

A diocesan first

9/3/2009 • By Mary Stadnyk | News Editor

Knights of St. John to be established in Trenton

The Knights of St. John International, a Catholic family fraternal organization that boasts a membership of thousands in the United States and countries throughout the world, will soon be established in the Diocese of Trenton at Blessed Sacrament-Our Lady of the Divine Shepherd Parish, Trenton.



Similar to the mission of the Knights of Columbus, Divine Word Father Edward Tetteh, pastor, said the Knights of St. John International, which are also found in the West Indies, Panama, Canada, London, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Togo, seeks to provide its members and their families with volunteer opportunities in service to the Church in their parishes and communities.

Recalling his own experience of being a member of the order while he was a seminarian studying for the priesthood in his native Ghana, West Africa, Father Tetteh said that when several parishioners approached him about starting a “commandery” in the parish, he was all for it.

“Since I was in the Knights of St. John, I was very familiar with their work,” said Father Tetteh, adding that he thought it was a good idea to bring it into his parish.

Once Father Tetteh obtained approval from Bishop John M. Smith to pursue a commandery, parishioner Francis Kollie, along with others, began the legwork to organize it.

Kollie, who hails from Liberia, was initiated as a cadet in 1980 and was drawn to the order “because of the support its members show for young people.”

Kollie told of when he emigrated to the United States in 2000, he lived in Atlantic City and continued his membership as a Knight when he joined a parish that had a commandery.

Kollie, who found his way to Blessed Sacrament-Our Lady of the Divine five years ago when he met and married a parishioner, extended his appreciation to Father Tetteh for his support for allowing the first commandery to be developed in the Trenton area. Now, the challenge for Kollie is to “drum up” interest in getting fellow parishioners to join.

So far, there are more than 20 men who have expressed an interest and there are another 13 who were already initiated into the Knights from other countries. Not all of the men are parishioners, he noted; some are from other parts of the diocese including Willingboro and Mount Holly.

In conjunction, Kollie added that attention will also be directed to forming a Knights of St. John Ladies Auxiliary as well.

One parishioner who is “very excited” about joining the Knights of St. John is Michael Days.

“It will be the first new organization developed at the combined parish,” Days said of the 2005 merger between Our Lady of the Divine Shepherd Parish with Blessed Sacrament Parish. “It’s a wonderful sign of a new beginning and it’s an organization that will, I think, further bond the members of the parish. We are all very pumped up about the fact that we will be forming a community at our parish.”

“In addition,” Days added, “I think the Knights perfectly fits my personal DNA as I’m primarily about getting things done, about being of service to my Church and my God.”

Once the Trenton commandery is up and running, Father Tetteh, who will serve as the commandery’s spiritual director, said what he looks forward to is how the members can serve to the benefit of the parish.

“We’re looking for men who will serve as role models for the youth in our parish,” he said. “That’s the main thing. We want the men to become more active in the Church, but to also engage and be present to the youth.”

What is also important, added Father Tetteh, is the strong focus the Knights of St. John International places on family.

“They stand for family values and I hope that is something we can promote,” he said, adding, “It’s their mission to be defenders of the Catholic faith.”

About the Knights of St. John

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The Knights of St. John International had its beginnings in the late 1800s when European immigrants, who had left their homelands to find religious freedom in the United States, formed many benevolent societies within their parish churches often named after patron saints.

Following the end of the American Civil War, a real need for physical and spiritual healing existed. In 1879, these many organizations, including the Knights of St. George, the Knights of St. Paul, the Knights of St. Louis and the Knights of St. John, met to form a greater society of Knights. They met in Baltimore, and formed themselves into the Roman Catholic Union of the Knights of St. John, later shortened to the Knights of St. John. The order was officially incorporated in the state of New York May 6, 1886. They sought to care for spiritual, social and physical needs of their members and neighbors.

The order continued to grow and expand into Canada, Panama, Ghana, Nigeria, Togo, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Trinidad and Tobago and recently into England. In 1992, the name of the order was officially changed to the Knights of St. John International to reflect its global structure.

(The above articles are copies of articles appearing in "The Monitor" The newspaper of the Diocese of Trenton, NJ.)