses in malls and even a fitness center.

Mustering his best English he described the Mass at the fitness center, where people would attend in their workout clothes and have their families come to attend. "It is wonderful when we can take the Church to the community rather than wait for them to come to the Church," he said.

At the convention, delegates were shown a brand new video about the Order called, "My Brother's Keeper." The

video was produced for the Convention, which was themed, "I am my brother's keeper."

The presentation not only spotlighted the large of amount of service provided by the Knights in various parts of the world. Knights have been present to provide support during such disasters as the World Trade Center after 9-11, after Hurricane Katrina and the earthquake in Haiti.

They provide wheelchairs to thousands of people in need, support special Olympics wit manpower and money, and supply ultrasound machines to crisis pregnancy centers.

That doesn't even begin to cover the labor and financial gifts to the church in underwriting education - especially for vocations, special projects for the Holy Father, family life initiatives and the work of pro-life in a multitude of ways.

Knights are also found supporting the military both here and overseas. In fact, they became well known in Europe during World War I for their KC Huts for servicemen, where everyone was welcome and everything was free. They are a strong volunteer component for VA Hospitals.

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I remember my first year in the Knights. I was standing outside a grocery store holding a red bucket, raising funds for those with intellectual disabilities. More than one person stopped and said, "Thank you so much! My child has been helped by a program you funded."

Over the years I have preached to audiences of several thousand eager shining faces but the look on the loving face of a down's syndrome girl I talked with at a Special Olympics dinner is the one I will remember.

Knights are also men of faith. Whether its ...